The Role of Social and Psychological Resources in Children's Perception of Their Participation Rights

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Abstract

Children's participation rights are recognised across the world. However, we still have relatively little empirical evidence on children's views of these rights and on the necessary conditions to effectively realise them. This study set out to explore how children assess their participation rights in school, and whether these assessments vary as a function of social and psychological resources, which constitute the preconditions for practicing participation rights. The sample included 1,006 children (48.8% female, mean age = 11.71 years) who were enrolled in the penultimate or final year of public primary school in Geneva, Switzerland. A majority of these children reported that they could exercise their participation rights in school. Furthermore, results indicate that children's assessments of their participation rights did not differ systematically across classes, schools, or city districts. However, these assessments were significantly related to social and psychological resources, including children's subjective well-being and feelings of safety, a perceived climate of social non-discrimination, and the presence of a person of trust in the school environment. In conclusion, this study goes beyond previous research by examining both children's views of their participation rights and to what extent they depend on social and psychological resources. The study also provides original empirical evidence on the extent to which children's participation rights are implemented in practice.

Keywords

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1 Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) holds the central promise of giving "the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (Art. 12) alongside ensuring that his / her views be "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (ibid.). The right of children to articulate their views and have them taken into account is considered the primary provision of the CRC in relation to children's participation rights (Lloyd & Emerson, 2016). Granting children the right to take part in all matters concerning their lives constitutes not only a legal prerequisite, but also a pedagogically important step on the way to respecting each child as self-determined and equal members of society (Daiute, 2008; Lundy, 2007; see also Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005). Through recognising children's participation rights, States Parties to the Convention set themselves a new standard, as they commit to create conditions in which children can effectively take part in social life.

1.1 The scope of children's participation rights

Although there is a lack of consensus on the exact scope of children's participation rights (Herbots & Put, 2015; Stoecklin, 2013), much of the debate to date focuses on challenging the primacy of adult-centred agendas and the resulting tokenistic forms of children's involvement in decision making (Hart, 1992; Thomas, 2007). Discussion has included recognising children's evolving capacities and abilities to formulate and represent their own interests towards others (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014), as well as children's autonomy and agency to take some degree of control of their own lives (Burger & Walk, 2016; Mayall, 2000). Furthermore, debates around participation rights focus on children's status as holders of rights and their legal entitlement to participate actively in society (Lansdown, 2010). While the child is still dependent on care, protection, nurture, and education (Burger, 2013; Reading et al., 2009), he / she also gains independent status in society thanks to participation rights.

1.2 Prerequisites for the realisation of participation rights

Today children's participation rights, as well as the child-centred and child-empowering values underlying them (Woodhead, 2010), are recognised on a global scale. Children have the right to be recognised as active members of societies, with their own concerns, interests, points of

view and personal agendas (UNCRC, 2005). However, both policymakers and researchers contend that it is still unclear how children's participation rights are best implemented in practice (Evans & Spicer, 2008; Liefaard & Sloth-Nielsen, 2017), and what conditions must be satisfied to facilitate effective participation (Kim & Yoo, 2016). Furthermore, despite a growing body of literature on children's rights to participate in various realms of life (Bosisio, 2012; Shier, 2001; Smith, 2007; Vis & Thomas, 2009), we still know relatively little about children's own perceptions of their participation rights (Hart, Pavlovic, & Zeidner, 2001; Lloyd & Emerson, 2016; Wyse, 2001). This is problematic insofar as children will only be able to advocate their rights if they are sufficiently aware of them (Liebel, 2012). If we conceive of children's participation rights as rights that they can effectively claim for themselves, then it is essential to assess how children perceive these rights and whether the necessary conditions for them to effectively apply these rights are available.

1.3 Current study

We examine children's perceptions regards the two main components of their participation rights, as enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC, namely, the *right of the child to express his or her views*, and the *right to have those views duly taken into consideration.* Given the important role that schools play in children's lives, we focus on their views of these rights in the school context by addressing the following two questions:

(1) To what extent do children perceive that their right to express their views and their right to have those views duly taken into consideration are realised at school?

(2) Does this perception vary as a function of social and psychological resources, which constitute prerequisites for exercising participation rights?

We see social and psychological resources as prerequisites for the exercising of participation rights because they serve as a means for attaining specific goals (Hobfoll, 2002), including the assertion of one's rights. In this study we focus on the role played by the following seven resources in children's appraisals of their participation rights: knowledge of rights, subjective well-being, the feeling of safety, perceived non-discrimination, the availability of a person of trust, and the perceived level of informedness about matters concerning their lives. We also take fear into account because it is a negative psychological resource that is generally considered to be an integral part of child development (Gullone & King, 1997), and could

therefore clearly affect a child's perception of his or her rights. In sum, this study aims to examine children's perceptions of their participation rights and whether the social and psychological resources listed above affect these perceptions.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Children's views of their participation rights

Prior research has analysed a number of questions relating to children's appraisals of their participation rights in foster and residential care, in child protection services, as well as in child protection placement decisions (Bessell, 2011; Cashmore, 2002; Magalhães, Calheiros, & Costa, 2016; Munro, 2001; Nordenfors, 2016; van Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2014; Vis & Thomas, 2009). There is also evidence on children's reports of their satisfaction with how their voices are heard by friends, parents and the wider family (European Commission, 2011), and on their perceptions of their actual participation in the family (Morrow, 1999b) and other "ecological systems" such as the community and the socio-political system (Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013). Furthermore, research has examined children's perceptions of their participation in youth councils (e.g., Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016; Taft & Gordon, 2013; Wyness, 2009). This prior research suggests that how children evaluate their participation rights depends heavily on the social domain in question. However, past research is found to suffer from two significant limitations that motivate the current study. First, most studies have used qualitative designs and there is comparatively little quantitative research examining children's perspectives on their participation rights. While, for instance, there are several qualitative studies on children's views of their participation rights in schools (e.g., Mannion, 2007; McCluskey et al., 2013; Mitra, 2004; Wyse, 2001), less quantitative evidence on this research concern currently exists (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009; Lloyd & Emerson, 2016).[1] Moreover, we are unaware of any recent quantitative research regarding this question in Swiss schools. Examining children's perceptions of their participation rights in schools in Switzerland is essential, especially in view of the recent report of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

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[1] Note that there is a body of quantitative research in *related* fields which, for the sake of brevity, we do not review exhaustively here. This research focused, for instance, on nurturance and self-determination rights (Cherney, 2010; Cherney & Shing, 2008; Lahat, Helwig, Yang, Tan, & Liu, 2009; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Day, 2002; Ruck, Tenenbaum, & Willenberg, 2011) and on children's conceptions of freedom of speech as a basic democratic right (Helwig, 1995, 1997, 1998). For recent reviews of much of this research see, for instance, Ruck, Peterson-Badali and Helwig (2014), or Ruck, Peterson-Badali, Elisha and Tenenbaum (2017).

which recommended that Switzerland "intensify its efforts to ensure that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and have those views given due weight in schools and other educational institutions" (UNCRC, 2015, p. 6), suggesting that children's participation rights may currently be insufficiently implemented in policy and practice (see also Netzwerk Kinderrechte Schweiz, 2014).

2.2 Social and psychological resources underpinning children's use of their participation rights

We conceptualise children's participation rights using an approach that looks at the role of both social and psychological characteristics with regard to how children think about rights. This approach thus stresses that perceptions of rights are psychologically driven and socially contextualised (Magalhães et al., 2016; Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Helwig, 2014). We argue that the social and psychological prerequisites for children to use their participation rights – and, by extension, to view these rights as realised in particular social domains – are, among others, that children are aware of their rights, that they feel safe and confident in expressing themselves, and that they are protected against any form of discrimination or aggressive behaviour from other people. Otherwise children will feel insecure, censor themselves, and / or expect to be ignored, which will in all likelihood result in them not fully exercising their participation rights. In the following we provide a brief review of theory and empirical research on the links between these social and psychological resources and children's (actual or perceived) application of participation rights in various social realms, identifying here the knowledge gaps which will be addressed by this study.

2.2.1 Knowledge of rights
There is some research on children's knowledge of their rights and on interindividual differences in this knowledge (Ruck, Keating, Abramovitch, & Koegl, 1998; Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998). This research indicates, for instance, that children's (declarative) knowledge of rights has implications for the likelihood that they will assert their rights in diverse contexts (e.g., Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). Moreover, it has been hypothesised that children who know of their rights have higher self-esteem (Liebel, 2012), and research further indicates that children who have a greater understanding of their rights show increased engagement and participation in school activities (Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2008). However, research on the relationship between children's knowledge of their rights and

perceptions of their participation rights is scarce. With this in mind, we examine whether children's knowledge of their rights affects perceptions of participation rights.

2.2.2 Subjective well-being

Research suggests links between children's subjective well-being and their participation in several domains, including decision-making in school, community, and family contexts (Casas, Bello, González, & Aligué, 2013; González et al., 2015). Children who report higher levels of well-being are also more likely to be civically engaged (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007) and to express their opinions in school (de Róiste, Kelly, Molcho, Gavin, & Nic Gabhainn, 2012). In a similar vein, evidence indicates that children's subjective well-being correlates with positive feelings regarding the enjoyment of participation rights (Lloyd & Emerson, 2016). Thus, assuming that high levels of subjective well-being are associated with higher levels of social participation, we analyse whether subjective well-being is related to children's perceptions of their participation rights.

2.2.3 Feelings of safety versus fear

Safety is a key determinant of a child's ability to participate in social life (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008). This is underscored by the fact that safety needs constitute one of the foundational layers of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. Where safety needs are not met, children are likely to exhibit an array of problems, including behavioural issues, social maladjustment, poor interpersonal relationships, and social withdrawal (Barbarin, Richter, & deWet, 2001; Moylan et al., 2010). The absence of safety needs being fulfilled has an adverse impact on children's social participation and, by extension, on their capacity to effectively practice their participation rights. Thus, it is assumed that children's feeling of safety will affect how they appraise their participation rights, because children who feel secure in a given environment will participate more actively and be more likely to consider their participation rights positively. Conversely, we assume that children who are fearful will participate less and will thus be less likely to consider their participation rights in a positive way.

2.2.4 Perceived non-discrimination

Non-discrimination constitutes a central requirement for the fulfilment of any participation right, and it also constitutes one of the general principles of the CRC (Art. 2). Children who feel discriminated against are less likely to participate in social life (e.g., Jaffé, Moody, Piguet, & Zermatten, 2012; Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005). In other words, where the right to non-

discrimination is violated, children will likely refrain from participating actively, owing to mental health concerns and behavioural problems, including increased levels of anxiety, lower self-esteem, psychological distress, conduct problems, as well as the deployment of avoidance strategies (Brody et al., 2006; D'hondt, Eccles, Houtte, & Stevens, 2016; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Simons et al., 2002). Thus, perceived discrimination may decrease both children's social participation and the extent to which they consider their participation rights as realised in a particular social domain. With this context in mind, we thus examine whether a perceived climate of social non-discrimination at school – conceptualised as equal respect toward members of different groups – is related to children's (positive) assessment of their participation rights.

2.2.5 Availability of a person of trust

Research indicates the paramount importance of trustful relationships, both in enabling children to participate in social life and as a means to realise their participation rights (Bell, 2002; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012). Persons of trust are assumed to offer children opportunities to build confidence and formulate their needs and interests. More generally, trust is a key component in children's personal, social and intellectual development (Bernath & Feshbach, 1995). As Cashmore noted, "participation does not mean having the right to make the decision or determine the outcome, but it does mean being listened to and having one's views taken seriously and treated with respect" (2002, p. 838). Persons of trust play a major role in seriously listening to, and respecting, the expressed views of children (Morrow, 1999a). They are key facilitators of children's participation and thus positively impact children's perceptions of participation rights. With this in mind, we examine whether children who report having a person that they trust in their school are more likely to consider their participation rights as being fulfilled.

2.2.6 Perceived informedness

Children's participation rights are premised on the right to accessing information as well as to be informed about relevant matters and possible decisions to be taken (Head, 2011; Lansdown, 2010). In order to form a view and contribute this view in a social context, children need appropriate information about a given issue or situation. Children also need information to make informed choices and voice concerns about matters that influence their lives. Information "is not only a form of participation, it is also the basic requirement if one wants to denote a situation as participative" (Herbots & Put, 2015, p. 165). Participation only becomes possible once a

child understands what is going on in a given situation, alongside what he or she can expect, and what is expected of him or her (Treseder, 1997). Hence children cannot exercise their participation rights unless they feel sufficiently informed. Against this backdrop, we assess whether children who report feeling well informed about matters that are important to them and their lives are likely to consider their participation rights as being fulfilled.

2.3 Main objectives of the study

As outlined above, and in line with theory that stresses the importance of psycho-social resources in cognitive appraisals (Burger & Samuel, 2017; Hobfoll, 2002), we hypothesise that children's perceptions of their participation rights vary as a function of such resources. Thus, the main objectives of the present study, primarily descriptive in nature, are to analyse how children evaluate the extent to which their participation rights are realised in school, and whether this is related to social and psychological resources.

3 Method

3.1 Procedure and ethical standards

We conducted a survey with primary school children in Geneva. First, we drafted and tested a questionnaire in a small-scale pilot. Subsequently, and following formal approval and authorisation from the General Directorate of Education in the Canton of Geneva, we administered the questionnaire in public primary schools (May / June 2014). Since our research focused on children's perceptions of their rights, their active participation in the survey was indispensable (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Morrow, 2009). We obtained informed consent from all study participants, guaranteed anonymity, and allowed children to refuse to participate or to end participation at any point during the survey, which occurred in only a few exceptional cases.

3.2 Sample

The sample comprised 1,006 children (51.1% boys, 48.8% girls; mean age = 11.71 years). These children attended the penultimate (7th grade) or final (8th grade) year of public primary

school.[2] The children were selected using a two-stage stratified sampling procedure. First, nine districts of the city were selected using purposeful sampling to guarantee diverse districts in the sample. Second, schools were selected randomly within these districts. A total of fourteen schools were included in the sample. In each school, we selected all children attending the 7th and 8th grades (only children who were absent on the day of the questionnaire administration were not included). In total, we selected children from 56 classes: 46.5 per cent of the children were in the 7th grade, 49.8 per cent were in the 8th grade, and 3.7 per cent were in mixed-age classes in which the 7th and 8th grades were taught together – hereafter also referred to as the '7th/8th grade'.

3.3 Measures

We administered a standardised written questionnaire designed to assess children's knowledge and perceptions of their rights alongside social and psychological characteristics, and, more generally, the child's perspective on their life worlds (Schutz & Luckmann, 1989). In this study, we focus on selected variables as outlined hereafter (further information about the complete questionnaire is available on request).

3.3.1 Independent variables
To eliminate potential confounding effects, we controlled for *gender* (0 = boys, 1 = girls), *age* in months (assessed in May 2014), and the *school grade* children were enrolled in at the time of administering the survey: 7th grade, 8th grade, or 7th/8th grade. We dichotomised this latter variable, using the 7th grade as the reference category. As a simple indicator of children's material possessions, we included as an item whether children had their own *mobile phone* (0 = no, 1 = yes). Albeit not the central focus of our study, we considered this item because children's perceptions of their rights might differ by variables related to family background, such as material possessions (Melton, 1980).

Furthermore, the following central independent variables were included in our models. *Knowledge of rights* was assessed using a dichotomous item: "Before today, did you know that you have rights?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). Children's *subjective well-being* at school was assessed

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[2] In 2014, at the time of the questionnaire administration, 83.1 per cent of all primary school children were enrolled in public schools (SRED, 2015a). In these schools 43.0 per cent of the children had a foreign background and spoke a foreign language at home (SRED, 2015b). The Department of Public Instruction of the Canton of Geneva does not provide detailed socio-demographic information about the children in these schools. However, they report that, on average, children with a foreign background came from families of lower socio-economic status.

using an item rated on a four-point scale (1 = not at all well, 2 = not so well, 3 = rather well, 4 = very well). The item here was: "Do you feel good in your school?" *Perceived informedness* about matters that are relevant to children and their lives was assessed with the item: "Do you feel that you are well informed about matters that are important to you?", using a four-point scale (1 = no, 2 = rather no, 3 = rather yes, 4 = yes). The subjective *feeling of safety at school* was assessed using a four-point scale (1 = no, 2 = rather no, 3 = rather yes, 4 = yes) and the following item: "Do you feel safe at school?" A child's *fear of going to school* was assessed using a dichotomous item: "Since the beginning of the school year, have you ever been afraid of going to school?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). Whether a child had a *person of trust* in the school environment was assessed with a dichotomous item: "At school, is there an adult who you trust and with whom you can share your problems?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). *Perceived non-discrimination* (children's perception of social non-discrimination) at school was assessed using a scale consisting of four items. These items were: "In your school, do the adults respect all children equally: girls equal to boys?", "… boys equal to girls?", "… children who have a different skin colour, appearance, language, or religion?", and "… children with disabilities?" Each of these items was assessed on a four-point rating scale (1 = no, 2 = rather no, 3 = rather yes, 4 = yes) (Cronbach's α = 0.82).[3]

3.3.2 Dependent variables

We used two dependent variables. A child's assessment of his or her *right to express their views at school* was assessed with the following item: "Do you feel that you may express your views about matters that concern you at school?" A child's assessment of his or her *right have their views duly taken into consideration* was assessed with the item: "Do you feel that your views are taken into account by your teacher?" Both items were rated on a four-point scale (1 = no, 2 = rather no, 3 = rather yes, 4 = yes).

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[3] We used several single-item measures to ensure that the study participants, mainly aged between 10 and 12 years, remain focused during the entire period of questionnaire administration (which took 45-50 minutes, given that the items used here were asked as part of a larger survey on children's perceptions of their rights). While these measures are more limited than multi-item measurement scales, they provide broad summary ratings of children's views, and their importance has been highlighted in previous research, although they do not allow for calculating scale reliabilities, or for computing latent variables (Casas et al., 2012; Rolstad, Adler, & Rydén, 2011).

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis included: (1) descriptive analysis of the measures; (2) variance components analysis to estimate whether children's assessments of their participation rights differed across classes, schools, and city districts; (3) multiple linear regression analysis to model the strength of the relationships between social and psychological resources (that is, prerequisites for using rights) on the one hand, and children's perception of their participation rights on the other. We applied weights so that the sample reflects the total population of the 7th and 8th grades in Geneva-based schools. These weights are inversely proportional to the probability of selecting a given child into the sample, that is, they take into account the probability of both selecting the school and the individual child within a school.[4]

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive results

Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics of the variables. Key findings are: The proportion of children who reported that they had already known about their rights was 89.7 per cent (95% confidence interval (CI): 87.8, 91.7).[5] 12.7 per cent of the children (95% CI: 10.6, 14.9) reported that they had felt fear of going to school in the current school year, and 62.2 per cent (95% CI: 59.1, 65.2) reported having a person of trust in their school. In addition, the continuous independent variables – subjective well-being, perceived informedness, perceived non-discrimination, and the feeling of safety at school – were, on the whole, rated favourably.

Regarding the dependent variables, almost nine out of ten children assessed their right to express their views as 'rather well', or 'well' fulfilled: 38.5 per cent (95% CI: 35.5, 41.6) answered 'rather yes' to the question on whether they may express their views about matters that concern them in school, and 48.8 per cent (95% CI: 45.3, 51.6) answered 'yes' to this question. A majority of children also assessed their right to have their views duly taken into consideration as 'rather well', or 'well' fulfilled: 25.8 per cent (95% CI: 23.1, 28.6) answered

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[4] In 12 out of 14 schools some children were absent. Across these schools the proportion of children responding to the questionnaire varied between 86.2% and 99.0%. These unequal probabilities of selection across schools, and the probability of school selection among all schools in Geneva, are considered in the weights.

[5] In a second research phase, we conducted semi-structured theme-centred group discussions with 92 children (56.5% female). These group discussions confirmed that children did clearly understand the central meaning of rights, namely that rights "may not be denied" to them, and that other people "must respect" their rights.

'rather yes' to the question on whether their views were taken into account by their teacher, and 62.1 per cent (95% CI: 59.0, 65.2) answered 'yes' to this question.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Independent variables				
Gender (0 = boys, 1 = girls)	.49	---	0	1
Age in months	140.51	8.49	115	172
7th grade	.47	---	0	1
8th grade	.50	---	0	1
7th/8th grade	.04	---	0	1
Mobile phone	.70	---	0	1
Knowledge of rights	.90	---	0	1
Subjective well-being	3.52	.63	1	4
Perceived informedness	3.38	.68	1	4
Perceived non-discrimination	3.69	.58	1	4
Feeling of safety at school	3.60	.65	1	4
Fear of going to school	.13	---	0	1
Person of trust	.62	---	0	1
Dependent variables				
Right to express personal views	3.30	.83	1	4
Right to have personal views duly taken into consideration	3.43	.87	1	4

Note. Section 3.3 provides information on the coding of the variables.

4.2 Variance in children's assessments of their participation rights at the class-, school-, and district-levels

Using an unconditional multilevel (linear mixed-effects) regression model with random intercepts at the class-, school- and district-levels, we partitioned the variance in children's perceptions of their participation rights into four components: individual-, class-, school-, and district-level variance. This partitioning of variance allowed us to determine whether children's assessments of their rights varied systematically, not only at the individual level, but also between classes, schools, and city districts.[6] The first model included children's perceptions of their right to express their views as the outcome variable. This model revealed that children's assessment of this right was *not* unevenly distributed across classes, schools, or districts. Only approximately 0.3 per cent of the variance was attributable to the class level, and even more negligible proportions of the variance were attributable to the school- and district levels. The

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[6] Variance partitioning is necessary because if children's perceptions of their rights differ systematically across different contexts, we cannot consider that the observations are independent. In such a situation OLS regression would not be warranted because the assumption of statistical independence of the errors would not be met (Snijders & Bosker, 2012).

second model included children's assessment of their right to have their views duly taken into consideration as the outcome variable. This model indicated that roughly 0.3 per cent of the variance was at the class level, 0.9 per cent of the variance was at the school level, and 0.1 per cent of the variance was at the district level.

4.3 Associations between social and psychological resources and children's assessments of their participation rights

Considering that children's perceptions of their participation rights did not vary systematically across classes, schools, or city districts, we performed ordinary least squares regression analysis to predict their assessments of these rights as a function of individual-level variables. The standardised coefficients (*β*) in Table 2 indicate the strength of the associations between each of the variables and children's assessments of their *right to express their views* (model 1) and of their *right to have their views duly taken into consideration* (model 2).

4.3.1 Children's right to express their views
Children's assessment of their right to express their views was *not* significantly related to gender, age, school grade, or the possession of a mobile phone. By contrast, children who previously knew of their rights were more likely to consider this right as realised in the school context. In addition, children's subjective well-being at school, their perceived informedness about relevant matters, perceived non-discrimination (i.e., a perceived climate of equal respect for all) at school, and the feeling of safety, were all positively related to their assessment of their right to express their views. Furthermore, children who reported fear of going to school in the current school year were less likely to consider this right as realised. Finally, children who reported having a person of trust in school were more likely to consider the right to express their views as being fulfilled. Each of these relationships was significant (at least) at the $p < .05$ level. The relative importance of each of the variables for children's appraisal of the right to express their views can be gauged by comparing the standardised coefficients (*β*), which indicate that children's feeling of safety at school was most strongly associated with the perception that they may express their views. Overall model 1 accounted for 13.9 per cent of the variance in children's assessment of their right to express their views.

Table 2
OLS regression analyses predicting children's assessment of their right to express their views (model 1) and of their right to have those views duly taken into consideration (model 2) at school.

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B (SE)	β	p-value	B (SE)	β	p-value
Gender: female (ref. cat. male)	.015 (.052)	.009	.775	.068 (.054)	.039	.212
Age (in months)	-.006 (.004)	-.057	.174	-.002 (.004)	-.020	.633
8th grade (ref.: 7th grade)	.109 (.071)	.065	.125	-.047 (.074)	-.027	.526
7th/8th grade (ref.: 7th grade)	.193 (.139)	.045	.166	.029 (.145)	.006	.843
Mobile phone	-.020 (.056)	-.011	.717	.034 (.059)	.018	.559
Knowledge of rights	.173 (.085)	.063	.042	.069 (.089)	.024	.439
Subjective well-being	.115 (.045)	.087	.012	.145 (.047)	.104	.002
Perceived informedness	.147 (.040)	.120	< .001	.040 (.042)	.031	.333
Perceived non-discrimination	.171 (.047)	.120	< .001	.305 (.049)	.204	< .001
Feeling of safety at school	.200 (.045)	.157	< .001	.223 (.046)	.167	< .001
Fear of going to school	-.159 (.080)	-.064	.045	.066 (.083)	.025	.426
Person of trust	.166 (.054)	.097	.002	.312 (.057)	.173	< .001
R^2	.150			.180		
Adjusted R^2	.139			.169		

Note. Constants not shown. B: unstandardised coefficients, SE: standard errors, β: standardised coefficients, p-values for two-tailed tests. $N = 913$ (in model 1), $N = 900$ (in model 2). Pairwise exclusion of missing values. None of the models was compromised by any multicollinearity problems. The highest, but unproblematic, variance inflation factors were 1.93 in model 1 and 1.88 in model 2 (both on the variable '8th grade').

4.3.2 Children's right to have their views duly taken into consideration

Children's assessment of their right to have their views duly taken into consideration was *not* significantly related to gender, age, school grade, the possession of a mobile phone, children's knowledge of their rights, perceived informedness about relevant matters, or fear of going to school. However, significant positive relationships were identified between children's assessments of their right to have their views duly taken into consideration and their subjective well-being, perceived non-discrimination, the feeling of safety, and the availability of a person of trust, in the school environment (all $p < .01$). Among these variables, perceived non-discrimination at school contributed most to children's perception that their right to have their views duly taken into consideration was respected. Overall model 2 accounted for 16.9 per cent

of the variance in children's assessment of the right to have their views duly taken into consideration.

5 Discussion

Participation is designated as a "general principle" right under Article 12 of the CRC, accompanying and underpinning all other rights (Nolas, 2015). Participation rights shall entitle children to express their views and to be heard, thereby guaranteeing children influence and decision-making powers (Hart, 2008; Lansdown et al., 2014; Smith, 2007). These rights are meant to ensure, moreover, that children are afforded space to articulate views on matters concerning them, and that adults give these expressed views serious consideration. This understanding of participation rights strongly implies that children are understood as equal and equivalent actors to adults, and as experts in matters that are important for them. However, if these rights are to be such that children can claim them for themselves (Liebel, 2006), then it is necessary to assess whether children know their rights, how they view them, and whether the conditions are given for all children to effectively use these rights in practice. Building on theory and prior research on children's participation rights, we conducted a questionnaire survey to examine how children viewed their participation rights in Geneva-based primary schools. Moreover, we investigated the extent to which children's views were related to social and psychological resources, which may act as prerequisites for utilising rights, and therefore influence children's perceptions.

We found that almost nine out of ten children regarded their right to express their views as being rather well, or well, realised in the school environment. A similar proportion of children also regarded their right to have their views duly taken into consideration as being rather well, or well, realised. Hypothetically, this might be a consequence of policy initiatives promoting children's active participation in various social realms in Geneva (Ville de Genève, 2014). However, further research is needed to shed light on the cultural and societal determinants of children's perceptions of their participation rights, before any conclusions can be reached.

To evaluate whether, and to what extent, children's assessments of their participation rights vary with social and psychological resources, it was necessary to first analyse whether children's perceptions of their rights differ systematically between classes, schools, or city districts, that is, whether contextual factors affect children's assessments. Variance partitioning indicated that children's assessments of their participation rights did not differ significantly

across classes, schools, or city districts. Thus, institutional (schooling) conditions and residential areas did not considerably affect how children evaluated these rights. This finding is at odds with evidence suggesting that children's views of their rights may depend, to some extent, on school climate characteristics – for instance, whether schools are open to children's criticism (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009). However, prior research also indicated that children differentiate the meanings of their participation rights across various "ecological levels" such as the family, the school, or the broader socio-political system (Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013). Thus, within each of these ecological contexts, children's views of their participation rights may be more similar than between these different contexts, with differences being potentially particularly pronounced between the family and the school context (Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013). Considering that, in Geneva, we did not find significant differences in children's assessments of their participation rights across classes, schools, or districts, we expected individual-level characteristics to play a more prominent role in explaining these differences. Our results do indeed indicate that children's assessments of their right to express their views, and of their right to have these views given due weight, varied significantly by children's (1) subjective well-being, (2) perceived non-discrimination, and (3) the feeling of safety as well as the availability of a person of trust at school, as discussed in the following.

(1) Subjective well-being: The relationship between children's subjective well-being and their views of their participation rights strengthens theory on children's positive perceptions about such rights being contingent upon psychological well-being – a resource that enables children to grow in confidence, assert themselves, and, ultimately, effectively take part in society (Kosher, Jiang, Ben-Arieh, & Scott, 2014; Park, 2004). Children who display high levels of well-being are likely to participate actively in social life. Through more active social participation and corresponding exercising of participation rights, children will be more likely to perceive that their participation rights are respected.

(2) Perceived non-discrimination: A perceived climate of social non-discrimination, or, in other words, the perception that different groups of children are equally respected, seems to be a necessary condition for children to regard their participation rights as being fulfilled. From a psychological standpoint, this may be explained by children's need for 'relatedness' (the feeling of connectedness and belongingness), which has been identified as a major psychological need that must be satisfied for an individual to thrive and develop those abilities necessary for fruitful participation in social life (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Where children's need for relatedness is thwarted, they will feel alienated, insecure, and, in all probability, deprived

of their right to participate in society. Perceived discrimination may negatively impact mental health (Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000; Neto, 2009) and self-esteem (Armenta & Hunt, 2009), which are both essential preconditions for the sense of being respected by others and, by extension, for social participation. Children who perceive disrespect, or a discriminatory climate, are thus more likely to feel that their participation rights have been compromised.

(3) Feelings of safety and trust: Children who reported a low feeling of safety, or who lacked a person of trust, tended to perceive their participation rights as being less well realised in the school context. This suggests that safety needs and needs for relatedness must be met before children can fully use their participation rights. Safety and relatedness have been considered as indispensable nutrients for, and antecedents of, psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Empirical research does indeed indicate that feeling safe in one's environment, alongside trusting relationships with others, are crucial components of subjective well-being and human functioning (Ainsworth, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Valois, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2001). It thus seems reasonable to conclude that children who feel higher levels of safety and trust will participate more actively in social life and be more likely to consider their participation rights as being fulfilled.

Children's assessment of *both* the right to express their views *and* the right to have those views duly taken into consideration varied significantly with the above-mentioned variables. The *right to express views* was, in addition, also related to children's knowledge of rights, their perceived informedness about relevant matters, and their fear of going to school. The fact that children's knowledge of rights shaped their perception of the right to express themselves constitutes evidence in favour of the theory that knowledge of rights is fundamental to children's social participation (Howe & Covell, 2005). Children who are aware of their participation rights will be more likely to claim and apply this right in their everyday lives and, consequently, consider this right as being realised in practice. Furthermore, children seemed to feel less entitled to express their views when they lacked crucial information on their lives. A subjective feeling of being informed about relevant matters would allow children to voice and articulate their views and demands more readily (Treseder, 1997), which, in turn, will influence perceptions of their right to express themselves. Finally, children who reported feelings of fear in school tended to perceive their right to express their views as restricted. This finding is in line with psychological research demonstrating that anxiety leads to social withdrawal and further socio-emotional difficulties, including symptoms of depression and internalising problems (Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009; Salmon, James, & Smith, 1998). Such socio-

emotional problems diminish children's social participation and thus their enjoyment of the right to express their views in social contexts.

5.1 Implications for practice

Based on our findings we conclude that any effective implementation of children's participation rights should draw on a social-psychological approach, which considers that children's rights are not fully achievable in practice unless each child is endowed with the resources that enable them to practice their rights. Where children lack the necessary social and psychological resources, the practical value of any formally granted and enforceable right is diminished because children are unable to fully enjoy them. Article 12 of the CRC imposes an obligation on adults to remove barriers to children's social participation (Lansdown, 2001). This obligation implies that adults must equip children with those resources which will allow them to take a full and active part in social life. Thus, in schools social workers and school psychologists should aim at strengthening the psycho-social resources in particular of vulnerable children who lack such resources. For example, the degree of social support experienced by children can have an impact on children's confidence, self-esteem, and well-being (e.g., Dumont & Provost, 1999), which in turn play a crucial role in children's participation and in their views of their rights. Moreover, children's participation and their participation rights may be promoted through the development and maintenance of relationships of trust, offered by key professionals or others in the school environment (Bell, 2002). Finally, teachers are urged to inform children about their rights and to guarantee a climate of social non-discrimination, for instance by imposing sanctions on aggressive or violent behaviour which might cause fear in children and thus impede their social participation and, more generally, the realisation of participation rights.

5.2 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

By examining the social and psychological underpinnings of children's perceptions of their participation rights, we addressed an important gap in research to date. This is the first quantitative study on children's views of their participation rights in Geneva, presenting findings that are generalisable to the population of students attending the final years of primary school. Yet we also acknowledge the limitations of our study and derive recommendations for future research. First, the study drew on a cross-sectional design, which prevented us from identifying causal relationships. Second, the regression models explained a relatively small

proportion of the variance in children's assessments of their participation rights. This is typical in this field of research. Similar explanatory power was reported in studies that predicted children's views of their rights as a function of personal, family and school climate characteristics (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009), or in studies that explained differences in children's views of their rights based on cultural, religious and family variables (Ben-Arieh & Khoury-Kassabri, 2008). Considering, however, the wide array of factors that may potentially explain children's appraisals of their rights (Peens & Louw, 2000), the strength of the relationships identified here was far from meaningless, and the results provide an estimate of the importance of social and psychological resources for children's views of their participation rights. Nevertheless, we recommend that future research develop and use measures that will explain a larger proportion of variance in children's perceptions of their rights.[7] Third, except for basic demographic information (age, school grade level, possession of a mobile phone), we did not collect additional socio-demographic data and therefore did not perform group-specific analyses. Since children's social and psychological resources as well as their perceptions of rights might vary with social, cultural or race/ethnic backgrounds, we recommend that future research also examine potential differences related to such background variables. Finally, different conceptualisations of children's participation rights exist. This study focused on only two aspects, namely, the right to express views and the right to have these duly taken into account. These are the rights that are enshrined explicitly in Article 12 of the CRC. We encourage other researchers to also consider further dimensions of children's participation rights that have been predominantly discussed in qualitative studies, such as children's autonomy in the definition of problems and tasks, their self-determination in decision-making, or the extent to which adults and children share their power and responsibility in decision-making processes (Herbots & Put, 2015; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997; Vis & Thomas, 2009).

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[7] To the extent that the majority of children in our study assessed their participation rights positively, our OLS regression analyses predict mostly the difference between a 'rather positive' and a 'positive' assessment of these rights (i.e., the values 3 or 4 on a 4-point rating scale). In additional tests we dichotomised the outcome variables to examine differences between children assessing their participation rights either positively or negatively. These logistic regression analyses provided additional evidence that several social and psychological resources affect children's appraisals of their participation rights. In particular, children's knowledge of rights, perceived non-discrimination, and the feeling of safety increased the odds of a positive assessment of the right to express views. Moreover, perceived non-discrimination, the feeling of safety at school, and the availability of a person of trust in the school environment increased the odds of a positive assessment of the right to have personal views duly taken into consideration (the results of these analyses are available on request).

6 Conclusion

Researchers and policymakers assume that participation rights serve to empower and enable children to develop necessary skills for participating fully in democratic and human rights-based societies (Howe & Covell, 2005). However, legally enforceable participation rights alone do not ensure that children perceive these rights as being fulfilled in everyday life. We found that children's assessments of their participation rights in school varied with subjective well-being, perceived non-discrimination (i.e., a perceived climate of equal respect for all), the feeling of safety, and the availability of a person of trust in the school environment. Thus, from our study it is clear that social and psychological resources play a central role in shaping children's views of their participation rights, and that these rights cannot be fully realised in the school context unless essential psycho-social needs are also fulfilled.

Compliance with ethical standards

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants. Anonymity was guaranteed. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the General Directorate of Education (Canton of Geneva).

Conflict of interest

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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