This presentation aims to invite critical reflection on the relationships between educational practices and the right to self-determination of the child which, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), is as important as safety or protection: children have the right "to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously" (art.12), "to seek and receive information" (art.13), "to meet with other children and young people and to join groups and organizations" (art.15).

These prescriptions have legal value since the UK agreed to obey the UNCRC in 1991 and are in line with developments in socio-educational research which, since the 1990s, have been placing emphasis on socialising children towards a sense of responsibility and skills in planning and managing social contexts (James et al., 1998; Matthews, 2003). Notwithstanding a rich literature exists outlining strategies for children's empowerment, scholars have been calling for further research to find out if children are understood as active participants (Jones, 2009) within a rights-based approach in early years practice (Osler & Starkey, 2010).

This presentation addresses these issues by discussing the findings of a research interested in the implementation of the right to self-determination in early year education. The research follows a qualitative approach consisting of 6 focus group with students undertaking a children's rights module on a BA Hons Programme in Early Years and 11 individual semi-structured interviews to practitioners in the North London area. Data were analysed within an interpretive paradigm giving importance to social context and subjective meanings, in order to explore how students and practitioners: 1) understand children's self-determination, 2) look at the implementation of this fundamental right within Early Years practice.

By identifying, formulating and discussing dominant trends in the meanings of children's right to self-determination among perspective and early practitioners, this presentation aims to: 1) give voice to practitioners, enriching the sometimes prescriptive framework of literature on the promotion of children's participation, 2) offer insights of the limits of the promotion of children's participation to their own education as currently practiced, 3) underpin future professional training opportunities and research.

References


