

Participation for Better or for Worse?

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The increasing emphasis on participation in education offers the starting point for this paper. Participation appears to be a strategic notion in a particular problematisation of education: this is installed through certain ways of speaking and writing (discourse) and through certain procedures, instruments and techniques that are proposed and developed in different places and spaces (technology). Participation is thereby claimed to empower individuals and to emancipate the child or the student from dominant regimes of power, including liberating them from oppressive traditional educational practices. Foucault's concept of governmentality, which offers us a specific understanding of power, helps us to analyse the discourse and technology of participation in a different way: participation comes to be seen not as an increase in freedom and empowerment, but as an element in a particular mode of government or power. According to this analysis the plea for practices of participation appears as an interpellation or call, governing the way that people act and behave, and encouraging them to think of themselves in a very specific way. We characterise this in terms of immunisation.

I INTRODUCTION

'Promoting participation of *each young person* in the care-system is a key-element of developmental progress, quality care and civil rights, and thus a standard of professionalism!!' These are the concluding words from a speech by the renowned Dutch university professor and consultant in juvenile care and youth policy areas, Micha de Winter (2003). This clear and direct statement leaves no doubt about the author's conviction of the necessity, the absolute desirability and the surplus value of participation for young people. And he is not the only one. For a number of years, and especially since the end of the 1980s, there has been a growing body of opinion—amongst politicians, academics and the wider public—that has been concerned to promote participation in educational practices, for children, citizens, students, parents, teachers and so on. Participation, on the strength of this, is perceived and presented mostly as an increased and active involvement of these target groups in the activities and decisions that concern their lives. In the terms of Unicef:

Child participation involves encouraging and enabling children to make their views known on the issues that affect them. Put into practice, participation is adults listening to children—to all their multiple and varied ways of communicating. It ensures their freedom to express themselves and takes their views into account when coming to decisions that affect them. Engaging children in dialogue and exchange allows them to learn constructive ways of influencing the world around them (Bellamy, 2002, p. 4).

The arguments and other reasons that provide the motivation and justification for advocating participation are manifold and multifaceted. For children and young people promoters of participation often appeal to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which became effective in 1990. Commentators refer to the, what they call, ‘participation articles’¹ of the convention as supportive arguments for considering participation an infeasible right essentially linked to freedom. They see it as something that should be promoted and safeguarded for every child and youngster, in every situation that crosses their life-worlds, and especially, therefore, in education. The ratification of the Convention has in many European countries led to governmental initiatives of all kinds (adoption of implementing legislation, establishment of special commissions or action groups), with the intention of realising, promoting, facilitating or regulating the participation of children in education. At institutional and individual levels, steps are taken to demonstrate why participation is necessary and how it could be realised in everyday practices, and a multiplicity of instruments, handbooks, manuals, descriptions of best practices, tips and strategies for substantiating and illustrating these, has been produced.

In the light of the growth of these initiatives and the increasing attention that is paid, in theory and in practice, to it, we aim in this article to develop a critical analysis that problematises participation both as a discourse reflecting specific aims and values, and as a technology that involves children (students, parents, teachers ...) in a particular way. We analyse participation by looking, on the one hand, at what has been said and written about it (that is, its discourse) and, on the other, at the practices, the strategic choices, the instruments and measures that are thereby proposed for realising participation (that is, its technology). In identifying the discourse and technology of participation, we are not looking for definitions or descriptions of what participation is or should be—in fact, it can have many meanings. Neither do we intend to develop an evaluation of participatory discourse and/or technology (by, for example, confronting each of these to see if they are in harmony with the other, or by questioning the underlying assumptions we identify). The consideration of participation as a discourse and technology allows us instead to point out how participation represents or is part of a more general problematisation of education. Reading participation as discourse and technology reveals more specifically its strategic function in the context of educational practices ostensibly geared towards freedom, emancipation, liberation, as places where human beings can exercise freedom or, also, where they can

develop into free and responsible adults and individuals. We give some examples that show how discourses and technologies of participation actually contribute to such a problematisation. De Winter, for instance, argues that for too long, educational practices and institutions ‘have raised children “big” by keeping them “small”’ (1995, p. 11). In his ensuing plea for participation, he further explains and exposes this problem in terms of the dominant ideas and practices of parents and teachers who raise children without giving them a voice, without involving them in the process of their own education on the assumption that they are unable to be involved in decisions concerning their own lives. Other proponents of participation relate this to the problem of manipulation or domination—for example, seeing participation as ‘an important antidote to traditional educational practice which runs the risk of leaving youth alienated and open to manipulation’ (Hart, 1992, p. 43) or extolling it in terms of its being an attempt ‘to build a community in which the weakest do not become victims of the strongest and in which children are not deliberately exposed to capriciousness of the educators’ (Berding, 2002, p. 253). Instead of manipulating or, in Freire’s terms, oppressing children, instead of ‘keeping them small’ or limiting their freedom, discourses and technologies of participation offer an alternative: they free individuals by involving them, by taking into account their opinions and intentions, by validating their experiences and capacities, and by acknowledging their competence to be active, to assume responsibility and to survive in the current reality of uncertainty and constant change (de Winter, 1995, pp. 51–52). The freedom that is hereby claimed is held to be no less, moreover, than that of democratic society and citizenship; it is an essential condition of democracy, for which education and participation are crucial building blocks (Bellamy, 2002, pp. 11–14). Or, to put it differently, participation as discourse and technology promises a freedom that complies with broader conceptualisations of democratic citizenship endorsing responsibility, tolerance, (self-)respect and equal rights for all as correlates of democracy.

We argue, however, that participation as discourse and technology also needs to be seen in the light of Michel Foucault’s perspective of governmentality: it is not clear that it is liberating, or that it guarantees freedom or that it reduces government. The idea of governmentality allows us to identify the ways in which participation actually produces and mobilises a particular type of individuality that is not ‘natural’, ‘evidently given’ or ‘un-alienated’, an individuality that implies a specific practice of freedom that needs to be ‘learned’. Put differently, participation as discourse and technology generates a particular way of looking at oneself (and others), a particular way of bringing freedom into practice and a particular way of behaving for the individual that always excludes others. Or again, participation as represented in discourses and by instruments or techniques functions as an element in the establishment of a specific (new) mode of government that can be characterised as a government of individualisation or, as we shall argue, of immunisation. Before entering in detail into questions of individualisation and immunisation, we shall

first explain further what we mean by saying that participation functions as an element in a mode of (self-)government.

II PARTICIPATION AS AN ELEMENT IN THE MODE OF (SELF-) GOVERNMENT

In order to develop this argument, we draw on the work of Michel Foucault, and more specifically on his notion of governmentality, as this has been elaborated and further developed in more recent governmentality studies.² The specific value of this Foucauldian notion and perspective concerns its potential for problematising certain practices in terms of power, exercised through a combination of ways of thinking or 'mentalities' (sometimes also referred to as regimes of truth) about government and about techniques aimed at effective government, that is, at the realisation of regimes of truth. 'Government' thereby refers not so much to political or state interventions but to an exercise of power that Foucault defines as the conduct of conduct, pointing at the double meaning of 'conduct' (in English as well as in French)—of guidance, on the one hand, and behaviour, on the other (Foucault, 1981, 1982). With his notion of governmentality, in other words, Foucault identifies a certain form of the exercise of power that is displayed in practices through the mutual strengthening and realisation of mentalities and techniques.

Two points in this perspective of governmentality need further explanation before we turn to its application in the critical analysis of participation. The first concerns Foucault's conception of power and the exercise of power, not as a negative, oppressive or violent force but as a productive force. It is 'a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or future' (Foucault, 1982, p. 220). In defining the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, Foucault incorporates a crucial element, namely freedom: he sees power as exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free or, as he says, 'faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realised' (ibid.). This in turn points towards the second factor in Foucault's conceptualisation of power, and more particularly in governmental power as the conduct of conduct—namely, the double dynamics in which power is exercised by human beings on the actions of others, and more specifically on the way in which these others exercise power upon their own behaviour. This second form of the exercise of power—also called behaviour—is defined by Foucault as the act of subjectivation, an act whereby a human being turns herself into a subject. Judith Butler (1997) has paraphrased beautifully the process of subjectivation as considered by Foucault, both as a process of subjection/subordination or a kind of primary submission to power and as a process of becoming a subject or of subject-formation. It is, as she explains, 'a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given

individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject' (Butler, 1997, p. 84). This double valence of subordinating and producing, in Foucault's and in Butler's view, does not assume the presence of a preliminary human being who is already there, who is subordinated and then becomes a subject. Instead, as Butler elaborates in her lectures entitled *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2003), subordination and subject-formation are circumscribed within a moral or ethical framework, where we, as the authors of our own actions, are always also under the authority of another, or where we are, with a term she borrows from Althusser, 'interpellated'³ with the effect that we take ourselves as objects of reflection and cultivation.⁴ In the distance emerging through that Althusserian interpellation, Butler, in other words, sees a possibility opened up for the subject to assume or to (re)produce a certain identity, to behave as a certain subject. This distance, in Butler's interpretation of Foucault, however, always also reflects the regime of truth and the set of norms that have inaugurated the subject's reflexivity, that have attributed authority to the interpellation. This regime of truth never fully constrains the subject's subjectivation; it merely provides norms for the act of subjectivation, without producing the subject as their necessary effect, albeit that the subject is never free fully to disregard these norms.

In considering the discourses that contribute to a new pedagogical paradigm of participation—that is, the scientific and practical arguments promoting the involvement of children in education—we find ample evidence for the view that participation constitutes a set of very specific mentalities or regimes of truth: for example, regarding the claims of the connection between participation and the ability of children to express themselves, the necessity of participation for the psychic health of children, the direct link between participation at school and the development of democratic skills and competencies, the emancipatory or liberating power of participation, and, of course, also the many psychological objectifications of the human being that provide norms for the approach of participants and the government of their behaviour, for which the psy-sciences play a key role.⁵ In addition, the techniques and instruments of participation represent, affirm, try to realise or rely on many of these truths, providing norms for considering and governing behaviour. When, for example, schools are encouraged to support and stimulate the organisation of school councils, this measure relies on the assumption (which is taken for truth) that such councils, in their ideal form, the form for which we should strive, provide the possibility for each student to express her opinions, to formulate her needs and interests, and to participate in decisions concerning the satisfaction of these needs and interests. Another example is given by Roger Hart (1997, p. 32), who develops a scheme that details scientifically deduced development levels and the different forms of participation that correspond to these levels, providing in effect an idealised and schematised manual on practices of participation with children. The discourses, instruments and techniques of participation that proclaim the truth about the individual, about education and about participation can now be seen as exercising a strongly

prescriptive appeal to subjects within education. This means that without there being any overt obligation or direct imposition of changes of any kind, schools, students and teachers are interpellated through discourses and instruments to participate, to behave as participants, to present and shape themselves as participants and also to consider and approach others as such. This interpellation, which is not coercive (people are not obliged to participate), gains authority by claiming to realise freedom for the subject, by its presentation of participation as a possibility or an option for the subject to become free, to become one's own master, to rid oneself of external government of one's identity and to become empowered. This means that, in its claim to realise freedom, this interpellation requires of the subject that she submits herself to certain norms, that she adopts certain truths for her own identity, that she follows guidelines inscribed in the discourses and techniques of participation. In other words, what we argue here is that the interpellation to participate does not simply open up the possibility for a subject of assuming a natural, unalienated, free and self-determining identity; it always also prescribes a certain participatory identity, a certain way of being for the subject that involves not only the government of the self as a participant but the consideration of the other as participant also. In the next section, we further explore the nature of this participatory individuality and the norms of participatory behaviour and identity—that is, the implications for subjects interpellated to participate.

III THE PARTICIPATING SELF: TO ACT IN AND ON ONE'S OWN INTERESTS

In order to describe the kind of behaviour or individuality that participation calls into being, we explore some 'how-to' literature—the manuals, handbooks or programmes that show how to participate, what it offers and why it is valuable. In contrast to theoretical texts, it is crucial that the 'how-to' literature on participation takes up a particular position with regard to the orientation of participatory action and behaviour, and of specific participatory mentalities and norms about and for the subject in education. Our exploration then concentrates on the nature of that orientation. In the light of this, and on the basis of our reading of this literature, we try to outline the particular behaviour and the kind of identity that are promoted, and that people are asked to assume, when invited, mobilised or interpellated to participate. We show how participation governs the individual in such a way as to problematise the self as the holder of certain capacities and as the representative of needs and interests, while presenting itself as the means of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-determination.

Passive and vulnerable versus interested and competent

A first aspect we can distinguish when studying literature on participation is the explicit consideration of children as *active and competent human*

beings. This is often elaborated in contrast to a more traditional perception of and approach to children as passive, innocent, self-contained and helpless objects of love, care and attention, which the proponents of participation typically condemn. In emphasising the importance and relevance of participation, the literature often refers to two traditional misconceptions about children and youth in education. The first concerns the assumed vulnerability or helplessness of the child, who stands in need of protection from a dangerous adult world; a carefree childhood is taken to be necessary for the development of the responsible and well-balanced adult (Hart, 1992, p. 5). The second concerns the idea of the child as a passive and immature creature, as a passive container or empty vessel that needs to be filled, that needs to acquire the necessary skills and competencies, the necessary knowledge to survive in society and the adult world. Both of these misconceptions, according to de Winter (1995, p. 143 f.), rely on a deficiency- or problem-oriented approach that has for too long formed the basis of pedagogical and educational practices and interventions. In opposition to these deficiency-based conceptions, participation is assumed to stand for an alternative potential-based approach that recognises and addresses the child as an active human being, as a *holder of certain capacities and potentials* and as a *representative*, not of problems but, *of specific needs and interests*. The capacities, competencies and skills that children and young people are assumed to have are thereby seen as essential to their potential for identifying, answering and satisfying their own needs and interests without external intervention, without others defining their needs and without adults dictating or organising their satisfaction. The participation of children and youngsters, the stimulation of their active involvement in issues that concern their own lives, involves the encouragement of their capacities, first of all to identify and formulate their needs and interests, and then also to satisfy them. The literature indicates different aspects of this participatory alternative by emphasising, for example, that children are able to *express themselves*, or more specifically that they possess the necessary capacities to *express what they need and want*. As Malfrid Flekkøy argues, babies are from the very beginning capable of ‘at least rudimentary self-expression’, of making themselves heard ‘even when their “opinions” or feelings may be difficult to understand’ (Flekkøy, 1999, p. 51). It is not only self-expression but also the early beginnings of *making active choices, planning and problem-solving*, and of engaging in interactions that become evident; this is so ‘at least when the child begins to creep and crawl’, as ‘[o]nce they can crawl, infants are no longer totally dependent on caregivers to secure things they want’ (p. 52). What is recognised as the capacity of the baby or child—that is, its potential to participate—is at the same time also understood as reflecting a need and as corresponding to a desire of the child: this is a desire for self-expression, for the exercise of choice in interacting with others, and it is seen as the correlate of healthy development and well-being. Because of this need or desire for competence, as Hart (1992, p. 23) calls it, participation is considered a necessity, as an indefeasible right. Or, in the words of de

Winter, who considers participation as a basic need (de Winter, 1995, p. 15), children must be addressed in the light of their existing and potential qualities in order to satisfy their need for the recognition and development of their capacities and potentials (pp. 42, 63). While the needs, on the one hand, and the abilities, capacities and competencies of the child to meet them, on the other, are quite reasonably assumed to vary according to age, culture, environment, class and so on (Hart, 1997, p. 27), the consideration of children (and participants in general) in terms of needs, interests and capacities remains the same. In other words, while it represents the content of needs and interests, and the concrete range, functioning or performance of capacities as different for every individual, depending on individual self-determination and self-development, the literature on participation seems to converge on the assumption of some general cluster of capacities, including, for instance, *self-reflection* and *self-expression*. Other examples are the capacities of *perspective-taking* (p. 30), *social and communicative skills* enabling the understanding and interpretation of environments, and the abilities to *construct and negotiate meanings* (Van Gils, 2001, p. 26), to *influence one's own and other's behaviours* (Flekkøy, 1999, p. 50), to *learn from experiences*, to actively make choices, to *identify problems* and to *reflect and act*, as experts, *upon their own lives* (Hart, 1992, p. 29; Van Dinter, 1999, p. 48). According to their presentation in the literature, these different capacities, skills or competencies, which are (potentially) present at birth and which can be learned or further developed through participation, can be considered objects of investment, as objects in which subjects, for the satisfaction of their needs and interests, need to invest. In effect, participation is highly recommended as a capital expenditure, as a valuable and safeguarded investment of the subject, in the development of particular skills and competencies. This engagement thereby is not limited merely to a personal level investment. The forging of alliances in the process of participation also involves others. This extends the investment of the participant to a social level, involving different people who engage with and consider one another precisely as participants, in interactions that are mutual investments in individual skills and competencies.

Self-esteem, self-confidence and self-determination

The consideration of people and more specifically of children as representatives of needs and interests, as holders of capacities and skills in which to invest in order to be able to satisfy those needs and interests, already gives a first indication of the form of subjectivity and of the norms that are promoted through participation. A second indication we want to outline here relates to the description in the literature of a certain sphere of freedom or, as mentioned previously, the specific circumscription of a promise of freedom and emancipation, of which participation is a condition. This freedom is connected, to be more precise, with a number of self-directed or self-related goals or values. In the literature there are numerous references to feelings of, for instance, *being important*, having a

significant influence on the construction of shared meanings, and of *self-esteem* and *self-confidence*. As de Winter argues, 'every child, every young person enjoys the feeling of being important, to be appreciated, to mean something within society. Taking up responsibilities adds to the formation of self-confidence, self-respect and a feeling of solidarity' (de Winter, 1995, p. 12). The freedom that is assumed to be realised for participants in the process of participation is, in other words, made tangible in feelings that affirm one's sense of identity—that is, or so the literature claims, in feelings of *self-control* and the development of a *positive self-image* (Van Dinter, 1999, pp. 14–15), fostering a sense of *ownership*, increasing *self-esteem* (Van Gils, 2001, p. 59), and strengthening the *autonomy* of the individual in terms of *self-responsibility* and *self-determination* (de Winter, 1995, p. 74). Or, as Hart also suggests, 'Self-esteem is perhaps the most critical variable affecting a child's successful participation with others in a project. It is a value judgement children make about self-worth based upon their sense of competence in doing things and the approval of others as revealed by their acceptance as intimate friends' (Hart, 1992, p. 37). This quotation from Hart reveals the fact that, in spite of the emphasis on individual or identity-related spaces of freedom, the literature on participation does not merely circumscribe norms for the subject as an individual. In its emphasis on individual well-being, on individual self-determination, self-confidence and self-responsibility, the literature also refers to a certain social engagement in which people co-operate, an engagement of participants in which they not only consider themselves as subjects of interests and competencies seeking personal freedom through self-esteem and a sense of ownership and self-worth, but also consider and respect others in the same terms. In other words, the spaces of freedom that are circumscribed in the literature—in terms of individual autonomy and self-respect—also involve a social component, be it only to indicate the social importance of everyone's freedom of self-determination and self-realisation. Hart's words make the point clear: 'Through positive group experiences children discover that organizing can work in their self-interest. Such mutual self-interest is probably the strongest base for cultural and political organization' (p. 42).

The connection of participation to the forms of freedom indicated here affirms our interpretation of participation as an element in a mode of government, in the sense we have described above. The emphasis on self-determination and self-realisation in the interpellation of participation opens up a possibility for the subject to realise freedom, where freedom comes explicitly to be understood in terms of the capacity of an autonomous individual to establish an identity through shaping one's own life as autonomy or as the capacity to realise one's interests, to fulfil one's potential, to determine the course of one's existence through acts of choice (Rose, 1999, p. 84). In the representation, understanding and interpellation of human beings as subjects of freedom in this specific sense, participation does indeed offer an opportunity to realise freedom, but it also governs this realisation, restricting it to a very specific form, a form corresponding to what Nikolas Rose calls an advanced liberal mode of government

(Rose, 1999, p. 61 f.). According to Rose, this mode of government is grounded in the understanding and acting upon subjects of freedom, which imposes

a regime of the self where competent personhood is thought to depend upon the continual exercise of freedom, and where one is encouraged to understand one's life, actually or potentially, not in terms of fate or social status, but in terms of one's success or failure acquiring the skills and making the choices to actualise oneself (p. 87).

In the light of the same understanding of the human being as a subject of freedom that our analysis of the literature has revealed, participation can be considered as an element in this mode of government: it is a regime or strategy for putting one's freedom into practice, for realising oneself as a free individual—that is, an autonomous, self-reliant, self-reflective, self-responsible individual, who invests in participation as a way to invest in herself and to (trans)form herself. This presentation of participation as a strategy, as a 'basic need', 'in the interests of the participant', offering 'self-control' and 'ownership', indicates how people are invited (but also governed) to look at themselves as acting in and on their own interests, orientated towards self-determination and self-development. This governed self-determination is thereby not directed towards a normative ideal of personhood (every subject is unique in his interests, competencies and investments) but towards the norm of individuality itself. This norm is evident especially in the belief in the almost unlimited capacity of the individual to shape her life according to her own project, according to the leading image of the autonomous, self-directing self and of the *a priori* of individual choice on the basis of needs (Bröckling, 2001). Thus, self-government through participation is orientated by the image of an autonomous self, towards the hegemony of the principle that the subject should put her own personal freedom into practice. In emphasising the autonomy of the subject to exercise freedom and to acquire and develop certain personal attributes, participation promises moreover to free the individual from the yoke of dominant educational structures that are external to her, that are systematic in their operation and effects, and upon which she is dependent. To put this differently, the appeal of participation functions as a double bind. On the one hand, supported by scientific and other truth claims, it appears authoritatively to know what is good for those to whom it is addressed. On the other, it feeds a distrust towards this authority since it resounds with the message: 'you are and you have to be autonomous and self-determinant'.

Participation, as the authoritative interpellation to be actively involved, is effective not through its obligatory or imperative character but through the 'built-in desire' (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 74) of individuals to construct themselves. Participation acts upon individuals by getting them to act in and on their own interests (p. 68). Participation is not a neutral instrument offered to *the* individual but itself produces a type of individuality; it involves a specific way of governing oneself that is not 'natural' or 'evident' but that implies a very specific practice of freedom, a practice

that has to be *learned*. People, in other words, have to learn to see themselves as people with individual interests and needs that have to be met and realised in a specific way. Agents involved in education geared towards participation are invited to look at themselves as active, competent, self-reflective, self-expressing, self-sufficient, communicative, social, constructive, independent, self-reliant, actively participating, problem-solving, planning experts of their own lives. Self-responsible self-determination constitutes something that we should have (it provides the norm), something of which we can never have enough (it constitutes our *telos*) and something to be learned (Bröckling, 2001).

IV THE 'GOVERNMENT OF IMMUNISATION'?

Critical analysis of the literature on participation has shown that the promotion of participation in education is interpellating subjects to behave as active, competent, independent, self-determining human beings. In the same vein, the analysis has indicated how participation as a governmental strategy strongly emphasises the hegemony of the individual and, hence, denounces influences of external educational interventions that oppose the principle of the self-governing individual. It has revealed participation to be an element in a mode of government, which is opposed to and compensates for the direct government of traditional educational practices, 'which for a long time raised children "big" by keeping them "small"' (de Winter, 1995, p. 11). Participation as such is not only presented as an alternative to traditional educational systems but also celebrated as heralding their final breakdown. The participatory alternative, however, proves in its turn to institute systematic governing mechanisms, notwithstanding the fact that these do not rely on forceful repression or direct coercion. This means that participation as an authoritative invitation or interpellation appears, on our analysis, as a form of governing power—not because it controls or suppresses the individual's freedom but because it offers and defines a very specific possibility for the subject to put her freedom into practice, that is, to govern herself. Participation, in this sense, governs by presenting to the individual the possibility of a specific way of putting her freedom into practice and, hence, of becoming a subject, of forming her identity. The government of participation then operates through persuasion, 'not through the fear produced by threats but through the tensions generated in the discrepancy between how life is and how much better one thinks it could be' (Rose, 1996, p. 73). Or, as Butler might put this, subjects respond to participation because they recognise its interpellation, because they recognise themselves—as developing human beings—in the appealing message of its call, which is as such never merely descriptive but always also prescriptive. Because: how could the subject refuse or disregard the norms that inaugurate its own identity, its own process of self-realisation and self-determination (Butler, 2003, p. 16)? We can also agree with Barbara Cruikshank, therefore, that the governing power of participation works through rather than against the

subjectivities of the participants (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 69). To paraphrase Butler, the governing force of participation is not regulated by an exterior relation of power, whereby an institution takes a pre-given individual as the target of its subordinating aims. On the contrary, the individual is formed or, rather, formulated through her discursively constituted 'identity' as a participant (Butler, 1997, p. 84). Referring to Foucault's definition of government as the 'conduct of conduct', this means that participation governs, on the one hand, through the self-government of the individual, through the governed self-interest of the individual to govern her own behaviour in favour of self-actualisation. To be a participatory subject, that is, to act on and in one's interests, therefore, constitutes an individualising principle, interpellating the human being to (trans)form herself into a certain kind of individual with her own self-determined identity. On the other hand, by interpellating every single individual to actively participate, participation also creates (within the context of education) a manageable totality of participating individuals. Being a subject acting on and in one's interest, hence, constitutes also a totalising principle: it makes it possible to govern (or conduct) this subject and all the subjects that govern (or conduct) themselves in this way through specific technologies and strategies. This can be interpreted as a productive form of power exercised on the actions of others, producing certain very specific and well-defined possibilities but thereby excluding many other chances or possibilities for bringing freedom into practice.

In this context there is a further way in which participation can be seen as being part of what Foucault calls a 'history of different modes [of objectification] by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' or 'are individualised' (Foucault, 1982, pp. 208, 212). In his later investigations Foucault does, indeed, increasingly emphasise what he calls the 'government of individualization' (Foucault, 1982) as a specific exercise of power isolating the individual, breaking his links with others and, hence, also undermining what makes individuals truly individual—involving, in one word, 'immunisation'.⁶ This individualising government, as Foucault describes it, imposes a specific form of subjection, relies on specific 'regimes of knowledge', operates through scientific and administrative procedures determining who one is and works through 'dividing practices' that divide the individual within herself as well as from others. More specifically, it refers to a form of power 'which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity . . . which makes individuals subjects' (ibid.). On the basis of the present analysis of participation, we suggest that participation be seen as a part of this kind of government. Projecting a specific understanding of human beings and their relations, as singular and independent subjects only related to others through a generalization of the same kind of individuality, participation promotes individualising and also immunising government. As revealed by its discourses and techniques and instruments, participation relies on an understanding of the individual as a free person unaffected by dependencies. It calls into being a subject that has to consider herself as an individual, with her own needs and interests,

exercising her capacities to satisfy them, and investing in these capacities in a participatory process of self-actualisation and self-determination. As we have tried to show, participation acts upon individuals by getting them to act in and on their own interests, by getting them to act as self-determining, self-controlling, self-reliant, competent and autonomous actors—that is, by getting them to act as ‘entrepreneurial’ and independent, individual or separated selves. Without answering the question whether participation is good or bad, our analysis urges, and also provides the vocabulary for, serious reflection, at the least, upon the question of whether the individuality that is imposed in the manner we have described amounts really to the kind of subject we want to be when participating, when promoting participation in education.⁷

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NOTES

1. Despite the fact that no provision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly mentions participation (see <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>), most commentators consider Article 12 a very important and clear cut ‘participation article’. Also other Articles (such as 2, 13, 14, 15, 17 and 28, as well as 29, 31 and 40) are often cited in connection with participation (Hart, 1992, pp. 6–8). For more extended commentaries on participation rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, see Flekkøy, 1999, Van Dinter, 1998, and Vandekerckhove, 2003.
2. The governmentality studies in question are the work of a circle of thinkers who, since the beginning of the 1990s, have been interested in Foucault’s work and the notion of governmentality, and in its value and relevance for critical research. The most comprehensive reconstructions and elaborations of the perspective that Foucault opens up with this notion, and the significance these have for wider research, are provided by Colin Gordon, in Burchell, Gordon and Miller (1991) and in Lemke, Krasmann and Bröckling (2000).
3. With the notion of interpellation, Butler tries to clarify Foucault’s position concerning what she refers to as the ‘discursive production of the subject’. Through the idea of interpellation, she interprets or designates Foucault’s view on subjectivation as a certain, neither singular nor sovereign, inaugurative address of the individual who, through that address and her subjectivation to it, becomes subject (Butler, 1997, pp. 4–6). The way in which Butler understands and conceives the authority of that address or call changes from a psychoanalytic into a more social and ethical interpretation, as is further clarified in the following note.
4. Butler’s accounts on the ethical relation of the self to the self, on the process of subjectivation as subject-formation and subordination, were first developed in a book, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection*, in which she finds herself, in criticism of Foucault, obliged to turn to psychoanalysis in order to be able to understand the scene of interpellation inaugurating the subject. In Butler’s words ‘I think that one cannot account for subjectivation and, in particular, becoming the principle for one’s own subjection without recourse to a psychoanalytic account of the formative or generative effects of restriction or prohibition’ (Butler, 1997, p. 87). This recourse to psychoanalysis yields a clarification for the subject’s answer to interpellation, interpreted as a punitive or prohibitive call, as a super-ego calling to account and calling into existence the conscience of the subject. In lectures published five years later, Butler (2003,

- pp. 14–15) admits to perhaps having moved too quickly to accept this punitive scene of inauguration of the subject and develops an—in our view more accurate and more ‘Foucauldian’—account of the process of self-constitution and subordination, referring more to ethical motivation than to psychoanalytically explicable effect.
5. To elaborate: what we wish to say here is that psy-sciences play a key role in providing the vocabulary and the regulatory knowledges, truth or norms for the government of (participatory) individuals. Psy-sciences are, in other words, argued to disseminate vocabularies for understanding one’s life and actions, vocabularies that are authoritative and, as derived from the rational discourse of science, also prescriptive or normative. Or, in Nikolas Rose’s words: ‘Psychology . . . has altered the way in which it is possible to think about people, the laws and values that govern the actions and conduct of others, and indeed of ourselves. What is more, it has endowed some ways of thinking about people with extra credibility on account of their apparent grounding in positive knowledge’ (Rose, 1996, p. 65).
 6. For a more extended elaboration of this notion, see Masschelein and Simons (2002).
 7. We would like explicitly to thank Paul Standish for his invaluable editing work and for his help with the translation. We also thank the Fund for Scientific Research of Flanders, which made the research for this paper possible. This is a joint paper. The order of the authors’ names is alphabetical and implies no order of ranking.

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