

Chapter 5

Children's participation

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Introduction

At a Children's Issues Conference in 1999 a group of children discussed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and collectively drew up the following statement concerning children's involvement and participation in decision making:

- we can make responsible decisions if given a chance
- it is okay for us to make the wrong decision sometimes, even if we know all the information
- please listen to us instead of ignoring us, and take notice of what we have to say
- expect an opinion from us, and ask for it
- lastly, we need adults to guide us towards making good decisions, but we also need you to let us practise making the wrong decisions as well

(Smith, 2000, quoted in Atwool, 2006, p. 264)

This statement reveals the extent to which children's collective voices can contribute to the development of positive adult-child relationships. These children clearly believe they have a right to be involved in decision making, but recognise that this involves both the support of adults and the creation of space in which to develop their capacities as decision makers. They are asking adults for guidance, patience and respect, as well as demanding that children's voices are heard.

McNeish and Newman (2002) identify different contexts of decision making:

- participation in individual decision making
- participation in service development and provision

- participation in research
- participation in communities
- participation in influencing policy or public awareness.

The first of these, a principle argued for by children and their advocates, is to be found in a range of policy and practice guidance (for example, the Children Act 1989, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2001, The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) 2006).

Children are also willing to participate in decision making that extends beyond their own immediate needs and individual interests, reflecting the other contexts in McNeish and Newman's list. It is these other contexts, reflecting children's involvement and participation in collective decision making, that will be examined in this chapter. The chapter will examine how participation has emerged, both politically and culturally, within practice across children's services. Case examples of projects, and a brief examination of selected methods, will be used to illustrate a range of potential benefits and challenges from participation. It is argued that effective participation requires specific skills and knowledge as well as critical reflection and evaluation of both processes and outcomes.

Core questions

- What are some of the different understandings of children's participation and involvement in collective decision making?
- In what ways is participation considered to be a good thing?
- How can we distinguish participation from non-participation?
- What has contributed to the original absence and eventual emergence of children's participation?
- What skills and processes contribute to effective participation in different contexts?

1 Participation and involvement

Participation and involvement in service development and practice, particularly with under-12s, is still evolving. The closer working ties within children's services create a context in which some organisations in the education and health sectors are finding opportunities to learn from sectors with longer histories of children's involvement, such as local authorities and voluntary organisations (Sloper and Lightfoot, 2003).

The existing body of knowledge confirms that, when done well, children's participation and involvement can:

- help children to develop a range of social and communication skills, including confidence-building and the capacity to participate in more sophisticated decision making (Taylor, 2003)
- help children become politically aware and active (Kellett et al., 2004)
- help parents, carers, policy makers and service providers improve their support for children (Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2004)
- provide children with a platform for learning about and demonstrating their capacities for good citizenship (Thomson and Holdsworth, 2003)
- provide children with space in which they can articulate their needs but also demonstrate their resources (Kay et al., 2006)
- help keep children safe – protection and participation are mutually reinforcing rights (Marchant and Kirby, 2004, in Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 211)
- be important for children's self-reflective processes and identity constructions both at a personal and a collective level (Eide and Winger, 2005, p. 77)
- accord children the rights of respect and dignity as equal human beings (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

1.1 Defining participation

According to the international children's charity Save the Children (2007), participation is about having the opportunity to express a view, influence decision making and achieve change. Children's participation is an informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages and abilities, in any matter concerning them either directly or indirectly. Children's participation is a way of working and an essential principle that cuts across all programmes and takes place in all arenas – from homes to government, from local to international levels.

Kirby and Bryson (2002) suggest that the term participation can be used to describe a range of situations and processes. These include:

- one-off consultations in which children express their views and share experiences (for example, surveys, focus groups);
- regular or extended programmes of involvement at both the organisational (for example, school councils; students as researchers) and area-wide strategic levels (for example, council youth forums);
- integrated daily participatory approaches (for example, democratic schooling).

(Kirby and Bryson, 2002, p. 10)

Sinclair and Franklin (2000) suggest that participation can also include involvement in delivering services by acting as mentors, counsellors, volunteers or workers.

The evolution of participation and involvement has resulted in a range of innovative approaches and initiatives accompanied by an ongoing discussion and debate around what constitutes good and, in some cases, bad practice. The following reflects some of the issues raised in this debate.

Participation at different levels

Alderson (2000) describes how participation can operate at different levels. These levels include:

- individual settings, such as a school or nursery, when children are involved in making decisions about aspects of its day-to-day running, the wider environment or the curriculum

For example:

The Cardiff Sure Start centre involved parents, staff and children in designing a new sensory room. Part of the process involved children visiting other centres that had sensory rooms. The adults observed and recorded the children's reactions and interpreted photographs taken by the children of the things they enjoyed from their visit (Lancaster, 2006).

- individual service providers (such as social services, health authorities or schools) when deciding how to provide services

For example:

In England, the Children's Fund was set up to provide support to children aged five to thirteen who needed extra help. It was used for projects involving children's health, home life, education or leisure time. Children's organisations applied for money to implement project ideas. Children were involved in planning and monitoring the projects.

- government and governance bodies involved in the planning of services for children

For example:

Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership is a strategy developed by the Welsh Assembly Government to organise and improve children's services. A central commitment is to listen to children and young people, resulting in participation at several different levels.

Nationally, the creation of the Funky Dragon website (<http://www.funkydragon.org>) by the Children and Young People's Assembly of Wales has enabled children and young people from across Wales to share their concerns with government ministers. Locally, every local authority is encouraged to set up a children and young person's forum for children aged eleven and over.

In Welsh schools, there is a requirement that the governing bodies of all junior and secondary maintained schools establish school councils.

- national government departments and parliaments responsible for introducing new legislation that may impact upon the lives of children

For example:

In England, government departments were issued with guidance on how to encourage children's participation. Responses from national consultations were used by the Government to develop the 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters*.

- international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organisations

For example:

International organisations were set up by and for street children campaigning for better conditions.

(Connolly and Ennew, 1996, quoted in Alderson, 2000).

Thinking point 5.1 Can you identify similar examples of participation initiatives at a range of different levels?

Participation as a process

The tendency to reduce participation to one-off consultations or events, which remain detached from wider decision making processes, has been widely criticised (Shephard and Treseder, 2002, p. 6).

Alternatively it is suggested that participation should be a planned process allowing the expression and recording of children's views (Crowley, 2004), followed by action, including feedback on the potential impact of the children's ideas on policy and practice (Aspinwall and Larkins, 2002).

Participation as process has been promoted within the *Hear By Right* standards produced in conjunction with children and young people by the National Youth Agency (Badham and Wade, 2005). These include the following values which illustrate very clearly both the process and level of commitment required for participation:

- Children and young people's involvement is a visible commitment that is properly resourced
- Children and young people's involvement is valued
- Children and young people have equal opportunity to get involved
- Policies and standards for the participation of children and young people are in place, evaluated and improved

(Badham and Wade, 2005, p. 8)

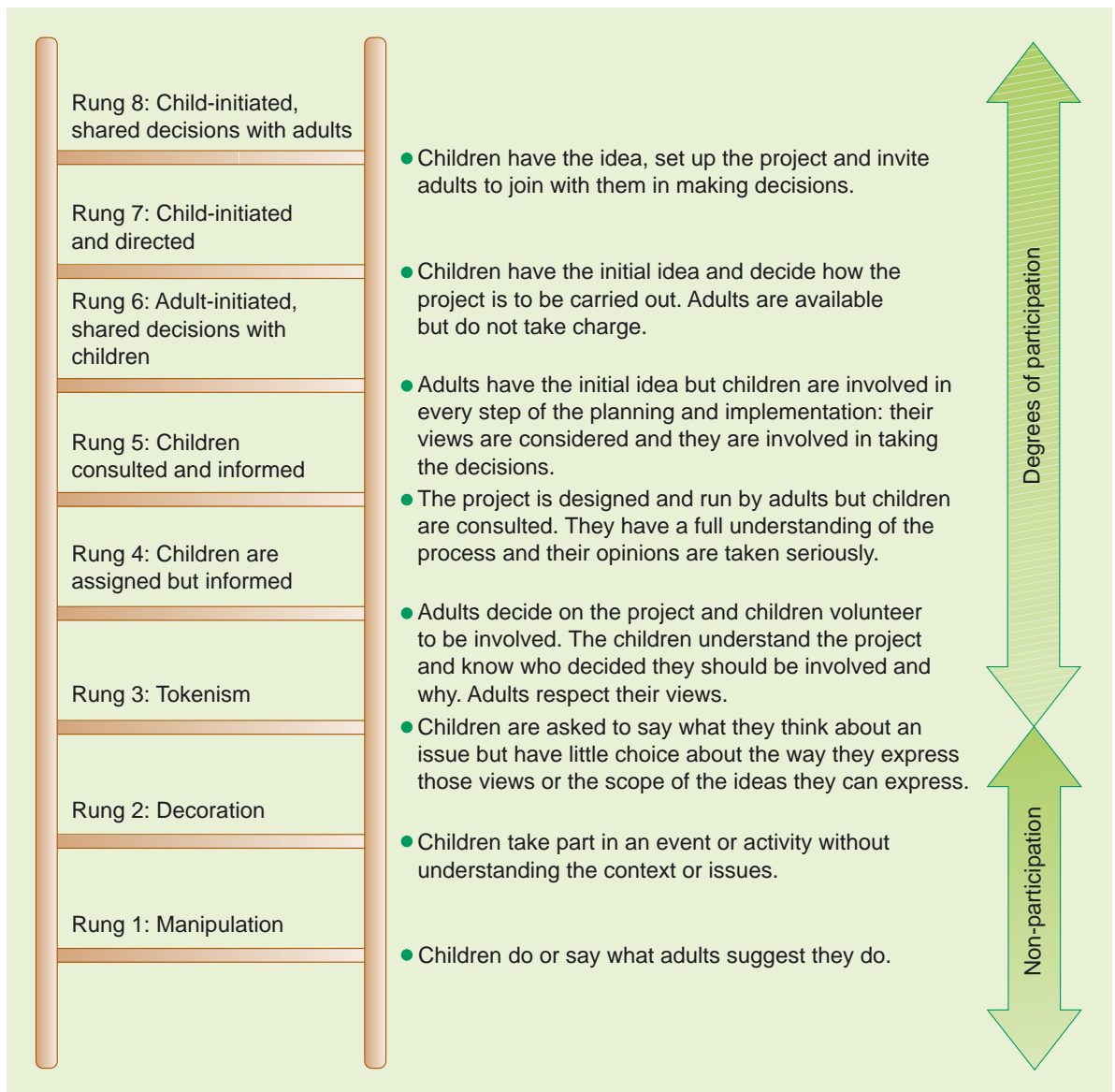
1.2 Participation and non-participation

[Those consulting] want to be seen to be doing something. I know from experience it is/You see in the newspapers they've consulted

a certain number of young people—but then where does the report go? And then nothing is done about it/It's just campaigning for the Government to make it seem they're doing something worthwhile.

(Young person quoted in Stafford et al., 2003, p. 365)

It is acknowledged that many children have had bad experiences of being 'consulted' (Peter Clarke, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, in Aspinwall and Larkins, 2002). Hart (1992) developed a highly influential model of participation. It expresses the interrelationship between adults and



Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992)

children at different levels (or rungs of a ladder) along a continuum that starts with manipulation and ends with child-initiated decision making with adults.

Thinking point 5.2 Identify some examples of participation from your own experience and consider where on the ladder model they might be placed.

The ladder model is particularly useful at measuring the extent to which children are participating within particular contexts. According to Shier (2001), one of the most useful contributions that Hart's model makes is to help to identify non-participation. The three lowest rungs on the ladder (Manipulation, Decoration and Tokenism) represent this and can be a reminder for adults intending to carry out participation work with children that it is easy to get it wrong:

Manipulation

One young woman who had been in care told us about her experience of being interviewed by a newspaper about the newsletter they were producing. She felt that all of her quotes had been taken out of context. She was very unhappy about the result as the journalist had made the article just about her own life. This could be seen as manipulation as she gave her opinion but had it taken out of context.

(McNeish et al., 2000, p. 61)

This extract, taken from a focus group discussing participation, demonstrates how, rather than reporting the young person's account of her experience as an active participant within a productive young persons group, the media manipulated her account into their own predetermined stereotype. It is frequent for the media to portray children in care, disabled children and others, as exceptional or brave children (Headliners, 1998).

Decoration

In May 1990, at the height of public anxiety about Mad Cow Disease, the Conservative Minister for Agriculture, John Gummer, was photographed eating beefburgers at a boat show with his four-year-old daughter Cordelia.

His actions appeared to be an attempt to reassure the public that eating beef, and feeding beef to their children, was totally safe. His daughter's views on eating beef and her involvement in the publicity stunt were not reported at the time. Sinead Kirwan from Headliners identifies other examples in the media of children being used to decorate adults.

Using children as decoration: John Gummer, then agriculture minister, with his daughter



She says:

kids are like a hat you bring out on special occasions and put back in the closet when you've finished showing it off.

(Headliners, 1998, webpage)

Tokenism

When you go into a room ... and sat round in a board meeting ... and put my points across and the director hasn't taken them or just brushed them aside because he's got other issues that are more important to him ... that sort of situation makes me angry.

(Young person quoted in McNeish et al., 2000, p. 61)

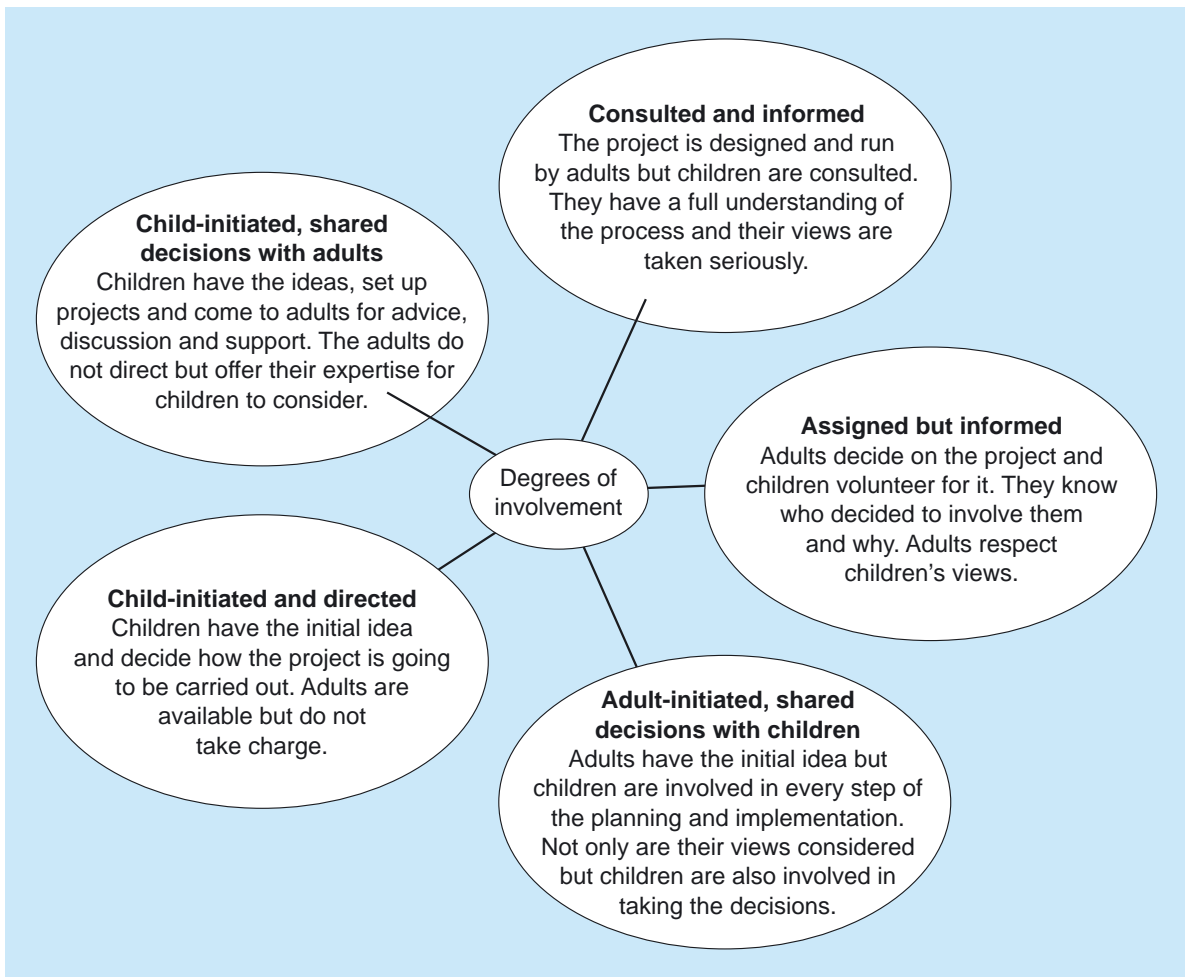
This quote highlights a common experience for some children who are expected to express their views in an unwelcoming and unfamiliar adult-orientated environment (in this case a formal board meeting). Alderson (2000, p. 93) says children are very 'aware of tokenism'. They know they are carrying out a 'symbolic function' (Hart, 1997, p. 42) in that the adults want to be seen to be involving children.

Participation within context

Although Hart's model is useful in identifying examples of non-participation, its tendency to categorise participation hierarchically has been questioned. Comeau (2005), for example, is concerned that it could

promote the view that participation at the level of the top rungs is dependent upon satisfactory completion of the interactions described in the lower rungs. In other words, participation projects could work their way up the ladder one rung at a time rather than choose an approach that suits the context in which they are working.

In response to this perceived weakness, Treseder (1997) developed a non-hierarchical and context-specific model reflecting that, within certain contexts (for example, in schools), children may not have control and therefore never reach the top rung of Hart's model. Treseder's model also acknowledges that although some children may wish to participate, they may choose to do so at a level that best reflects their abilities, resources and ambitions. Just as levels of participation may depend on individual contexts, children are not a homogenous group (Lansdown, 2001, p. 14).



Treseder's Degrees of Involvement Model (1997)

For some children and young people, being involved in a group with others who have shared similar experiences is important.

Peer support encourages children and young people to take responsibility for each other and to actively participate in developing positive relationships and community well-being.

(Kirby et al., 2003, p. 97)

This is particularly relevant to Black, disabled and refugee children who are also in the Looked After care system (Voice for the Child in Care, 2004). Some experiences, such as poverty and disability (as we show in Chapter 7), affect both children and adults and may require support and decision making involving whole families or communities. On the other hand, some children do not feel comfortable working in groups with peers or adults. Despite some perceived benefits in splitting children into sub-groups based on interest or experience, Lansdown suggests that:

it is also important to recognise that many issues affecting children are common to them all and that it is not always appropriate to focus on children in terms of 'problems'.

(Lansdown, 2001, p. 14)

Adults need to enter into dialogue with children to ascertain if and how, and with what kind of support, they would like to become involved.

This may shift from moment to moment, and from child to child, as well as between tasks and projects.

(Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 212)

Effective participation projects work with the different strengths and experiences that children bring and provide:

a number of different roles that children can fulfil according to their aptitudes, interests and abilities, each of which should be promoted and valued equally.

(Lansdown, 2001, p. 14)

Empowering children

It is evident from children's accounts that they are acutely aware of power, and the hierarchy of power in which adults place themselves firmly above children:

'Adults make the decisions of children and children make the decisions of babies. And then babies make the decisions of a mouse, and then a mouse makes it for ants, and then ants make it for a small crumb.'

(Child quoted in Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 212)

Real participation will shift that balance of power: ‘The outcome of any successful participation process will be empowered children’ (Shephard and Treseder, 2002, p. 4).

Empowerment generally refers to the process by which power is developed and gained by people who lack it (Braye and Preston Shoot, 1995, quoted in Ward, 2000). At its simplest level ‘it refers to gaining greater control over one’s life and circumstances’ at the psychological, political and social level (Thompson, 2000, p. 120). For some people working with children (for example, social workers) the term ‘empowerment’ is a familiar challenge embedded into the professional value base. For others, empowerment is perhaps a less obvious part of the role they play in children’s lives: ‘it’s giving up control, a certain amount of control, which is not necessarily very easy for a teacher’ (educational professional quoted in Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 214). It is a ‘challenge’ to ‘really hold back and let the children come out with what they want’ (parent volunteer quoted in Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 214).

Empowerment challenges the view that children are totally dependent upon adults to support them. A more positive interpretation, that acknowledges children’s agency, is to construct the child–adult relationship as interdependent, see Chapter 4.

Interdependence is evident even in relationships between adults and small children (Alderson, 2000). Babies and toddlers are able to communicate when they need support and provide opinions on the support that they are given. By responding sensitively and appropriately, adults, perhaps without realising it, are involving and empowering very young children.

Participation is, similarly, an interdependent relationship requiring work with, rather than for, children. Adults play a crucial part in these empowering relationships by ‘accepting responsibility’ for children without ‘taking responsibility away from them’ (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 20). The following example illustrates interdependence and empowerment in operation:

Practice box 5.1

The Children's House Nursery, in north east Lincolnshire, actively enabled children's participation in collective decision making. In particular, children were involved in issues involving food and eating. The adult workers promoted discussion with children about healthy eating and involved children in tasting sessions. The children themselves went to the supermarket and helped choose the food for the tasting. Children were also encouraged to discuss what, with whom and how they eat at home. The staff noted how children involved food in role plays, making meals from photographs cut out of food magazines, and from dough which they then served to each other. This role play was observed and videoed and notes kept on the kinds of food children preferred or disliked. This information was used to plan menus with the nursery cook.

(Case study by McAuliffe and Lane, 2005)

Thinking point 5.3 To what extent can all the relationships that you form with children be described as interdependent?

Involving everyone

Criticism has been levelled at participation initiatives that appear to only involve certain children whilst excluding others. 'It's always the same people that get picked for everything' (young person quoted in Hill, 2006, p. 77).

Hill (2006) found that many children were driven by a sense of fairness and would question why, in certain contexts, only more confident or older children were given opportunities to participate. Other factors associated with children's gender, ethnicity, social class or disability can also impact on their invisibility in participation work.

In one study of school consultations, children presented their own ideas about how inclusive participation could be achieved:

- picking young people for consultation on a random basis rather than at the discretion of adults;
- involving whole schools in consultation;
- rotating consultation round different schools and areas of Scotland so that each gets a turn;
- encouraging young people to take part, using publicity, for example TV adverts.

(Stafford et al., 2003, p. 364)

Key points

- 1 Participation is a process that can operate at different levels with many positive benefits for children.
- 2 Models of participation are useful for highlighting different ways of working with children and exposing bad practice.
- 3 Participation benefits from inclusive, empowering and interdependent adult child relationships.

2 The philosophical basis of participation

The pace of change in accepting children's participation in practice has been slow – and in some cases non-existent. To understand why, it is necessary to examine, first, how and why children have been denied a voice and, secondly, the various discourses from which the idea of children's participation has emerged.

By the early twenty-first century the rhetoric of participation in public decision making had achieved a 'high profile, with a growing body of literature' (Shier, 2001, p. 107) and 'a sustained commitment in government policy' (Cavet and Sloper, 2004, p. 614). Turning this into a reality remains a challenge for the children's workforce. Prior to this it was possible to describe children as having 'muted voices' (Ennew, 1994, p. 125). This section will explore ways in which adults have contributed to this situation.

Actively muting children's voices

Infected by the strike contagion at present passing over Scotland many of the boys at Rattray School refused to resume lessons on Tuesday forenoon and proceeded to Craigmill and subsequently to Blairgowrie but failed to induce the scholars at these places to join their ranks. The strikers caused considerable disturbance but the movement was short lived most of them returning to school the same day, where they were duly rewarded for their pains.

(Blairgowrie Advertiser, 11 October 1889, quoted on Perthshire Diary, 2007, webpage)

Although it is fair to say that children's voices have been muted, it is not the case that they have been silent. History is full of examples of children who have protested, commented, argued and offered constructive criticism on the services provided for them and the wider world in which they live. The article in the *Blairgowrie Advertiser* was written when a school strike movement spread throughout Britain with children demanding: 'free education, less rote learning and the abolition of corporal punishment' (Cunningham and Lavalette, 2002, p. 172).

Subsequently the children were portrayed unfavourably in the media and the police were posted at school entrances. Some of the strikers were taken to court, fined and 'bound over' with threats of imprisonment or flogging should they repeat their actions (Cunningham and Lavalette, 2002).

A further series of national strikes occurred in 1911, initially as a response to a school strike at Bigyn School in Llanelli which was sparked off by a teacher beating a student for passing paper around the class (Bigyn School, 2006). A school in Liverpool went out on strike in sympathy,

adding their own demands including abolition of the cane, abolition of home lessons and an extra half day's holiday (Cunningham and Lavalette, 2002, p. 176). A further sixty schools across the country also joined the strike.



Newspaper cartoons belittling children's protests: *Sunday Express*, 14 May 1972 (left) and *The Times*, 20 March 2003 (right)

Thinking point 5.4 In what ways are these two cartoons, published thirty years apart, conveying a similar message about children's participation?

The reaction to these children's protests demonstrates the different ways in which children's collective voices have been silenced. Both the 1889 and 1911 strikes resulted in children being physically punished. Later protests, including further anti-corporal-punishment strikes in 1972 and the Gulf war protests by schoolchildren in 2003, were belittled in the press with a suggestion that children were, in some way, mimicking adults or using the protests as an opportunity to miss school lessons.

Learning and valuing the languages of childhood

I've got a load to give you
But I don't know how
I've got load to say to you

But I don't know how.

Well, you wouldn't understand

(Child's poem in Foster Care Associates, 2000, p. 52)



Text messaging: one of the creative ways in which children communicate with each other

Children find creative ways of expressing their feelings and ideas that both include, and move beyond, verbal and written communication. Their views 'can be expressed in many ways, for example, through emotions, drawing, painting singing, drama'

(Lansdown, 2005, p. 4)

Drawing, particularly, has been referred to as the universal language of childhood (Rubin, 1984, quoted in Rollins, 2005) and is particularly useful for younger children 'who may not have the cognitive ability to express themselves in words' (Malchiodi, 1999, quoted in Rollins, 2005). As we saw in Chapter 1, adults can connect with children through a broad range of communication methods. This is sometimes described within the Reggio Emilia approach as the 'hundred languages of childhood'. Arguably it has been the refusal of adults to learn and value the languages of childhood that has historically contributed to the muting of children's voices.

With this in mind it becomes possible to reappraise the national protests and strikes by children. Much has been made of the fact that these exceptional instances of children achieving a national voice appeared to coincide with

major political unrest by trades unions or other protesters. The implication is that children were either being misled by adults or were participating in some kind of copycat activity. The appropriation of the adult methods of striking and marching to make a political point is, itself, an example of creative expression. Mimicking in this sense is a positive attribute, a familiar part of the process of learning and developing communication. Adults have a responsibility to model behaviour to children and should expect such observed behaviour (whether judged good or bad) to be appropriated. This strengthens the case for adults to model effective democratic processes and to provide opportunities for children to do likewise.

Adults replacing children's voices with their own

Beresford (1997) describes the difficulties of hearing the views of disabled children. In many cases adult carers present what she refers to as the proxy views of these children, denying them a true voice. Political and media-led debates about the treatment of disabled children increasingly provide parents and carers with a platform to air their views, yet rarely include the views of disabled children.

Carter (2002) undertook research around medical encounters (that is, consultations and meetings with medical professionals) where children were suffering from chronic pain. The children in her study (aged seven to thirteen) were able to be both articulate and animated. However, despite the fact that the children felt they had a lot to offer in the medical encounter they reported being marginalised or overwhelmed by the professionals.

Communication between doctors and children was mostly restricted to children answering specific, medical-diagnostic questions. Frequently, the parents were used as the conduit for the children's experiences, a form of adult-child ventriloquism, even though the children would have welcomed more direct and appropriate involvement.

(Carter, 2002, p. 35)

Significantly, the children's experiences in these accounts replicate those of some adults who also have chronic pain. It suggests that these children are doubly disadvantaged and discriminated against.

'[Doctors should] talk to me more, not just my mum.'

(Child, interviewed by Carter, 2002, p. 35)

'Listen!!!!!! [...] Listen to what the people [with chronic pain] have to say and take notice of it. Treat them as people no matter how young they are [...] [Doctors] get really patronising [...] I just get really fed up with it.'

(Child interviewed by Carter, 2002, p. 35)

At the collective level the same process is evident when professionals express a view that is supposed to be representative of all children in their setting, or where large organisations supposedly speak on behalf of children.

Because adults hold a more powerful position in society, they can be useful advocates for children's voices. A good example of this is the Children are Unbeatable Alliance which consists of over 400 mainly adult-led organisations campaigning against smacking. The important distinction here is that the issues are led by the views and wishes of children.

Key points

- 1 Historically, children's voices have been suppressed.
- 2 Adults wanting to encourage children's involvement need to understand and work with the many different languages of childhood.
- 3 Adults must learn not to replace children's voices with their own.
- 4 Some children are silenced as a result of double or multiple forms of discrimination.

3 The emergence of children's participation

In this section we will consider a number of interrelated processes, themes and discourses that have contributed to the present day emphasis on children's participation.

3.1 New ways of understanding children's evolving capacity

The political changes promoting participation are the product of new ways of understanding children and childhood. The ideas behind participation can be received as a challenge to deeply held cultural attitudes and practices.

Even adults who are utterly sympathetic to the principle of enabling children to express their views may often feel uncomfortable with the ways, means and implications of putting this into practice. Indeed, children themselves frequently experience similar feelings of unease.

(Lansdown, 2001, p. v)

These feelings are not surprising because they run counter to the dominant framework that constructs how we understand childhood.

In the introduction to this book we outlined the emergence of a new sociology of childhood providing a theoretical challenge to the dominant framework. In order to push forward policies that promote children's participation and involvement, some advocates have found it useful to place their projects within this alternative theoretical framework, as this extract from publicity material for the Norfolk Children's Fund demonstrates:

This approach draws on new models of children as 'social actors'; as innovative and creative users of the world around them and as having social rights conferred upon them through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ... It is believed that sensitivity to the 'child's view' will add value to the design and delivery of services and increase sustainability.

(Norfolk Children's Fund, 2003, webpage)

Despite some evidence of changes in attitude towards children there is still some uncertainty about the relevance of participation to younger or disabled children. It is 'widely accepted that some significant changes in physical strength, agility, and cognitive and social competencies take place during a child's second year, at around 6–7 and again at puberty' (Lansdown, 2004, p. 4). Most societies have some kind of age-based transition in their expectations of children between the ages of seven

and twelve (Thomas, 2002). Unsurprisingly, most participation work is undertaken with teenagers.

Lansdown (2005) suggests that the concept of *evolving capacity* could be used as an alternative to age-based ideas about competency. This concept is drawn directly from Article 5 of the UNCRC and extends the consensus, found in all theories of childhood, which recognises change and evolution in children's capacities.

Children's physical immaturity, relative inexperience and lack of knowledge do render them vulnerable and necessitate specific protections.

(Lansdown, 2005, p. 31)

Yet they can still be introduced to experiences of participation within a safe context with 'appropriate direction and guidance' (United Nations, 1989).

Once again, this promotes the potential for interdependent adult-child relationships. As Vygotsky (1978) identified, even very young children can learn and develop new capacities through collaboration and interaction with adults. Marchant et al. (1999) used innovative communication methods enabling young learning disabled people to collectively express views about respite care. It appears that the *capacity to participate* can be learnt through being provided with *opportunities to participate* (Lansdown, 2005). Miller (2003) describes a very good example of this in practice:

Practice box 5.2

At Wood End Family Project in Coventry, crèche staff set up a drinks and fruit bar, available at all times, so that children could decide for themselves when to have a drink and something to eat. There were 20 children in the group, aged 0–4 years.

At first the children kept asking if they could have fruit and water rather than helping themselves, but they soon realised that it was there for them to have when they wanted it. Initially the children kept spilling water, but as they got used to pouring they became proficient and less was spilt. The children helped staff to wipe up spillages where they occurred. The children told the staff that they really enjoyed eating the fruit.

Staff comment that the activity went very well and feel that in time the children will get used to this as a regular part of the session.

(Miller, 2003, p. 38)

Participation as a universal children's right

The UNCRC has been one of the most significant influences on children's rights, in particular the development of children's participation. It was adopted by the UN in November 1989 and ratified by the UK government in December 1991.

The UNCRC's status in law is often overstated and, whilst it can be used to prompt member countries into improving their rights record, the UK continues to fall short in several areas – such as the reasonable chastisement laws and treatment of young refugees. The UN has also been accused of promoting a globalised standard childhood at the expense of the multitude of diverse childhoods that exist (Woodhead, 1999). Ironically, although it has promoted a wide range of participation initiatives, the Convention itself was drawn up without children's involvement (Freeman, 2000).

The UNCRC is made up of fifty-four separate articles, each conveying a particular area of rights. These articles can be categorised into three general areas:

- Provision
- Protection
- Participation

Franklin (2002, p. 21) makes a helpful distinction between welfare rights and liberty rights. Welfare rights tend to prioritise the *provision* for, what are seen at particular times and places, children's welfare needs (education, healthcare and housing) and their *protection* (health and safety, child protection). Franklin notes that in some cases this involves restricting children's choices and behaviour and for this reason can be described as paternalistic. For example, a child's 'right' to education provision involves being compelled to follow a specific curriculum or to attend school between specified hours. Similarly, a child's right to protection from harm involves being denied the opportunity to watch certain television programmes after the 9 p.m. watershed.

Liberty rights, on the other hand, focus on children's rights to self-determination which could include, for example, the right to *participate* in decision making. This more radical idea might involve children in determining a curriculum, negotiating the school day or helping the government decide if and when a television watershed should be created. By introducing participation, alongside protection and provision, the UNCRC challenged adults to build interdependent and empowering relationships with children.

Franklin (2002) concludes that children's claims to protection and provision rights 'are rarely contested' whilst 'their claims for liberty rights invariably are'. Lee (2005) suggests that this results from a tendency to

view participation as creating complete separation between adults and children and therefore undermining adults' possession of children. Protection and provision both conjure up images of adults surrounding and possessing children who are unable to act for themselves. The wording of Article 12, Lee claims, is designed both to protect children from 'exploitative forms of possession' (that is, adults who do not act to ensure the child's best interests are met) and to promote 'good forms of adults' possessive concern' (that is, adults who find a balance between children's rights to participation and protection) (Lee, 2005, p. 18). He suggests that separation could be replaced by the more flexible concept of *separability* which represents both the connectedness that exists between children and adults and also the space for children to be valued in their own right with their own voices.

The following is an extract forming part of the conclusions from some direct research with children about their experiences of childcare provision. It provides an insight into how children's views can provide a basis for improving standards and, therefore, how participation can potentially overlap with provision:

Younger children (under 5) were more likely to complain about not having enough toys or having to sit on the carpet too long (a particular feature of pre-school centre-based settings where children sit on carpet squares or a rug for story or circle time) and not being able to go outside. Older children (8+) were more likely to complain of being bored due to insufficient choice of activities, no one of their age to play with, or activities that were not age appropriate. There is a feeling that they do not have enough to do because the club is structured for younger children (5–7). Some considered they were not given sufficient freedom and responsibility for their age.

(Mooney and Blackburn, 2003, pp. 20–21)

Thinking point 5.5 What practical changes could be made to service provision based upon these children's views?

Alderson (2000) argues that protection, provision and participation rights overlap. Rather than viewing participation as radical and different she argues that it is an integral part of good-quality provision and protection. Article 3.3 of the UNCRC focuses on the need to have standards against which services involved in provision and protection can be measured. These standards can include and be informed, she argues, by regular consultation with parents and children who use the services.

3.2 Service user involvement

Nothing about us, without us

(Popular slogan of the disability rights movement)

The development of children's participation has also been influenced by the ongoing interest and activity associated with service user involvement.

Service user involvement has developed in part through the historic grass roots activism of pressure groups, including physically disabled people, older people, people with learning difficulties, and people who use mental health services. A desire to see improvements to welfare services has become the focus of campaigning activity by many of these groups.

Children who come into contact with welfare services have likewise developed their own grass roots organisations. This has been evident in the campaigning carried out by local or regional Young Carers projects. Children from the Looked After care system have also been actively involved historically through the National Association of Young People in Care (NAYPIC) and more recently by A National Voice (ANV). These organisations also focus on promoting awareness and campaigning on specific issues, such as the use of restraint by social care workers.

Thinking point 5.6 In what ways might organisations run by and for young people differ from traditional children's rights organisations like the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) or Save the Children?

More recently, service user involvement has been stimulated by a top-down approach inspired by government social policy requiring welfare organisations to improve the quality of their provision by actively seeking the views of service users. Initiatives such as Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in the National Health Service (NHS) have resulted in large-scale organisational infrastructures and government funds designed to create a listening culture within health service design and delivery. The attempt by governments to promote the perception that welfare service users can choose between services has also reinforced the construction of service users as empowered consumers or customers.

This vision of involvement is difficult to sustain, particularly as some service users (Looked After children or people sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983) are not necessarily choosing to 'use' services. Furthermore, many other people lack the confidence, ability or resources to express a view or make choices between services. There is a suspicion in some quarters that these initiatives are little more than:

mechanisms by which state agencies give their decision-making processes legitimacy, in the process failing to address inherently problematic structural issues and excluding voices that are not deemed acceptable.

(Hodge, 2005, p. 164)

Involvement and participation in children's services has also been stimulated by government policy. However, this was pre-dated by a longer tradition of participatory and empowering activity particularly in the voluntary sector and amongst youth and community workers. This bank of good practice and knowledge has the potential to be shared across different areas of the children's workforce. Such innovation and diffusion of ideas is evident in the wide range of projects emerging from the locally based Children's Fund initiative. The following two examples illustrate this:

| Project | Details of activity | More information |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| South Gloucestershire Council Participation Project | A Children's Fund project using a project worker to support children's involvement in design delivery and evaluation of preventative services. | South Gloucestershire Council (2007) |
| St Helens 'Kidz Time' | Children in a refuge for homeless families are supported to have their say on what they would like to happen to themselves and their families. Supported by the St Helens Involvement & Participation Team (SHIP) and the Children's Fund. | Mittler and May-Chahal (2004) |

Unsurprisingly, service user involvement with children can be challenging to both children and adults. Many well-meaning policy makers and service providers fail in their attempts to seek children's views through lack of resources or by adopting inappropriate approaches and working methods. Sometimes, where successful user groups of children have been established, they may become overburdened with requests for consultation. Such groups can often be dismissed as unrepresentative. The views of certain groups of children (such as residents of children's homes) are easier to access than others (such as foster children who are dispersed in individual households across a wide geographical region). Furthermore children themselves often lack the communication skills suited to participation activities, and their voices can be viewed by some adults as confrontational, challenging and even rude.

Democratic schools and active citizenship

I think that a lot of schools would benefit from listening to pupil voice. That way pupils feel better by knowing that teachers will listen to them. I know that almost everybody in our school does. (Oliver, Year 6 student, Wheatcroft School)

I think it is important that the children and teachers have a good relationship – it makes working much easier. (Nicola, Year 6 student, Wheatcroft School)

(Peacock and Wheatcroft School, 2001, pp. 51–52)

Concern has been expressed at the reluctance of young people to understand, see the importance of, or get involved in the democratic political process. This is evidenced by the decline of under-25s as voters in general elections and as members of political parties (Hannam, 2001, p. 5). One response following the Crick Report (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998) was to introduce citizenship into the school curriculum in the hope that children would learn to understand and value democratic processes. This was felt to be particularly important after a government survey revealed that students possessed a ‘limited’ understanding of ‘fundamental democratic values and institutions’ (Kerr et al., 2003, p. iv).

The government’s concerns about the future of democracy have resulted in a further process influencing the development of participation. Evidence that ‘successful education for democracy needs to be at least in part experiential’ (Hannam, 2001, p. 5) has led to the view that children should be encouraged to participate in decision making bodies within schools. For some this is less about preparing children for the future than an opportunity to make schools more democratic.

In the main, most developments have occurred in secondary level education, including the introduction of citizenship education and guidance for school governing bodies and local education authorities (LEAs) on involving children in decision making (Department for Education and Skills, 2004, p. ii). In Wales, all schools beyond infant level are expected to have a school council. However, English primary schools also have to show how they are preparing children for citizenship. Despite being a lesser priority for social policy, a number of infant and primary schools have developed participatory activities:

| Project | Details of activity | More information |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| Peer Support at Stubbings Infant School | Year 2 children are trained to support other children who are lonely or in need of help. One of several strategies to prevent bullying. | Save the Children (2006c) |
| Children as Governors at Isambard Brunel Junior School | One pupil from years 4, 5 and 6 is recruited to attend Governors' Curriculum Committee meetings. These meetings are adapted to ensure children can participate in curriculum and budget decision making. | Save the Children (2006a) |
| Children as Inspectors at Cannon Lane First School | Selected children write reports based upon their observations of lessons and surveys of other pupils and parents. These are shared with governors, staff and other pupils and parents and are used for setting targets. | Save the Children (2006b) |
| School Court at Isambard Brunel Junior School | Local community police officers train selected pupils with mentorship skills, enabling them to support other children referred by teachers for being disruptive in class. | Save the Children (2006a) |

Children report great satisfaction and personal gains from participation in schools:

'I never used to like school, but now because I've got this important job I'm starting to mix in quite a bit now.'

(Peer mediator quoted in Save the Children, 2006a)

'I am a pupil at Wheatcroft Primary and I am chairman of our School Council. I think that being chairman gives me a responsibility and it makes me feel important and having that feeling makes me want to do better at things so I don't let myself down.'

(Year 6 child quoted in Peacock and Wheatcroft School, 2001, pp. 51–52)

According to some headteachers participation also:

impacts beneficially on self-esteem, motivation, sense of ownership and empowerment, and ... this in turn enhances attainment.

(Hannam, 2001, p. 7)

Studies have shown that despite the misconception that participation leads to an undermining of teachers' authority, it can in fact enhance discipline (Taylor and Johnson, 2002; Ekholm, 2004, in Osler and Starkey, 2005,

p. 142) by creating a situation in which teachers have to provide justification for their rules and actions. Hannam (2001) found that although participatory activities increased teachers' workload, this was outweighed by the great benefits produced for students. Evidence from Baginsky and Hannam's (1999) research for the NSPCC argued that the development of democratic structures in schools is one way of making schools safer places for children.

Despite the perceived benefits, concerns have been expressed that citizenship in schools is no more than a 'mantra being repeated' (Leighton, 2004, p. 179). A discrepancy has been noted between what children learn in citizenship classes and the undemocratic experience of school itself (Osler and Starkey, 2005) with students indicating that they can easily see through tokenism or manipulation:

'There is a pupil council but the headteacher comes to the meetings so you really can't say what you think, well you can, but he always says you're wrong.

We do get a say and they do listen, but not necessarily anything is done about it. It's as if they're trying to prove they're listening but they don't pay attention to what we think'

(Student quoted in MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001, p. 78)

If, as Willow and Neale (2004, p. 8) suggest, citizenship involves 'recognition, respect and participation', the fostering of respectful interdependent relationships between children and their teachers is a necessary precondition. This is particularly challenging because schools 'remain essentially authoritarian in their structures and organisation' (Osler and Starkey, 2005, p. 137).

It is not simply that schools do not practice the human rights and democratic values they preach. It is that many schools consistently contravene them.

(Alderson, 1999, p. 194)

Key points

- 1 The dominant theoretical framework has been challenged by new ways of understanding childhood which, in turn, have helped the development of participation.
- 2 Children's participation has been influenced by policies promoting service user involvement and citizenship.
- 3 Models of participatory activities from practice indicate potential gains for both adults and children.

4 Putting participation into practice

For anybody intending to undertake participatory activities with children, a large body of material has been generated offering advice on methods, techniques and approaches. This section considers the importance of relating techniques to contexts and provides an example of one widely used approach, referred to as circle time. It also highlights the importance of understanding participation as a total process requiring planning, reflection and evaluation.

Suitability for purpose

One study into quality within early childhood services (Mahony and Hayes, 2006) attempted to utilise 'multiple perspectives' which included children's views alongside those of parents and professionals. In order to access a wide range of children, the project team used a range of techniques including:

- structured conversation
- supported conversations
- the use of line drawings depicting facial expressions (happy, sad, sleepy and cross/angry)
- puppetry
- cameras
- arts and crafts.

These approaches were well-suited for children aged three to six but were not considered suitable for:

a number of children who were too young, developmentally immature or lacked understanding/comprehension of the use of the method.

(Mahony and Hayes, 2006, p. 12)

An alternative approach was therefore adopted for these children, involving observation of their language and behaviour.

This highlights the importance of having available approaches that are specifically suited to both task and children. Having a range of possible approaches also enables children themselves to have options in terms of which approach they would like to participate in.

Thinking point 5.7 How would you go about ensuring that a particular participation technique was suited to individuals within a group of children?

4.1 Practice example: circle time

Circle time is only one of many approaches to enable children's participation. However, within the context of this chapter, it is useful as an example to raise some of the practical issues that need to be considered when undertaking participatory work with groups of children. Circle time is used in early years settings and schools for helping children develop communication and self-confidence within groups. Variations of circle time are also applicable to a range of participatory contexts, including young carers groups and resident groups in children's homes.

'If there's a problem between friendship ... because our friend Sam ... we once had an argument, we called each other names, but we made up in Circle Time, sorted out our problems ... We shook hands in the middle of the circle ... it made me feel better about myself, it got, like, a lot off my shoulders.'

(Child quoted in Taylor, 2003, p. 3)

It is particularly valuable in helping younger children develop social awareness, which is a prerequisite for any kind of social participation or involvement. According to Tait:

social awareness comes about gradually through experiences of meeting and interacting with others, influencing one's ability to 'decentre'

(Tait, 2005, p. 24)

The ability to decentre means being able to take on board alternative viewpoints.

One study identified several ways for dealing with emotions and using games, including structured, activity-based, spontaneous and problem-centred models (Taylor, 2003). The circle format is a symbol of unity. 'It enables everyone in the group to have a clear physical view of everyone else and hopefully, in time, this will also become a clear psychological view' (Tait, 2005, p. 24). For some children, circle time is valued ahead of other forms of collective participation because it enables everyone to have a say:

Child: Before the school council voted for children in class – to be governors – people tell them what they wanted. It was always the same people, it wasn't all of us, just two people from each class,

sitting around the table talking 'blah blah blah'. Child: We decided we didn't like it. In circle time we all have a go, go around the circle.
(Kirby et al., 2003, p. 65)

Participation in circle time varies according to group size and children's existing relationships with their peers (Taylor, 2003). Mosley (in Tait, 2005, p. 25) suggests an optimum group size of six to eight children for three- to four-year-olds and twelve to fourteen children for five- to six-year-olds. Some children find it more difficult to participate than others.

We can suggest that children raise a hand to signal their wish to speak but need to make sure we don't always pick the same people. We can encourage the less confident children to join in by occasionally addressing questions directly to them, though we should never place them under any pressure to talk

(Tait, 2005, p. 25)

Circle time encourages adults to listen to and empathise with children's views. Children themselves value the opportunity to talk, learn about other people and have fun. They do, however, express concern that some children can undermine circle time by being disruptive, which highlights the need for ground rules and good facilitation skills (Taylor, 2003). Mosley (in Tait, 2005) highlights the dangers of constantly reprimanding children during circle time and promotes a more indirect and sensitive approach to dealing with disruptive behaviour. For example:



Circle time: an opportunity to encourage children's participation

Remember, talking stops us from hearing what others are saying is better than: Damien, it's very rude to talk when someone else is speaking!

(Mosley, in Tait, 2005, p. 25)

Taylor's (2003) study highlighted a lack of formal training amongst teachers in how to facilitate circle time. The adult leading the circle time is a crucial role model for the children (Tait, 2005, p. 24) and requires appropriate facilitation skills in order to attend to issues of confidentiality and disclosure. The type of support most wanted was when adults 'let you do what you want and only helped you in the things you want to be helped in' (one child's view of adult facilitation, in Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 215).

Kirby and Gibbs (2006, p. 215) suggest that facilitation of participatory activities (including circle time) needs to be adapted to the particular context. A skilled participatory facilitator is able to give the children 'maximum control' while maintaining 'sufficient adult input'. In some cases it involves stepping in to ensure effective group functioning and equal opportunities to participate:

Child: I'm presenting

Professional: No, you did it last week.

Child: I'm the best at presenting, I've got a loud voice.

Professional: You did very well last week, but how about giving others a chance to develop the skills as well?

(Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p. 218)

To illustrate the range of facilitator roles in participation work, Kirby and Gibbs (2006) developed the model opposite. It identifies eight possible roles that adults could move between, depending on the specific context.

Thinking point 5.8 In what ways does this model relate to Hart's Ladder of Participation or Treseder's Degrees of Involvement?


Most participatory facilitators, including those leading circle time, consider it important to set ground rules that promote positive communication. These can include:

Listen when someone else is speaking in the group.

Wait one's turn to speak or act (not when others are speaking or doing things).

Look at what is going on.

(Tait, 2005, p. 24)

| | | | |
|---|---------------|------------|---|
|  | Non-directive | Abstainer | Leave children alone to do activities, discuss and develop ideas and materials without adult intervention. |
| | | Observer | Reflect and feed back on what is happening in the group. |
| | | Enabler | Ask questions to find out what children want to do. Encourage inclusion. Provide resources to take action. |
| | | Activator | Challenge ideas and encourage children to develop their ideas further. For example, may play devil's advocate. |
| | | Adviser | Suggest ways in which events can move forward. |
| | | Informer | Tell children what is happening. Provide further information. May include adults' own views. |
| | | Instructor | Tell children what to do and how to do it. For example, ensure structure, discipline and safety. |
| | Directive | Doer | Take action on behalf of children. |

Facilitation roles within participatory projects, adapted from Klein (2001) by Kirby and Gibbs (2006)

Miller (2003) suggests two further rules:

- No one will be ridiculed or put down.
- Everyone has a right to 'pass'.

Tait (2005, p. 24) suggests that these can be presented and reinforced through the use of activities such 'Follow Me':

Practice box 5.3

Follow Me: A 'looking and turntaking' game

The adult holds a 'wand' and raises and lowers it at varying speeds. The children must watch closely and follow the movements of the wand, responding with high and low movements. Children can also take turns controlling the wand.

Once ground rules have been established and children have developed more confidence, Tait suggests that new themes can be introduced into circle time:

Practice box 5.4

The Special Person Box is designed to build self-esteem. Use a small, attractive box with a mirror fitted into its base. Keep the lid closed as you introduce the box to the children, explaining that you are going to pass it around the circle and that each child in turn is to look inside where they will see someone who is very special. No-one is to speak as the box is passed around!

Show Me How You Feel is an activity in which children choose badges depicting a facial expression representing the way they are feeling. It helps children to identify and reflect upon different emotions – their own and others – by focussing on body language. We can begin by asking the children to make a happy face, sad face, angry face. (Don't explore too many feelings at once!) We can ask them to say what might make them feel happy, sad and so on. It is important that the adult accepts what each child says in a non-judgemental and calm way. We can then introduce badges depicting certain expressions and ask the children to identify the emotion represented on each badge. Explain that you will leave the badges in a certain place in the classroom and that any child may choose a badge to wear, to let others know how s/he is feeling. Eventually the use of pictures will become redundant as children become more able to recognise and verbalise their feelings. The adult can create opportunities for discussion at circle time by saying 'Would anyone like to talk about how they feel today?'

(Tait, 2005, p. 26)

Thinking point 5.9 How might you feel as an adult being asked to take part in a 'show me how you feel' activity? Do you think that children might have similar feelings?

4.2 Evaluating participation

At the start of the chapter we listed a number of reasons why participation is considered a good idea. It is evident that policy makers and practitioners are convinced by many of these arguments. More opportunities appear to be open for children's participation and involvement in public decision making. There is also an evolving body of good practice literature and guidance for people working with children.

In order to develop these opportunities further, and expand the practice literature, it is necessary to evaluate the scope, quality and impact of participation (Lansdown, 2004). Hart's model of participation can be a useful measure of scope, while quality can be measured with reference to standards such as *Hear by Right* (Badham and Wade, 2005).

Evidence can be easily found demonstrating the beneficial impact of participatory work on children's personal and social development including 'confidence, self-belief, knowledge, understanding and changed attitudes, skills and education attainment' (Kirby and Bryson, 2002, p. 6). Participation and involvement can also be fun for children and an opportunity to make new friends.

Children's active involvement has impacted on the growth in service-user-led training for professionals (Children's Rights Officers and Advocates, 2000) and the mainstreaming of service user involvement, particularly in social care (*Hear By Right*, Badham and Wade, 2005). Children's collective voices conveyed through research (for example, the Children's Research Centre) and media (for example, *Headliners*) have helped challenge traditional views of childhood and promoted children instead as competent social agents.

Despite these positive results, Wyness (2006) alerts us to the danger of 'sentimentalising' children's voices as an end in itself rather than as a means to change policy. Of particular concern is the scarcity of evidence about the impact of children's involvement on service development (Cavet and Sloper, 2004). The continued involvement of children can only be achieved, and sceptics (both children and adults) won over, if participation is shown to result in improvements to children's quality of life.

If participation becomes an end in itself, there is an inherent danger that people will not be open and honest about what does and does not work. Ackermann et al. (2003) identify that some organisations are under pressure from funding bodies and policy makers to demonstrate successful participation.

Therefore, many of the most valuable learning experiences, which came out of apparent 'failure' may not be shared openly for the benefit of all

(Ackermann et al., 2003, p. 17)

Effective participatory practice will only be developed through honest and open evaluation linked to critical reflection and review. Also, because participation is a process rather than a one-off event (Crowley, 2004) it is important that these evaluations look at changes over time (Ackermann et al., 2003).

More research is needed to understand why some children participate more than others. This may be because some children have no interest in becoming involved, or because traditional participation approaches do not reach some children. It is noticeable that very few studies have sought the views of children who do not participate (Kirby and Bryson, 2002).

Adults working with children may need help in recognising that participation is not an off-the-shelf technical approach. Neither is it built upon a universal fully-formed area of practice knowledge. Even experienced participatory workers learn a great deal through evaluating their methods and being willing to share their experiences with others. Ackermann et al. (2003) suggest that because the aims of participatory projects are often context-specific, ‘extreme caution should be exercised in the promotion of universal indicators for the impact of participatory projects’ (Ackermann et al., 2003, p. 11).

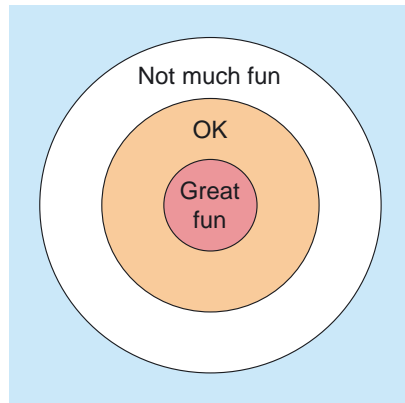
One way around this is to build evaluation into participatory projects from the start and involve children themselves in the evaluation process. A number of ethical principles can guide evaluation of participation with children:

- *participant centred*: based on children’s own meanings and understandings
- *informed consent*: children should be fully aware of the purpose and process of evaluation
- *confidentiality*: children should know and understand the boundaries of confidentiality
- *risks* to children by being involved should be anticipated and averted
- *appropriate organisation and working space*: to ensure an environment in which children feel comfortable and safe enough to be creative and honest
- *transparency*: staff should be open and honest about the evaluation purpose process and with whom information will be shared
- *feedback*: children are entitled to have the findings fed back to them in an appropriate format and be informed about any outcomes resulting from their involvement.

The following example is adapted from Shephard and Treseder, who provide a number of evaluative activities that can involve children.

Practice box 5.5

Evaluation targets



Evaluation targets
(Shephard and
Treseder, 2002, p. 90)

Draw a target (three or four concentric circles) on a piece of flipchart paper. Write the evaluation question at the top. If you have several questions you can draw several targets.

For example: Did you feel listened to? Was today fun?

Give everyone sticky dots and ask them to stick one onto each target. You might have to explain with examples such as 'If today was fun and you have enjoyed yourself place your dot near to the middle. If it was okay, but not brilliant, put your dot further out. If you'd rather have gone to the dentist, then put your dot on the outside edge.'

This kind of activity is fun and less intimidating than a questionnaire or verbal interview. It could also be adapted by providing space for children to write down specific comments and ideas for improvement.

Thinking point 5.10 How might this activity be adapted for children with visual or cognitive impairments?

Key points

- 1 Participation methods should be carefully chosen to reflect both context and purpose and not be forced upon unwilling participants.
- 2 Different participatory methods require adults with appropriate facilitation skills.
- 3 Both the processes and outcomes of participation require evaluation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the potential for children's participation in collective decision making. It is evident that adult-child relations, particularly within the provision of services, can be enhanced when children are valued and involved. Services themselves are more likely to meet the needs of children if they are designed with their views in mind. Although the historic attitudes about children and childhood still linger, it is possible to find examples of spaces where children are provided with opportunities to show their true capacity and competence. It is important that these are evaluated and the findings shared so that others can build effective participatory relationships.

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