CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN VOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE in projects and decisions

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Shift in the approach to childhood and adolescence

• From the developmental model: biologically immature, irrational;

• new sociology of childhood: agents and competent in actively participating and making sense of the world
The Shift in the construct of childhood and youth

Children observe with different eyes, ask different questions – they sometimes ask questions that adults do not even think of.

Children have different concerns and immediate access to a peer culture where adults are outsiders.

• Shift away from the idea of a child as ‘becoming’ an adult to the ‘being child’ conceptualised as an ‘active social agent’
Children’s participation

- New research on children’s participatory rights may give the impression that ‘listening’ is a recent phenomenon.

- There is a risk of listening practices remaining hollow unless they take account of and are conceptualised within philosophical and political traditions.
The Concept of Participation

According to Kirby and Woodhead (2007), participation is a multifaceted concept:

“...participation is about children’s activity and agency being recognised; about children being treated with dignity and respect; about them being entitled to express their feelings, beliefs and ideas; about being listened to and about their voices being heard”
The Concept of Participation

- Full and meaningful participation starts with two assumptions:
  I. That children are not only developing competence for the future, but are also actors in the world today; and
  II. That they have things to teach us both about their own lives and about society

- This means recognising that children are important people with skills and capacities to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems (Lansdown, 2003).
KINDS and LEVELS of PARTICIPATION

• Many different initiatives can be embraced under the broad heading of ‘children’s participation’.

• Initiatives vary in their scale and their goals, in the role of adults and in the extent to which they promote children’s power and influence;
Hart’s Models of Participation

The ‘LADDER OF PARTICIPATION’ model using the metaphor of a ladder as a conceptual framework for thinking about all these different kinds of participation” (Lansdown, cited in Kirby and Woodhead, 2007)
Children have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions.

Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in taking the decisions.

The project is designed and run by adults but children are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

Adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project, and know who decided they should be involved and why. Adults respect their views.

Children are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.

Children take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing or wearing T-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issues.

Children do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, OR children are asked what they think, adults use some of their ideas but do not tell them what influence they have had on the final decision.
The nature of participation

- **Consultative** – “adults initiate processes to obtain information from children through which they can improve legislation, policies or services/ local amenities” (Lansdown, 2001);

- **Participative** – “the aim is to create opportunities for children to understand and apply democratic principles or involve children in the development of services and policies that impact on them” (Lansdown, 2001)

- Some projects might fall into both categories i.e. the boundaries are not clear cut – which is fine, but say so.
Decision making structures need to be addressed. It is important for children to understand what is possible and that they understand from the very beginning what decisions can be made by them;

Adults might have overall responsibility for overseeing the project but things like ground rules need to be established and negotiated with children from the outset.
Conclusion

• Different countries and regions are at different levels of listening and attending to children’s voices (Kanyal and Cooper, 2010).

• The application of the universal convention on the rights of the child is interpreted differently by different nations/communities, and it often intersects with the cultural, interpersonal and personal characteristics of both adults and children.

• More research, at a comparative level, is needed to truly explore the extent to which children’s rights are being applied. This application needs to be analysed sensitively, paying attention to the social and cultural contexts of the communities involved.