Children and young people’s participation in collective decision-making: challenges and possibilities

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You should be able to say what you think in lots of different ways

What is participation?

This term has evolved and is now widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2009: para 2)
How do we ‘do’ participation?
Familiar Challenges

1. Tokenism and lack of impact
2. Lack of feedback
3. Who is included or excluded:
   over-consulted; under-consulted; only on certain topics; presumed to be ‘representative’
4. Consultation not dialogue
5. Adult processes and structures exclude
6. Lack of sustainability

Thinking of your own work on children and young people’s participation .. Do any of these apply?
"If those kids would shut up, we'd listen to them!"
Tendencies in UK

1. Bureaucratic and legalistic
2. Consumerist
3. Non-political
4. Train up to be good citizens
.. the proper objective of participation is to ensure ‘transformation’ of existing development practice and, more radically, the social relations, institutional practices and capacity gaps which cause social exclusion. (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 13)
Transformative participation?

1. Pedagogical – listening in early years settings
2. Policy networks and governance – example of Youth Commission on Alcohol
   http://www.youngscot.net/what-we-do/project-directory/youth-commission-on-alcohol.aspx
3. Knowledge exchange, contribution analysis and ideas from complexity theory – example of Children’s Parliament
   http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/
Pedagogical – listening in early years settings

• a body of pedagogical thought and practice, permeated by cultural values, making the early childhood centres into social and political spaces … to take the image of the rich child, an active subject with rights and extraordinary potential and born with a hundred languages. (Rinaldi 2005:17)

• If we believe that children possess their own theories, interpretations, and questions, and are protagonists in the knowledge-building processes, then the most important verbs in educational practice are no longer ‘to talk’, ‘to explain’ or ‘to transmit’ … but ‘to listen’. (Rinaldi 2006: 125-6)
... listening is not only a technique and a didactic methodology, but a way of thinking and seeing ourselves in relationship with others and the world. Listening is an element that connects and that is part of human biology and is in the concept of life itself ... [It] is a right or better it is part of the essence of being human. (Rinaldi 2005: 6)
Paisley Pre-Five Centre
http://paisleycc.renfrewshirenurseries.org.uk/a.html
See Gordon-Smith 2011
Looking across the examples

1. All seek deep engagement of everyone involved
2. Change relationships from traditional hierarchical ones - spaces of co-creation
3. Revised and new spaces – relational and physical
4. Going beyond the written word
5. Change culture of organisations


UN Committee Rights of the Child (2009) *General Comment No. 12* http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.doc
If you want more information …


The Leverhulme Trust International Academic Network

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/researchprojects/rp_theorising.html


**Children and Young People's Participation: From fashion accessory to part of the fabric (2011-12)**

ESRC Follow on Fund

Briefing Paper 1

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/reports/Participation%20briefing.pdf
Related publications


The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships
http://www.crfr.ac.uk/index.html

MSc in Childhood Studies
http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/pgtcs