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Children and young people's participation in the welfare sector: a literature review: a scaffold for participation in agency work

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Children and Young People's Participation in the Welfare Sector: A Literature Review

(A scaffold for participation in agency work)

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Contents

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3**
- INTRODUCTION..... 3
- SECTION ONE 4
- SECTION TWO..... 6
- SECTION THREE..... 9
- SECTION FOUR 10
- INTRODUCTION 12**
- SECTION ONE 13**
- HISTORY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S 'VOICE' AND PARTICIPATION 13
 - Summary*..... 14
- MOVEMENTS INFLUENCING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION 15
 - Developmental Theory*..... 15
 - The Rights Movement*..... 16
 - The Consumer Movement* 18
 - A 'new sociology' of childhood*..... 18
- SECTION TWO 20**
- DO THEORY, POLICIES AND REALITY EQUATE? 20
 - Developments in participation*..... 20
- SECTION THREE 27**
- SOME MODELS OF PARTICIPATION 27
 - The Ladder of Participation*..... 27
 - The Bridge of Participation* 29
 - The Participation Orb Web* 31
 - A model of participation specifically for child protection* 32
 - A Collaborative Model of participation* 33
- SECTION FOUR 35**
- WHAT SUPPORTS EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION? 35
 - How children and young people feel*..... 35
 - Changes in adult attitudes* 35
 - Collaborative and equal relationships*..... 35
 - Knowledge* 36
 - Communication* 36
 - Choice* 37
 - Safety*..... 37
 - Resourcing*..... 37
- CONCLUSION 38**
- APPENDIX 39**
- MEANINGS AND PARAMETERS 39
- REFERENCES 41**

Executive Summary

Introduction

The work of *UnitingCare Burnside* (Burnside) is driven by its purpose to provide innovative and quality programs and advocacy to break the cycle of disadvantage that affects vulnerable children, young people and their families in New South Wales. The following literature review on children and young people's participation in the welfare sector is a response to the need to achieve this purpose. The focus of this literature review is to draw out common themes and issues, throughout the Western world, that relate to children and young people's participation in the welfare sector. This is relevant to the purpose of Burnside as well as to the practice priority area relating to participation. The literature reviewed represents a broad sweep of the literature available on the topic at the time of writing and is by no means exhaustive.

The first section of the literature review explores some of the history of children and young people's participation as well as social movements that have been of influence. The second section explores current issues, as raised in the literature reviewed, while the third section outlines five models for participation along with factors that support effective participation.

Section One

History of children and young people's 'voice' and participation

The first part of Section One is a concise historical overview of what is noted in the literature reviewed detailing the ways in which children and young people have participated in decision making and the ways in which their voices have been heard throughout Western society.

The literature examined suggests that the ways in which children and young people were regarded during various eras in pre-modern times are similar to ways in which they have been viewed throughout most of the modern era. It is highlighted that children and young people have been consistently ignored, conceptualised as passive and weak, blamed for all manner of social problems and marginalised (Head 1998; Ochilree & Edgar 1981). It also appears that although some moves to engage children and young people in participative ways are visible within the last 10 -15 years, it would be misleading to imply that a genuine movement to engage children and young people, and to take their views seriously, is any older than 3-5 years. The overall consensus of the literature analysed is that there is still much to be achieved in terms of participation.

Movements influencing children and young people's participation

The second part of Section One identifies and summarises key factors within the four movements that have been instrumental to the development of children and young people's participation in the welfare sector. These four movements are: developmental theory within psychology and sociology; the Rights movement; the consumer movement and the 'new' sociology of childhood.

Developmental theory

Foundational to developmental theories, and most applicable to children and young people, is that idea that greater value is attributed to an individual as she or he moves along the developmental and social lifespan towards the 'pinnacle' that is adulthood (Butler & Williamson 1996). From this perspective, childhood is viewed as a state of unfinished development, and children and young people are seen as being merely on the path to becoming adults, or as incomplete adults (Hill 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; Mason 1999). This implies that they are not valuable in their own right. In effect this framework argues that children and young people have not reached a social status where they deserve a 'voice' or the chance to participate in decision making about their lives.

The Rights Movement

The Rights Movement has been very influential to the debate about participation. It arose out of an era towards the end of the nineteenth century when children and young people were increasingly recognised as being in need of protection. In response to an extended period of community pressure by adults, children's rights and welfare became legal and political considerations, and state policies began to change, albeit extremely slowly (Sidoti 2000).

Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) in 1989, there has been growing support for children and young people's rights, including their right to be heard and to participate in and influence society (Hart 1992; Head 1998; Kjørholt 2002). The rights afforded to children and young people by CROC include the right to actively participate in community life, to be central players in decisions about their own welfare, to express their opinions freely, and to be listened to and taken seriously (Hart 1992; Rayner 1992; Taylor &

Henaghan 1997; Head 1998; Newell & Robinson 2000; Sidoti 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Nicholson 2001; Robinson 2001).

There are two broad strands coming out of the Rights movement. One is usually adult-directed and works towards changing legislation to improve conditions for children and young people. One of the manifestations of this movement has been the inclusion in legislation, particularly child protection legislation, of the imperative to seek and value children and young people's participation and decision making in relation to child protection matters (Rayner 1992; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

The child-directed strand of the Rights movement, like other civil rights movements throughout history, advocates for the elimination of oppression and exploitation experienced by minority groups throughout the world, in this instance children and young people (Mason & Urquhart 2001). Unlike other civil rights movements, this one is controlled and directed by children and young people.

The Consumer Movement

The Consumer Movement has also contributed to changing the manner in which children and young people are viewed and treated, albeit not to the same extent as the other movements mentioned (Corsaro 1997; O'Brien 1997; Mason & Urquhart 2001). In terms of children and young people in the social and welfare context, the early literature on participation in out-of-home care adopted consumer and market notions (see O'Brien 1997), arguing that since children and young people are recipients of services, it would be respectful, logical and beneficial to engage them when evaluating and reforming those services.

The 'new' sociology of childhood

An emerging branch of sociology, known as the 'new' sociology of childhood, or 'new' childhood studies has been very influential in recent debate. This movement challenges 'commonsense' views and dominant theoretical perspectives about childhood that are taken to be truth, arguing that these are social constructs (Ochilree & Edgar 1981; Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Long 1999; Kjørholt 2002). The aim is to expose what it considers to be a mistaken and offensive conceptualisation of childhood, children and young people (Oakley 1994; Corsaro 1997; Long 1999; Kjørholt 2002). The underlying assumption is that children and young people are actively creating their childhoods and contributing to a 'shifting' within all of social life (Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Kane 2000). This perspective claims to take the views of children and young people seriously, consciously pushing to engage children and young people as competent participants (Hill 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Long 1999; O'Kane 2000; Kjørholt 2002).

Section Two

Do theory, policies and reality equate?

This section explores what is noted in the reviewed literature about children and young people's participation from a political, legislative and social policy perspective. It also explores how these compare to the perspectives of children, young people, social researchers and commentators. Attention has mostly been paid to legislation and government policy affecting workers in NSW.

Developments in participation

Political developments

Some of the literature reviewed specifies how governments have taken an interest in including children and young people in matters relating to their own welfare and wellbeing. Throughout the 1990's a number of significant research reports were completed in NSW. Additionally, a number of agencies designed to monitor the circumstances of children and young people, to and advocate on their behalf, were established in NSW. The NSW Child Protection Council commissioned the '*Having a Say*' Report (Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998), Cashmore & Paxman (1996) completed the '*Wards Leaving Care – A longitudinal study*' project, and the Community Services Commission (2000) completed the '*Voices of Children and Young People in Foster Care*' report.

On the political front, the NSW government youth policy, 'Focus on Young People', has principles of participation and contains statements to guide practice, so as to make sure that participation occurs (NSW Cabinet Office 1998). The NSW government also created a Commission for Children and Young People in 1999, created a position of Youth Liaison Officer at the NSW Ombudsman's Office, and continued the NSW Youth Advisory Council. An additional NSW Government body, called the Office of the Children's Guardian, was established in 2001 to monitor the situations of children and young people in out-of-home-care and ensure that their rights are being upheld (NSW Office of the Children's Guardian 2002).

Legislative developments

Discussion within the literature sample has also focused on legislative developments related to children and young people's participation. Some literature suggests that there has been increasing awareness in legislative reform and development to acknowledge children and young people's rights, in particular, their right to participate in decision making that relates to them (Rayner 1992; Nyland 1999). Changes to improve children and young people's participation has occurred in the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW), the Family Law Reform Act 1997 (Cth) as well as the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 (NSW), and the Young Offenders Act 1997 (NSW).

The NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 outlines a number of points to guide how practitioners are to improve conditions to make sure that participation occurs, although these are not legally enforceable. Since the Children's Guardian, Children's Court, Child Death Review Team and out-of-home care arrangements also fall under the jurisdiction of this Act, the principle of participation relates to these also.

What children and young people say about developments in participation

The literature outlining the views of children and young people on participation in an “unadulterated” way is small in comparison to the volume of literature on adult perspectives of children and young people's views on participation. Despite differences of opinion on the topic of participation, the overall sense within the literature is that children and young people want to be allowed to participate and want their opinions to be valued and respected, implying that this is largely not the case presently. (Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Bunce 2002). Additionally, the literature notes that children and young people's feelings range from cynicism and lack of faith in the process and adult concern for their opinion, to feelings of appreciating the process and adult efforts to listen and try to take them seriously (CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Bunce 2002; Roxon 2002).

What the literature says about developments in participation

A substantial selection of the literature dealing with children and young people's participation in the welfare context, within Australia and NSW, indicates that efforts to engage children and young people in various ways in society is increasing, as is recognition of children's rights (Nyland 1999; Singleton 2000). Unfortunately there is also much evidence to suggest that children and young people's participation is ‘often exploitative or frivolous’ (Hart 1992: 4) and that effective participation is constrained by structural issues (Taylor & Henaghan 1997).

Six significant themes have emerged within the literature reviewed. These can be split into two sections. The first relates to changes in the actions and opinions of adults generally along with developments in hearing, listening to and acting upon the voices of children and young people. The second section relates to how changes have manifested in practice. These relate to the performance of the government, legislative reform, progression in research, and changes in welfare practice, particularly child protection and out-of-home care. There is a range of opinions in the literature on the degree to which participative environments are developing.

1. Changes in the actions and opinions of adults generally

The literature suggests that although there have been some change in adult conceptions of children and young people there is still generally a negative, controlling and paternalistic view taken of them (Rayner 1991; Moore 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

2. Developments in hearing, listening to and acting upon the voices of children and young people

There is indication in the literature that there has been an increase in recent times of the appearance of children and young people's opinions being sought on issues in the social welfare context. Despite this, the bulk of the literature agrees that children and young people are still generally devoid of genuine opportunities to be engaged in meaningful participation.

3. Performance of the government

Various programs and initiatives have been undertaken by governments in Australia. The approaches have been uncoordinated and do not appear to have a strong commitment to participation underlying them.

4. Legislative reform

Writers commenting on the legal arena generally note that although some moves have been made in legislation throughout the world to engage children and young people, and to recognise their right to participate in decision making in matters regarding themselves, there is still a long way to go in practice (Rayner 1992; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; CREATE 2000; Nicholson 2002).

Some argue that the underlying factor constraining children and young people's participation in Australia is the ongoing refusal by adults, most prominently within the Commonwealth government and judicial system, to take children's rights seriously (Rayner 1991; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Long 1999; Mason 1999; Nicholson 2002).

5. Progression in research

There is a great deal of social research that engages children and young people. Despite this, of the writers from a research perspective on children and young people's participation argue that adults continue to control the research agenda, processes and ways in which the outcomes of the research is expressed (Hill 1997; Roberts 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

6. Changes in welfare practice, particularly child protection and out-of-home-care

Most of the literature on the participation of children and young people in the welfare sector refers to decision making in relation to out-of-home care matters, and some to child protection. The argument generally follows that although there are claims that participation is a principle factor it is not actually performed well. It is argued that children and young people, through no fault of their own, are usually either excluded from the decision making process or do not understand it (Butler & Williamson 1996; Healy & Walsh 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Brien 1997; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Wilkinson 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

Conclusion

Although there has been a lot of improvement in the extent to which children and young people are able, and encouraged, to participate in various ways throughout society, there is still much to be done. Generally it is felt that changes in systems, structures and cultures have to precede changes in practice. Although this is a huge task there is good evidence to indicate that it is both possible and occurring.

Section Three

Some models of participation

This section summarises the five models of participation that have been described throughout the literature reviewed. These models were chosen to be reviewed because they have been specifically designed to be used in relation to children and young people. Another factor considered in choosing them was the extent to which they vary from each other. This was in order to provide a useful overall picture of the models available, elements of which might be useful for practitioners deciding how to maximise children and young people's participation.

The models described in the review are:

1. the 'ladder' model formulated by Hart (1992)
2. John's (1996) model in the form of a bridge
3. Corsaro's (1997) model constructed in the shape of a spider web
4. a model specifically designed for participation in the child protection sector Butler & Williamson (1996), and
5. a collaborative model for participation Mason & Urquhart (2001).

Section Four

What supports effective participation?

Ideas on what enables and maximises participation were noted throughout the selection of literature. Many of the reviewed authors argue that there are certain factors and issues, outlined below, that must be addressed in order for participation to be real.

How children and young people feel

According to some of the literature reviewed, participative practice must be such that children and young people feel that they are respected, valued, taken seriously (Rayner 1991; Lindsay 1995; Healy & Walsh 1997), and that they are listened to in a genuine way (Mason 1999; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Bunce 2002).

Changes in adult attitudes

Many of the authors reviewed argue that in order for participation to occur there needs to be a change in adult attitudes to be such that the culture of children and young people is considered to be valuable, having as much to contribute to social life as adult culture (Corsaro 1997; Healy & Walsh 1997; Nyland 1999; Moore 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Sidoti 2000). It was also argued that adults seeking to engage children and young people in participation must have an attitude of respect for the participants, valuing them and recognising each person's uniqueness, competence and knowledge about their world (Taylor & Henaghan 1997; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

Collaborative and equal relationships

Many of the commentators in the selection argue that involvement must occur on an equal footing, meaning that children and young people must be participating as equal stakeholders with adults where power is shared and hierarchies levelled (O'Brien 1997; Moore 2000; Singleton 2000; Nicholson 2001). There is a strong feeling throughout the literature reviewed that the practice framework must be one of collaboration (Davie & Galloway 1996, Corsaro 1997; Healy & Walsh 1997; O'Brien 1997; Long 1999; CREATE 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

Knowledge

One of the most important factors is a high level of access to knowledge. It is argued that children and young people must be prepared for their role and informed about the purpose, role and intentions of organisations and adult facilitators (Hart 1992; CSC 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). They must also be informed about issues related to history, structures, prior decisions and anything else that might impact on the participative process (Lindsay 1995; Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). It is also argued that they must be included in decision making, informed of the outcomes of the decisions and project as a whole, and given the choice to participate in an ongoing manner throughout the discussion, decision making and implementation process (O'Brien 1997; Healy 1998; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Henderson 2000; Moore 2000; Singleton 2000). Some also argue that there needs to be ongoing review and examination of models of participation and practice to ensure that policies and politics, research, social commentary, theory and practice about participation is changing as knowledge becomes available (Healy 1998; Henderson 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

Communication

It is argued throughout the reviewed literature that there must be realisation that children and young people communicate differently to each other, and to adults, and that although this often results in difficulties between people, it need not be so (Hill 1997; O'Kane 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Nicholson 2001; Robinson 2001). According to the literature reviewed, adults should be prepared to consider context, attentively observe, actively listen to and be genuinely interested in children and young people when they are attempting to involve them in participation (Hart 1992; Nyland 1999; Henderson 2000; Moore 2000; Robinson 2001).

Choice

The other significant issue related to engaging children and young people in participative practice is about choice. In much of the literature examined, the argument presented is that in order for participation to be maximised, there needs to be increased and flexible choice for children and young people to decide themselves on how and when they participate (Hart 1992; Crowley 1996; O'Brien 1997; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Moore 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Nicholson 2001).

Safety

Some of the literature reviewed argues that an important factor to ensure maximum participation for children and young people relates to the participative environment and the process feeling safe and comfortable (CSC 2000; Robinson 2001). This includes relevant, open and safe access to feedback, communication and decision making structures, opportunities and processes (CSC 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Singleton 2000).

Resourcing

Some literature maintains that an important factor in maximising participation relates to the provision of a realistic level of resources, supplied on the basis of various factors. These factors include: appropriateness and relevancy; extent to which participants will have educational opportunities; time and space to organise, promote and maintain children and young people's participation (Moore 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Singleton 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Nicholson 2001), and the extent to which more than just a few representatives can be involved (O'Brien 1997).

Conclusion

It seems obvious that there are many and varied issues and factors to be considered when attempting to create structures and processes where participation of children and young people is to be maximised. These issues are not merely related to practicalities such as resourcing and participatory environments. They extend far deeper - into the very attitudes that adults have about and towards children and young people. It seems clear that fundamental to increased participation for children and young people is changes in hierarchical systems of power, increased levels of respect for children and young people and greater acknowledgment of the value that children and young people bring to human society and culture.

Introduction

The work of *UnitingCare Burnside* (Burnside) is driven by its purpose to provide innovative and quality programs and advocacy to break the cycle of disadvantage that affects vulnerable children, young people and their families in New South Wales. The following literature review on children and young people's participation in the welfare sector is a response to the need to achieve this purpose. The focus of this literature review is to draw out common themes and issues, throughout the Western world, that relate to children and young people's participation in the welfare sector. This is relevant to the purpose of Burnside as well as to the practice priority area relating to participation. The literature reviewed represents a broad sweep of the available literature on the topic at the time of writing and is by no means exhaustive.

Section One

History of children and young people's 'voice' and participation

Following is a concise historical overview of what is noted in the reviewed literature about ways in which children and young people's voices have been heard. This includes ways in which children and young people have been given scope to participate in Western society. Thomas (2000) notes that historians have sometimes not been completely balanced in their examination of history, particularly in relation to ways in which they have perceived children and young people's circumstances. He argues that there is evidence to suggest that the ways in which children and young people were regarded during pre-modern times are in many ways similar to ways in which they are viewed now. In other words, sometimes children and young people were (and are) valued and engaged in decision making and at other times, they are not.

Where some believe that hearing a child's voice begins at birth (Hart 1992), the literature examined suggests that the reality for children throughout history has been mixed (Thomas 2000). It must also be noted that there is a sparsity of historical accounts of childhood and that when they do occur they are overwhelmingly from adult perspectives (Davie & Galloway 1996; Thomas 2000). Although there is recent suggestion that participation is beginning to be seen as important (Mason & Steadman 1997; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001, Mason & Urquhart 2001), the overall consensus of the literature analysed is that there is still much to be achieved.

According to Ochiltree & Edgar (1981), the Middle Ages was a time when children were mainly ignored until they could 'contribute' (that is, work) in a 'worthwhile' way. Participation was synonymous with the ability to learn how to contribute. Often this would mean being 'apprenticed' out of the family, or sent to workhouses or boarding houses without their consent. An example of the extent to which children were 'voiceless' was the practice that, even sometimes up until the late eighteenth century, names of babies and infants who died were not written on headstones (Stone 1979, cited in Ochiltree & Edgar 1981).

Generally, but not in all cases, treatment of children during the sixteenth century is summed up in the following description given by John Wesley's mother in describing how children should be reared. This was, (as cited in, Ochiltree & Edgar 1981:11) that children "when turned a year old, and some before ... were taught to fear the rod and cry softly, by which means they escaped the abundance of correction they might otherwise have had, and that most odious noise of crying of children was rarely heard in the house". This kind of physical suppression of children and young people's voices extended throughout the seventeenth century.

During the eighteenth century, and up until only recently, children throughout Western society were seen as the property of their parents, or more specifically their fathers, in the eyes of the Law (Davie & Galloway 1996; Head 1998; Sidoti 2000). British children and young people were, like adults, transported to the colonies. Descriptions of the experiences of Australian children during the convict era were characterised by them being treated as adults in terms of rations, work expected and punishment administered (Ochiltree & Edgar 1981).

In places such as Britain and America the end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of social movements and legislation to protect children from exploitation and abuse (Ochiltree & Edgar 1981; Davie & Galloway 1996). Agencies committed to protecting children who were living in poverty or being exploited in the workforce began to be formed. Where Britain had agencies such as the Children's Employment Commission and the Infant Life Protection Society (Ochiltree & Edgar 1981), America had agencies like the National Child Labor Committee and

US Children Bureau. Around this time such countries began to reform their legislation to protect children. Examples of British legislation, inherited in theory by Australia, include the Factory Act 1833, to protect children from exploitation in the workplace, the Infant Life Protection Act 1872, after lobbying by the Infant Life Protection Society, and an Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to, and Better Protection of Children, (Children's Charter) in 1889, 75 years after a similar Act preventing cruelty to animals (Ochiltree & Edgar 1981; Davie & Galloway 1996).

According to Ochiltree & Edgar (1981) the twentieth century is known as the century of the child. The general feeling throughout the literature does not affirm this. The literature examined highlights that children and young people continue to have consistently been ignored, treated as passive and weak, blamed for all manner of social problems and marginalised (Head 1998; Ochiltree & Edgar 1981). Despite this reality, there is agreement that generally the latter part of the twentieth century has been a time when, for whatever reason, children and young people's participation has become much more prevalent than in any other era of Western civilisation.

Some argue that legislation and social work practice in the Western world has been operating to actively obtain the opinions and wishes of children and young people since the 1960's (Hill 1997) and that this has been gaining momentum since the 1970's (Crowley 1996; Davie & Galloway 1996; Mason 1999). Others argue that listening to children and young people's voices in Britain has only more seriously occurred since the time leading up to the Cleveland Inquiry into child sexual abuse and resultant *Children Act (1989)* (Davie & Galloway 1996). It has also been argued that participation has only begun to have been taken seriously since ratification of *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC)* in 1989 (Shier 2001), and codification of its central tenets in Articles 12 and 13 (Mason 1999). Regardless of when the movement began to take shape, it is generally agreed that this movement came out of increasing recognition that children and young people needed to be afforded protection (Sidoti 2000).

Summary

The ways in which children and young people have participated, been allowed to participate or had their voices heard has varied throughout history. Although the last two hundred years has indicated an emerging interest in children and young people's protection in their own right, not just as parental property, even this has been mixed. For example, social movements early on in the last two hundred years were based on paternalistic principles and action was conducted on adults' terms. Also, despite the twentieth century being known as the 'century of the child' moves to engage children and young people in participative ways are visible only recently. In summation, it would be misleading to imply that a genuine movement to engage children and young people, and to take their views seriously, is any older than half a decade.

The remainder of this section explores the social movements considered, throughout the reviewed literature, to have been of most influence to the development of children and young people's participation.

Movements influencing children and young people's participation

There have been four movements, or frameworks, leading the debate on the issue of children and young people's participation. These have been developmental theory within psychology and sociology, the Right's movement, the consumer movement and the 'new' sociology of childhood. Following is a brief exploration of factors identified throughout the literature as being influential to increased recognition of participation of children and young people.

Developmental Theory

Theories of childhood that are based on developmental and socialisation paradigms have dominated the views on children and young people's participation over the past few decades (Oakley 1994; Mason & Steadman 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Mason 1999; O'Kane 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001). Where developmental theories use ideas from areas such as biology and psychology to explain human behaviour, socialisation theories examine ways in which human behaviour is altered by social forces.

Basic to these theories, and most applicable to children and young people, is the idea that greater value is added to the individual the further they have moved along the developmental/social lifespan towards the 'pinnacle' that is adulthood (Butler & Williamson 1996). From this viewpoint, childhood is considered a state of unfinished development and children and young people are seen as being on the way to becoming adults (Hill 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; Mason 1999). This implies that rather than being valuable in their own right, children and young people are valued according to where they are in their development towards adulthood. Children, young people and childhood are defined as generalised concepts and afforded value according to their relationship to adult concepts rather than according to what they are in and of themselves (Oakley 1994; Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; Mason 1999).

This theory maintains that adults are in possession of knowledge that children and young people are not. In order to gain access to this knowledge, and thus gain competence, children and young people are required to learn from, and be moulded by adults (Butler & Williamson 1996; Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997). Additional to this is the idea that because children and young people are in a passive, dependent and vulnerable state, their needs can only be met by adults (Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; Mason 1999).

Proponents of this theory provide insight into children and young people's lives from the perspective and perception of adults (Oakley 1994), meaning that the discourse and research is determined and directed by adults. All of this in effect means that children and young people have not yet reached the status within society where they are perceived as deserving 'a voice' or deserving of the chance to participate in decision-making about their lives, as they will when they attain adulthood.

The Rights Movement

The Rights movement has been very influential in relation to children and young people participation and there is a great deal of literature on this topic. As noted earlier, towards the end of the nineteenth century children and young people were increasingly recognised as being in need of protection. In response to an extended period of community pressure by adults, children's rights and welfare became legal and political considerations, and state policies began to change, although extremely slowly (Sidoti 2000). Thanks to the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, there is now growing support for children and young people's rights including their right to be heard, and to participate in and influence society (Hart 1992; Head 1998; Kjørholt 2002).

Virtually all of the literature reviewed refers to CROC. The impression is that this, and particularly Article 12 which refers specifically to participation, has been definitive in boosting children and young people's participation.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

(UNICEF 2002)

Perhaps most importantly CROC maintains that children and young people have rights and are people independent of adults. The rights afforded to children and young people include the right to actively participate in community life, to be central players in decisions about their own welfare, to express their opinions freely, and to be listened to and taken seriously (Hart 1992; Rayner 1992; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Head 1998; Newell & Robinson 2000; Sidoti 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Nicholson 2001; Robinson 2001). It has also been argued throughout the chosen literature that the remarkable thing about this Convention is that, unlike any other UN Convention, it has been ratified by virtually every country in the world, with the exception of the United States of America and Somalia (Nyland 1999; Robinson 2001).

Although CROC is not directly transferable into law it does set standards for practice (Rayner 2001) and a heightened expectation that the countries who ratify it will establish policy, practice methods and legislation to remain true to the standards they have agreed with in principle (Rayner 1992; Newell & Robinson 2000).

Adult directed

There are primarily two strands coming out of the Rights movement. One is adult directed and works towards changing legislation to improve conditions for children and young people. Underpinning this movement are Article 12 of CROC and the notion of 'competence' (Bowen 1998). There is an imperative to make sure that participation occurs based on merit. It needs to be according to the participant's level of understanding generally and in relation to their knowledge about the implications of their involvement (Bowen 1998).

Analysis of the chosen literature suggests that one of the major manifestations of this movement has been the inclusion in legislation, particularly child protection legislation, to seek and value children and young people's participation and decision making in relation to child protection matters (Rayner 1992; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001). In Australia, legislation recognising children and young people's participation has been introduced in the ACT, Queensland and Tasmania, as well as in NSW, where the *NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection Act) 1998* outlines a principle of the Act pertaining to participation (see S.10). An additional outcome has been the establishment in some States and Territories, and discussion at a National level about such establishment, of Commissioners for children and young people.

The main areas of social welfare research in relation to children and young people's participation has included their competence in decision making about medical treatment (Bowen 1998), as well as their participation in decision making about child protection and out-of-home care matters (Cashmore & Paxman 1996; Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; Community Services Commission 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001) and Family Law matters (Bowen 1998).

Some of the literature reviewed argues that often the nature of adult directed work has resulted in the work and research being about children and young people rather than involving them directly (Hill 1997, Mason & Urquhart 2001) and that it is still the majority of cases in which children and young people's involvement is not valued to the extent that the legislation suggests that it should be (Bowen 1998). This will be expanded upon in a later section detailing what the literature indicates about the reality of legislative and policy changes for children and young people.

Child directed

Over time, realisation of human rights and adult-led movements has resulted in movements and groups managed by children and young people. This has led to the other rights-based movement, identified as the 'children's movements' model (Mason & Urquhart 2001). Like other civil rights movements throughout history this movement advocates for the elimination of oppression and exploitation experienced by minority groups throughout the world, in this instance children and young people (Mason & Urquhart 2001). Unlike other civil rights movements, this one is controlled and directed by children and young people.

The 'children's movements' model has evolved as children and young people have become educated in rights matters and coordinated themselves into organisations to fight for their rights (Hart 1992). These organisations aim to confront adult agendas and assert their knowledge of human rights to develop standards for work that are non-exploitative and not oppressive of children and young people (Mason & Urquhart 2001). Examples of child-governed groups throughout the world include the 'Underground Power' movement, formed during the 1990's as a direct response to CROC (Bird & Ibidun, cited in Mason & Urquhart 2001), organisations formed by working children in the majority world, and networks of children and young people, in

countries such as Britain and Australia, organised to advocate for children and young people in out-of-home care (Hart 1992; Davie & Galloway 1996; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

The literature sampled suggests that the Rights movement has sought to transform the balance of power within society. Similarities have been drawn throughout the chosen literature between the children's movement and the women's movement (Oakley 1994; Taylor & Henaghan 1997). The overarching theme throughout the children's rights literature that was examined is the recognition that children and young people have rights due to the fact that they are citizens of the society of their own accord, without consideration to their relationships to any adults. Further to this is recognition that active participation in society accompanies their standing as citizens.

The Consumer Movement

The consumer movement has contributed to changing the manner in which children and young people are viewed and treated, although not to the same extent as the other movements (Corsaro 1997; O'Brien 1997; Mason & Urquhart 2001). Outside of the social and welfare sector, there has been a change in advertising and marketing. It has moved from targeting adults as consumers to developing a climate where children and young people are also being targeted and valued for their consumer power (Ochiltree & Edgar 1981; Mason 1999). Additionally, increasing levels of participation of young people has been a focus for professionals in community development as well in urban design and planning (Malone 1999; Moore 2000).

In terms of children and young people in the social and welfare context, the early literature reviewed on participation in out-of-home care adopted consumer and market notions (see O'Brien 1997). The argument in this literature is basically that since children and young people are recipients of services, it would be respectful, logical and beneficial to engage them when evaluating and seeking feedback about, and reforming, services.

A 'new sociology' of childhood

It appears that a significant factor in improving participation of children and young people has been the development of a new movement within sociology. This emerging branch of sociology is known as the 'new' sociology of childhood, or 'new' childhood studies. It draws on ideas and methodology from post-structural and critical discourse along with ecological and feminist theory to increase participation for children and young people in all aspects of sociology and social life. This includes increased participation of children and young people in the development of theory, policy and research as well as other areas of social life where children and young people are present, including out-of-home care, child protection, health and education.

The 'new' sociology of childhood challenges 'commonsense' views and dominant theoretical perspectives about childhood that are taken to be truth, which it argues are actually social constructs (Ochiltree & Edgar 1981; Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Long 1999; Kjørholt 2002). The aim is to examine what is considered to be a mistaken and offensive conceptualisation of childhood, children and young people (Oakley 1994; Corsaro 1997; Long 1999; Kjørholt 2002).

The underlying assumption is that children and young people are actively creating their childhoods and contributing to a 'shifting' within all of social life (Corsaro 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Kane 2000). This opposes dominant perspectives on childhood where there is an assumption that children and young people are passive recipients of adult care, concern and social life due to their weakness, immaturity and dependence (Corsaro 1997; Hill 1997; Mason 1999; O'Kane 2000). Proponents of the 'new' sociology of childhood argue that the current paternalistic adult attitudes have resulted in children and young people being placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Mason 1999).

This perspective claims to take the views of children and young people seriously. There is a conscious push within research, policy and practice from this perspective to engage children and young people as competent participants. Practitioners aim to seek out, value and utilise the views of children and young people because they view children and young people as experts of their own lives (Hill 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Long 1999; O'Kane 2000; Kjørholt 2002).

This section has provided a brief overview of the four major movements, addressed in the literature, that are seeking to improve children and young people's participation. For more information about each movement the literature samples themselves detail how children and young people's participation is conceived of in each of these movements. Following is an outline of what the selected literature notes in relation to the current status of children and young people's participation now, concentrating mainly on the Australian situation.

Section Two

Do theory, policies and reality equate?

Examination of the selected literature appears to have uncovered discrepancies between theory and practice. The following section explores what is noted in the reviewed literature about children and young people's participation from a political, legislative and social policy perspective. It also includes the perspective of children, young people, and social researchers and commentators. The section further explores reasons given for why these differences are perceived to be the case. To make sure that the review is relevant to those working in the New South Wales social welfare context, and because of limited space, attention will mostly be paid to legislation and government policy affecting workers in NSW.

Developments in participation

Political developments

Some of the literature reviewed specifies how governments have begun to take an interest in involving children and young people in matters related to their own welfare and wellbeing. Throughout the 1990's a number of significant research reports were completed and a number of agencies were established in NSW that were designed to monitor the circumstances of children and young people, and to advocate on their behalf. There were three studies in NSW of major significance to children and young people's participation in decision making in matters relating to their situation in out-of-home care (Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). All three studies had similar foci, summed up in the summary provided as being the purpose of the '*Having a Say*' project. This was outlined as being to "seek the views of children and young people in decisions and processes affecting their lives" and to "identify barriers to participation as well as ways to enhance participation" (Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998: 5).

'Wards Leaving Care – A longitudinal study' was conducted in 1996 (Cashmore & Paxman 1996). This study involved the completion of three interviews with young people aged 16 to 18 years who were leaving out-of-home care. One interview was completed prior to them leaving care and two were completed within twelve months of them having left. The '*Having a Say*' project was commissioned, by the NSW Child Protection Council in 1998 (Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998, O'Brien 2001) and researchers spoke to 37 children and young people living in out-of-home care about their involvement in decision making. The third study, '*Voices of Children and Young People in Foster Care*' was completed in 2000 after consultations with 66 children and young people in out-of-home-care (CSC 2000). The researchers of this study note that, "the most significant component of the methodology was the preparation for children and young people's participation and the use of strategies to enhance their ability to contribute their views and experiences" (CSC 2000: 28).

Another NSW government research initiative was the Youth Consultation Research Project. This began in 1997 and was conducted by the Department of Local Government. So far this has culminated in three reports on the topic of engaging young people in consultation.

On the political front, the policy of the NSW government, 'Focus on Young People', declares that young people were consulted prior to the writing of the policy and that this will be a regular and valued occurrence (NSW Cabinet Office 1998). With one of the principles of the policy being participation, the policy contains statements to guide practice to ensure that it occurs. The policy also lists some ways in which the government itself is encouraging processes whereby young people can participate in decision making. This includes the creation of a Commission for Children and Young People in 1999, the creation of a position of Youth Liaison Officer at the NSW Ombudsman's Office and continuing existence of the NSW Youth Advisory Council (NSW Cabinet Office 1998).

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People was created after the Wood Royal Commission into corruption within the NSW Police Service found that failures within the NSW child protection system were endemic, and that consequently children and young people were being put at risk of harm (NSW Child Protection Council 1998; O'Brien 1999). The role of the Commission is to make issues and interests of concern to children and young people a priority (NSW Child Protection Council 1998). One of the principle functions of the Commission relates to children and young people's participation (NSW Child Protection Council 1998). This is,

'to promote the participation of children in decision making that affects their lives and to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children appropriate to their age and development'.

(NSW Child Protection Council 1998: 19)

In 1999, the Federal government replaced the independent National peak association for youth with a group called the National Youth Roundtable. This group is comprised of young people, aged 15 to 24 years, from across Australia. The intention is that these 50 representatives consult their peers on matters relating to young people and bring the issues to the government for discussion (Hando & Schuermann 2000). This was expanded in 2000 when the National Youth Forum was created as a way of ensuring ongoing connection between the Federal government and youth organisations (Hando & Schuermann, 2000).

An additional NSW government body, called the Office of the Children's Guardian, was established in 2001 to monitor the circumstances of children and young people in out-of-home care and ensure that their rights are being upheld (NSW Office of the Children's Guardian 2002). Although children and young people's participation is supposed to be an important element of their agenda, the role and functioning of this organisation has been hampered by the slowness of the NSW Government in proclaiming the relevant sections of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, or to amend the Act in relation to the Office of the Children's Guardian, and in so doing change its role.

Legislative developments

Discussion within the literature sampled also focused on legislative changes that have needed to occur in order for agencies dedicated to improving the wellbeing of children and young people to be established. Following is an outline of legislative developments related to children and young people's participation that were located.

Some of the literature reviewed provided a legal perspective on the issues. This literature suggests that there has been increasing awareness in legislative reform and development to acknowledge children and young people's rights, in particular, their right to participate in decision making that relates to them (Rayner 1992; Nyland 1999). Those influencing changes in

Australian law have been CROC and the *Gillick* case in England (Lansdown 1992, cited in Head 1998; Rayner 1992; Bowen 1998). This case was related to competence and found that adolescent girls have the right to seek their own medical care, that is, without their parents permission. The most important achievement through this judicial process was acceptance of the possibility that children and young people might be able to make decisions competently, an important factor for the Law.

Changes to improve children and young people's participation has occurred in the *NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, the *Family Law Reform Act 1997* (Cth) as well as the *NSW Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 (NSW)*, and the *Young Offenders Act 1997*. Shifts to include the issue of children and young people's participation have also been apparent in moves by the Queensland and Tasmanian governments to establish positions similar to the NSW Commission for Children and Young People.

The principle relating to participation in the *Children and Young People (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)* states that,

“wherever a child or young person is able to form his or her own views on a matter concerning his or her welfare, he or she must be given an opportunity to express those views freely and those views are to be given due weight in accordance with the developmental capacity of the child or young person and the circumstances”

The Children and Young People (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) outlines a number of principles to guide how practitioners are to improve conditions to make sure that participation occurs, although these are not enforceable at law. Since the Children’s Guardian, Children’s Court, Child Death Review Team and out-of-home care arrangements also fall under the jurisdiction of this Act, the principle of participation relates to these also.

The Family Law Court Act s68F(2)(a) “requires that a Court must consider the wishes of the child and give them such weight as the age and maturity of the child requires” (Nicholson 2002).

What children and young people say about developments in participation

The literature that outlines, in an “unadulterated” way, children and young people’s views on participation is small in comparison to the volume of literature of adult perspectives of children and young people's views on participation. It is also important to highlight that, in the case of consultation that has been conducted in NSW, most of this selected literature has been made available since the advent of the Children and Young People (Care and Protection) Act 1998.

There have been a few studies conducted with children and young people in out-of-home care in New South Wales. These have highlighted that although some know they have rights to be informed of decisions (CSC 2000; Cashmore & O’Brien 2001), many of the participants in the research did not know or understand they had rights to be involved in decision making (CSC 2000). For those who were aware, there was a general feeling that they wanted to know and be involved (Cashmore & O’Brien 2001), but that they were generally not allowed to participate, particularly in important life decisions (CSC 2000).

There was also a view amongst children and young people in out-of-home care that adults do not value their opinions and that if they are allowed to participate then it is felt to be ignored, tokenistic or as though it will not actually change anything (CSC 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Bunce 2002; Roxon 2002). Additionally, the literature notes that children and young people's feelings range from cynicism and lack of faith in the process/adult concern for their opinion, to feelings of appreciating the process and the adults' efforts to listen and try to take them seriously (CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Bunce 2002; Roxon 2002).

Some literature also revealed that some children and young people consider that they would have been less traumatised growing up and less reliant on welfare support as adults if they had been involved in the decision making process whilst in care (Cashmore & Paxman 1996; O'Brien 1997; Mason 1999). Additionally it has been noted that some children and young people believe that they would be more likely to accept decisions, they would have been less resentful, and the outcomes would have been of more benefit to them if they had have been allowed to participate in decisions (Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

There are differences of opinion on the topic of participation, where some children and young people will say they feel they there are listened to and others unequivocally say that they believe that they are not. Despite this, the overall sense within the literature is that children and young people want to be allowed to participate and want their opinions to be valued and respected, implying that this is largely not the case presently (Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Bunce 2002).

What the literature says about developments in participation

A substantial selection of the literature dealing with children and young people's participation in the welfare context, within Australia and NSW, includes views on how this is progressing. It was found that some believe that efforts to engage children and young people in various ways in society is increasing, as is recognition of children's rights (Nyland 1999; Singleton 2000). Alternatively there is also suggestion that participation is 'often exploitative or frivolous' Hart (1992: 4) and that effective participation is constrained by structural issues (Taylor & Henaghan 1997).

Six themes have emerged within the literature and these can be split into two sections. The first relates to changes in the actions and opinions of adults generally, as well as developments in hearing, listening to and acting upon the voices of children and young people. The second section relates to how changes have manifested in practice. These relate to the performance of the government, legislative reform, progression in research, and changes in welfare practice, particularly child protection and out-of-home care. As noted in the previous section, where the literature on children and young people's participation provides a view on the current environment, this is mostly made from an adult perspective. Also, as was the case with the opinions of children and young people, there is a range of opinions in the literature on the degree to which participative environments are developing.

1. Changes in the actions and opinions of adults generally

The literature reviewed suggests that although there have been some moves in changing adult conceptions of children and young people there is still generally a controlling and paternalistic view taken of them (Rayner 1991; Moore 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001). For example, there is still a conception of the role of childhood to be one of working towards a better position in society, that is, to reach ultimate standing in society as adults. Greater value is still placed on competence, strength, ability to be rational and depth of knowledge

about the world (Mason & Steadman 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997). Some of the literature notes that there is still also a dichotomised view of children that they are either innocent, dependent and vulnerable, requiring protection (Hart 1992; Butler & Williamson 1996; Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Brien 1997; Singleton 2000), or alternatively a threat to society and subsequently require controlling (Oakley 1994; Singleton 2000).

The selection of rights literature argues that children and young people are still refused basic political and civil rights, and that generally adults are resistant to improving these conditions (Hart 1992; Taylor & Henaghan 1997). In addition to this there appears to be a perception that improved conditions for children and young people will mean fewer rights and less power for adults.

2. *Developments in hearing, listening to and acting upon the voices of children and young people*

There appears to have been a small increase in recent times of children and young people's opinions being sought on issues in the social welfare context (Henderson 2000; O'Kane 2000; Roberts 2000; Sidoti 2000; Singleton 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001). This has included areas such as political and legal systems, child protection, out-of-home care, and education. Despite this, the bulk of the literature examined, published within the last five years, agrees that children and young people are still generally devoid of genuine opportunities to be engaged in participation (Bowen 1998; Nyland 1999; CSC 2000; Singleton 2000; Thomas 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Robinson 2001; Bunce 2002; Nicholson 2002). There is some agreement that changes in legislation have contributed to ensuring that their opinions are considered (Sidoti 2000; Thomas 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

Reasoning follow the lines that when children and young people are asked to express their opinions and be involved in decision making, their opinion is usually either not heard or discounted when it is (Mason 1999; Mason & Urquhart 2001). It is also noted that children and young people are powerless when it comes to the framing and process of the debate (Oakley 1994; Corsaro 1997; O'Brien 1997). In addition, the point has been made that when children and young people are engaged to express their opinion the conditions are often not conducive to this being done on their terms, or in a manner that is respectful of and meaningful for them (Lindsay 1995; O'Brien 1997).

3. *Performance of the government*

Some of the literature outlines the performance of governments in Australia in terms of their attempts to take children and young people's participation seriously (Nyland 1999; Nicholson 2002; Roxon 2002). It appears that various programs and initiatives have been undertaken, such as the institution of a Federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and Commission for Children and Young People in NSW. In relation specifically to young people the NSW Government policy, 'Focus on Young People', has principles of participation, and contains statements to guide practice so as to make sure that participation occurs (NSW Cabinet Office 2002). However, the lack of a coordinated approach reflects a lack of strong commitment to meaningful participation..

One example of this has been criticism levelled at the Federal government in the 1996 report by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on breaches of CROC (Nyland 1999; Nicholson 2002). Nyland (1999:13) argues that, "although the Australian government has accepted moral and legal responsibilities by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child there is little sign that progress is being made in acknowledging or promoting children in our society". Also in relation to this matter, writers commenting on human rights and legislative change have noted that Australia has a very poor record when it comes to permitting human rights treaties, such as CROC, to influence legislation (Nicholson 2002).

Another initiative of the current Federal Government that has drawn criticism from within the welfare sector is the defunding in 1998 of the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC), formerly Australia's peak youth affairs organisation. One of the objectives of this agency was to be committed to promoting the participation of young people (AYPAC 1998). The Government replaced this agency with the National Youth Roundtable which, it is argued, "has done little to improve the perception that politicians are not interested in listening to the views of young people" (Roxon 2002: 51). In relation to out-of-home care matters, the Federal Government has not yet formally responded to the 'Seen and Heard' report, five years after it was written (Nicholson 2002).

4. *Legislative reform*

It appears that the legal arena has not fared much better in relation to a genuine commitment to children and young people's participation. Writers commenting from a legal perspective generally note that although some moves have been made in legislation throughout the world to engage children and young people, and to recognise their right to participate in decision making in matters regarding themselves, there is still a long way to go (Rayner 1992; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; CREATE 2000; Nicholson 2002). Some argue that the underlying factor constraining children and young people's participation is the ongoing refusal by adults, most prominently within the Commonwealth government and judicial system, to take children's rights seriously (Rayner 1991; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Long 1999; Mason 1999; Nicholson 2002).

Examples of what is contained within the literature in relation to this matter is as follows. Some have noted that children and young people's statements in matters continue to be challenged in ways that adults' statements are not (Mason & Steadman 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997). It is argued that this is partly due to paternalistic conditions in legal matters such as "their best interests" (Rayner 1992; Oakley 1994; Mason & Urquhart 2001), and competency (Hart 1992; Mason & Steadman 1997; Bowen 1998). Others argue that disadvantage arises in legal systems because children and young people are not valued as being autonomous, or as citizens (Rayner 1992; Sidoti 2000). Still others argue that the traditions of legal systems often prevent the reforms being implemented (Rayner 1992; Taylor & Henaghan 1997). An example of this at a Federal level in Australia is that although provisions exist for children to give evidence directly in Family Law matters, the Rules provide that leave must be granted by the Court for them to be heard, which rarely occurs (Nicholson 2002).

5. *Progression in research*

There is a great deal of social research that engages children and young people. Most of the writers speaking from a research perspective on children and young people's participation argue that adults continue to control the research agenda, processes and ways in which the outcomes of the research is expressed (Hill 1997; Roberts 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001).

6. *Changes in welfare practice, particularly child protection and out-of-home care*

Most of the literature on the participation of children and young people in the welfare sector refers to decision making in relation to out-of-home care matters, and some to child protection. The argument generally follows that although there are claims that participation is supposed to be a principle factor, is not actually performed well. It is argued that children and young people are usually either excluded from the decision making process or do not understand it (Butler & Williamson 1996; Healy & Walsh 1997; Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Brien 1997; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Wilkinson 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001). This phenomenon is not specific to Australia, where Parton et al. have noted the absence of children's voices in relation to decision making in child protection files in England (cited in, Mason 1999).

The situation described above is generally linked to the way in which children and young people are conceptualised in society. This results in devaluing of children and young people by adults, where they are still valued according to their ability to become adults (Hart 1992; Butler & Williamson 1996; Moore 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001), or by their place in the family (Mason 1999). Aligned with this is the assumption that children and young people are not mature and autonomous, thus unable to know about and make important decisions about their lives (Mason 1999; Newell & Robinson 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Robinson 2001). Some also argue that this behaviour is due to adults not wishing to relinquish their power and control over children and young people's lives (Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Brien 1997; Healy 1998). One argument for why this is the case is the claim that funding bodies are not providing adequate levels of funding for programs because they are not taking seriously evidence that suggests that true participation is resource intensive (Healy & Walsh 1997).

Some of the literature examined raised the point that participation is not always possible. One author noted that limits to participation in a statutory child protection framework are directly related to issues within the child protection structure itself (Healy 1998). This includes under-resourced, crisis driven work being executed by professionals who are dealing with a high level of guilt and surveillance, and lack of autonomy at not being able to perform to their own standards (Healy 1998). In addition to this the workers have to deal with issues particular to statutory child protection practice, such as the role they play in being a mediator between the state, family and child or young person (Healy 1998; Mason 1999).

There are a few examples of material that has been published to guide practice, such as the NSW Commission for Children and Young People's (2001) "TAKING PARTICipation seriously" kit and CREATE Foundation's (2000) 'Facilitating Participation: Learning through action' training package.

Although there has been a lot of improvement in the extent to which children and young people are able and encouraged to participate in various ways throughout society, there is still much to be done. Generally it is felt that changes in systems, structures and cultures have to precede changes in practice. This is indeed a huge task but there is evidence to indicate that it is possible and that, indeed, it is happening to some degree currently.

Section Three

Some models of participation

The following section describes and summarises five of the models of participation that have been described in the literature reviewed. These models were chosen to be reviewed because they have been specifically designed to be used in relation to participation with children and young people. Another factor considered in choosing them was the extent to which they vary from each other. This was in order to provide a useful overall picture of the models available, elements of which might be useful for practitioners when deciding how to maximise children and young people's participation.

The models described in the review are the 'ladder' model formulated by Hart (1992), John's (1996) model in the form of a bridge, Corsaro's (1997) model constructed in the shape of a spider web, a model specifically designed for participation in the child protection sector (Butler & Williamson 1996), and a collaborative model for participation (Mason & Urquhart 2001).

The Ladder of Participation

Roger Hart (1992) has designed what has become possibly the most influential model of children and young people's participation (John 1996; Singleton 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Shier 2001). This was adapted from Arnstein's model of participation, designed to be used in social planning (Healy 1998). Hart has designed a ladder (Figure 1), the rungs of which represent the level of children and young people's power throughout the participation process. There are eight rungs, each step 'up' representing a 'step up' in power for the child or young person. At the least powerful position, children and young people are being 'manipulated' whereas at their most powerful position, the eighth rung, they are assisted by adults as they bring their own ideas and projects to life (Hart 1992).

John (1996) has criticised the focus that Hart places on power. She argues that the hierarchical representation is actually disempowering for children and young people because the power comes from adults and is given to children and young people.

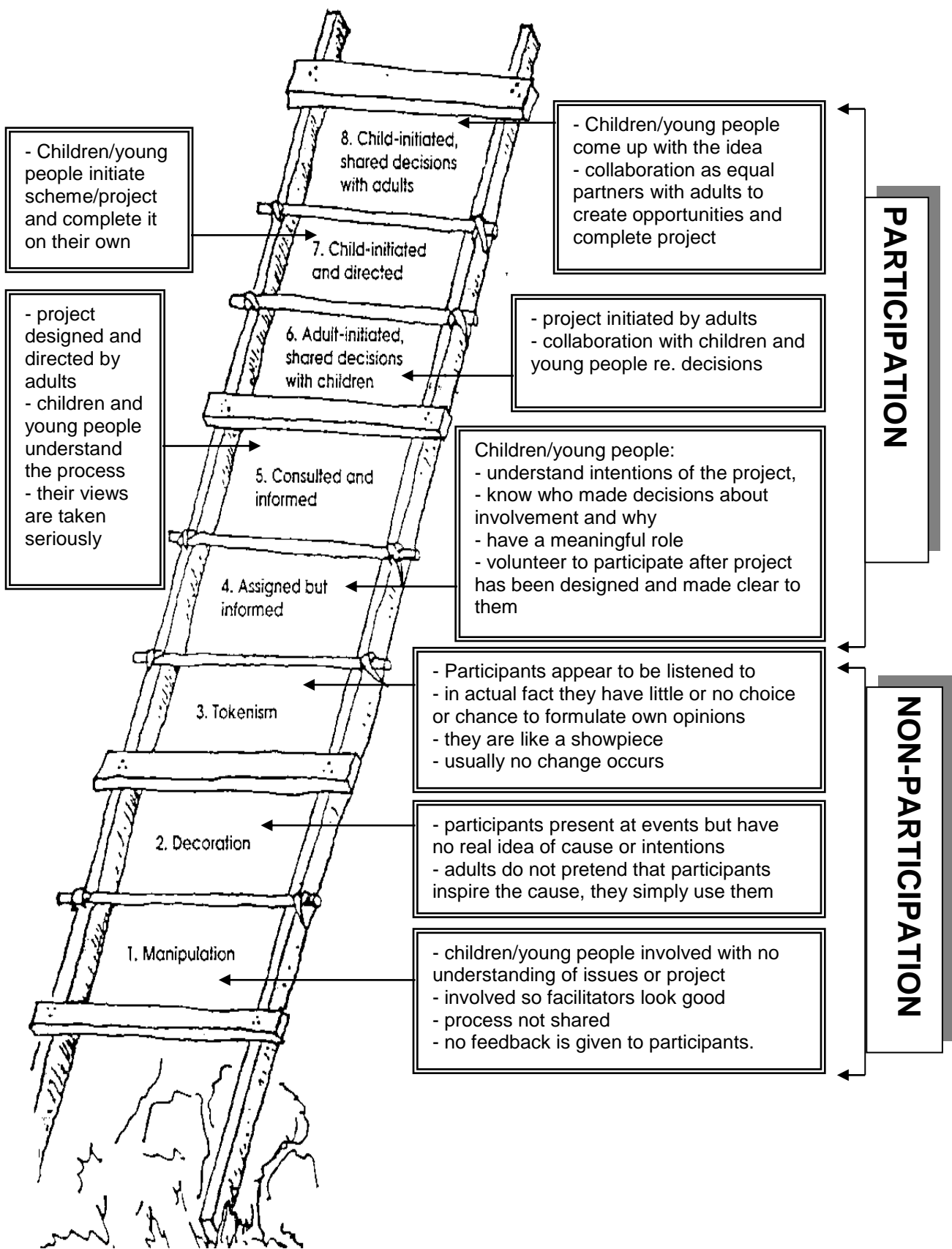


Figure 1: Amendment of Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' (Hart 1992: 9 – 17)

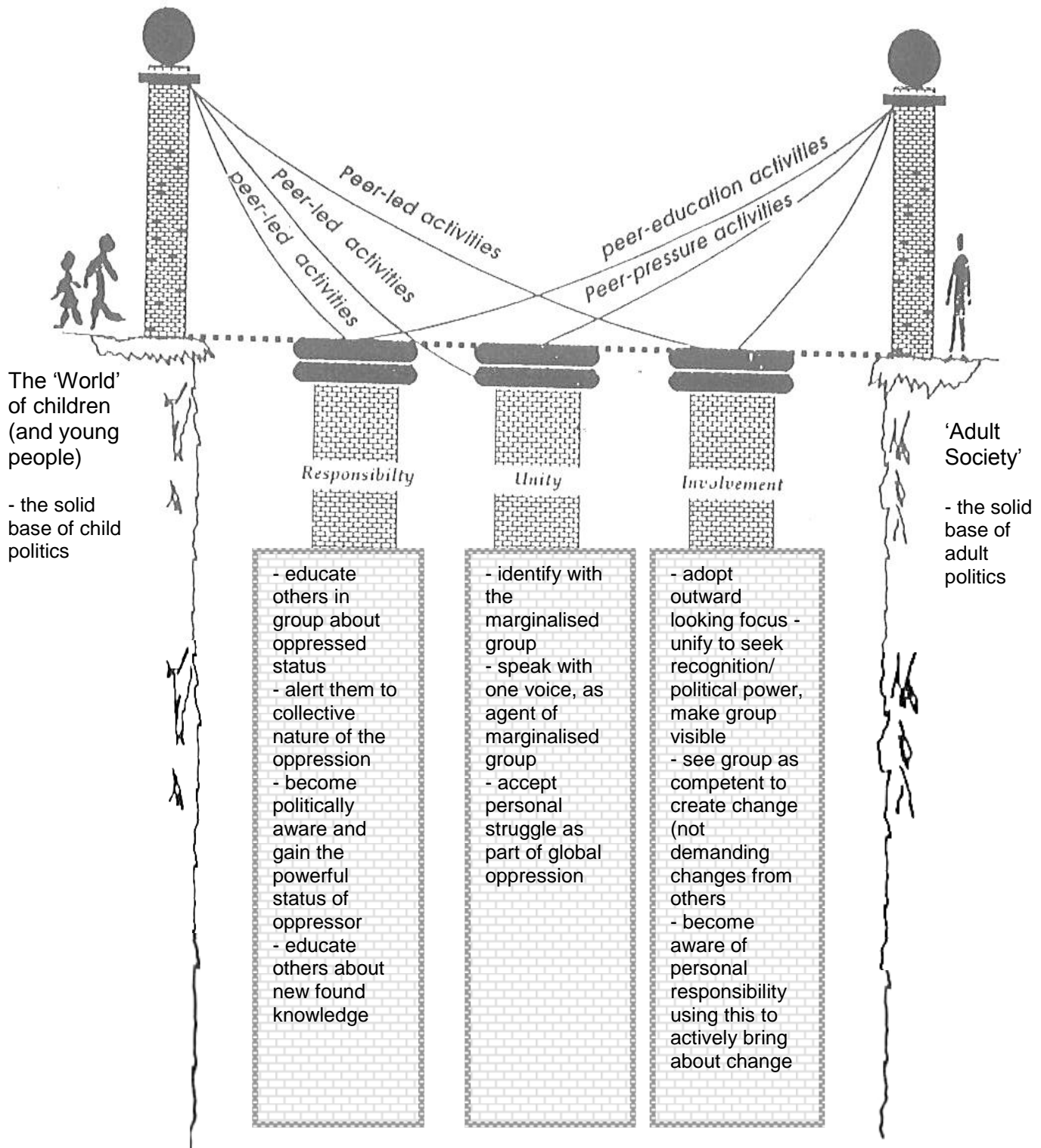
The Bridge of Participation

Mary John (1996) claims that her 'bridge building' model (Figure 2) is more dynamic for children and young people than Hart's model. The idea is that the political 'world' of children and young people is separated from the adult political world by a seemingly impassable, politically oppressive and disempowering 'chasm'. In actively engaging to bridge the chasm, children and young people can take up their true place with adults as full citizens in the democracy, a position that John argues they are currently excluded from.

Based on Steve Biko's work in relation to the African-American rights movement, the pillars that assist in bridging the chasm focus on the participants' *responsibility* and *unity* as well as their *involvement* in the creation of a people's movement. There are individual and collaborative activities between children, young people and adults that are part of the process of participation for those involved in the struggle, as they actively build the bridge and span the chasm. These are based on the work of Penny Townsend, (cited in John 1996: 18), and are the 'ropes' spanning across the 'chasm'. These activities can be:

- Peer pressure activities – which arise when pressure is put on some members of the group by other peer-aged children and young people with the expectation that activities will be carried out because of the internal group politics.
- Peer education activities – are a result of more knowledgeable peers teaching other members of the peer group. In this instance peer pressure is not a factor but the education focus and material has been designed by adults.
- Peer-led activities – arise out of situations when children and young people in the group have concerns and ideas and tell other group members about these. Assistance is sought from adults as far as resourcing, skills and training is concerned so that the activities can be carried out. It is claimed that in these instances children and young people guide and focus the activities, other group members and the adults' responses and thinking.

Figure 2: Amendment of John's 'Bridge of Participation' (John 1996: 15-21)



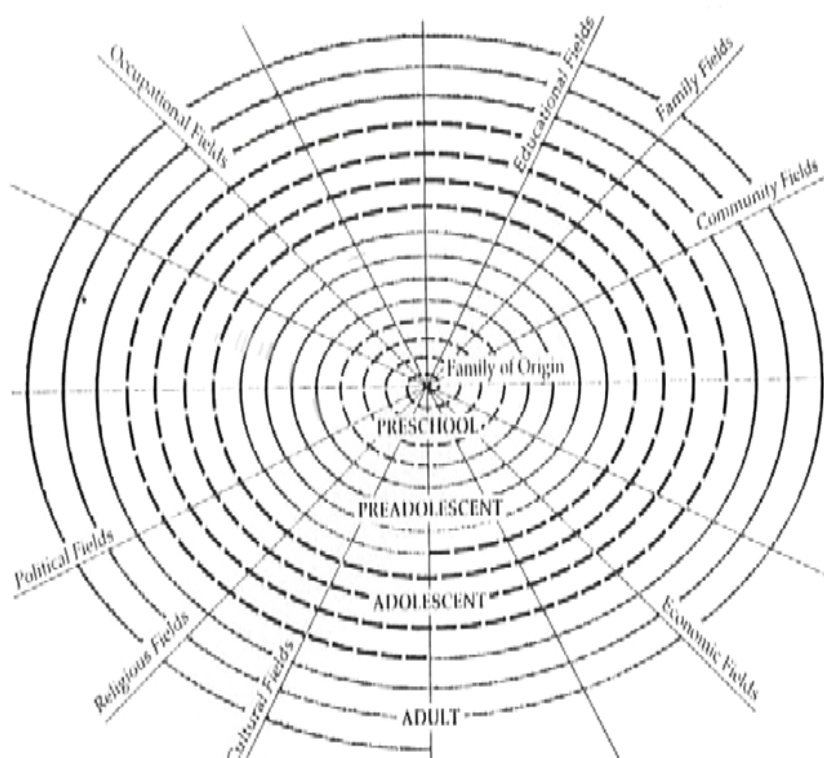
The Participation Orb Web

Corsaro (1997) has created a model for children and young people's participation that is described as being constructed in much the same way an Orb spider builds a web (Figure 3). The child or young person is like the spider, constructing their life around threads, like scaffolding that extends outwards. These represent elements and institutions within social and cultural life. The scaffolding can include religious, community and sporting groups, political, educational, health and welfare institutions, occupational and economic spheres of life, extended family and other such social and cultural constructions. The profile of each individual's life 'web' will depend on the size, number, shape and stability of the cultures, institutions and other elements that make up the scaffolding.

There are four peer cultures that people pass through, that is pre-school, pre-adolescent, adolescent and adult. These are not stages, as they cannot be left behind once they have been passed through. Rather they are embedded in the individual's life and subsequently continue to form an integral part throughout the individual's life.

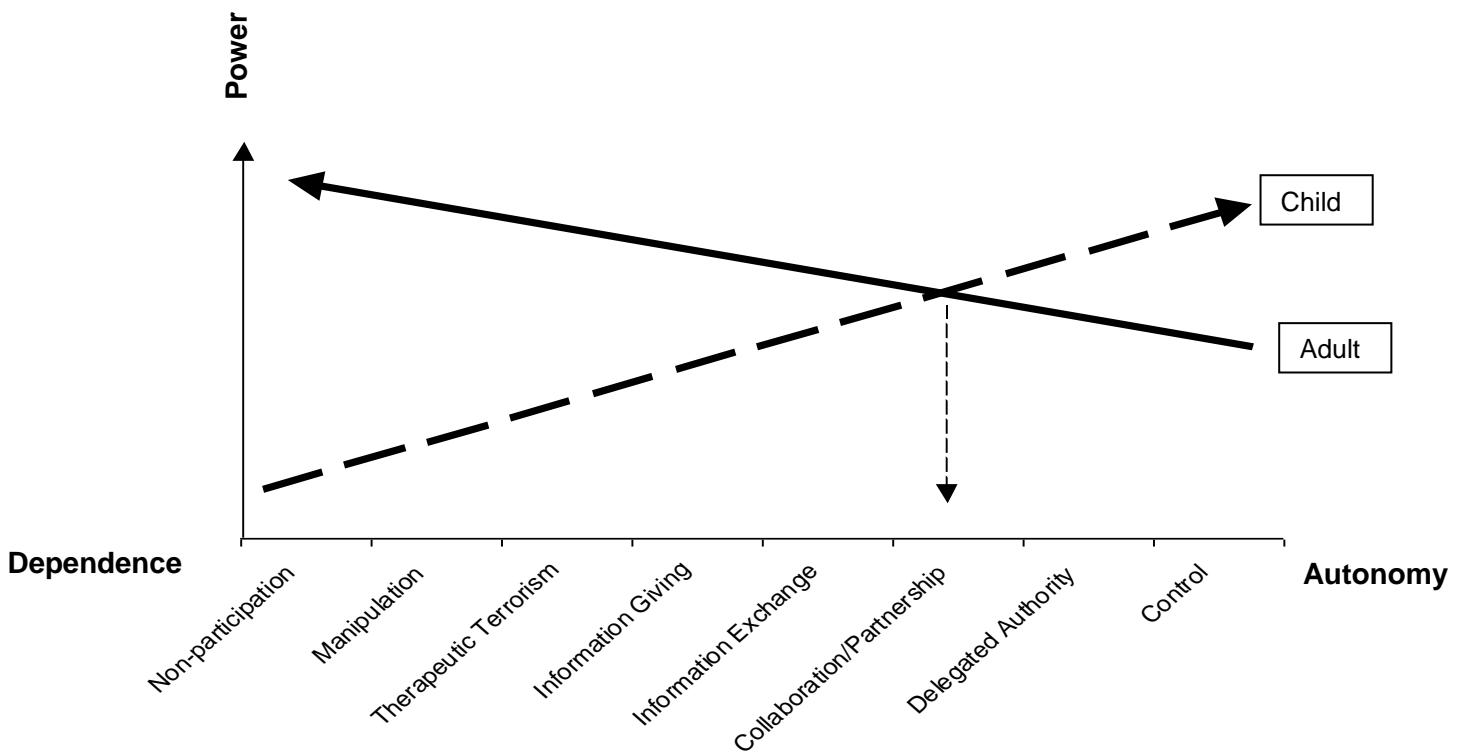
Corsaro's model is based on the notion of interpretive reproduction. According to this concept, developing membership in social and cultural life is multi-dimensional rather than linear. This means that the child or young person coexists with other children, young people and adults, interpreting the interactions as they create their own, individual and peer, culture. Furthermore, the participant relies on these others because they, and the institutions of which they are members, form part of the scaffolding around which the participant is constructing their life web. The weaving of the web (that is, culture) is a dynamic and collective activity, where the child or young person must interact with these in order to keep building their web. One of the most important elements of this concept is that children and young people are independent members of the 'adult' world, along with every individual across the lifespan, and are actually already participating in the design and construction of this world. Additionally, because the elaborateness of the social web, the social and individual web of those they are interacting with affects the children, young people and adults involved.

Figure 3: Corsaro's 'Orb Web of participation' (Corsaro 1997: 23-26)



A model of participation specifically for child protection

Butler & Williamson (1996) argue that child protection workers do not typically seek input from the children and young people they are working with. They have outlined a model (Figure 4) showing various stages of participation in relation to power. The graph indicates varying degrees of autonomy in the process for both the child/young person and adult involved relative to the amount of power they hold over the situation. The model indicates that the point at which children/young people and adults are working together at an equal power status is at the point of collaboration/partnership. An interesting aspect of this model is that the adult always has some level of power over the situation, even when it is less than the children/young people. This is evident in the case of 'delegated authority' and 'control', where adult power relative to children/young people is still quite high.



NON - PARTICIPATION	PARTICIPATION
Non-participation - child/young person plays passive role and is often ignored by adults involved	Information exchange - decision making might include listening to child/young person's voice
Manipulation - child/young person required as administrative convenience so process can be facilitated (eg for forensic or legal purposes)	Collaboration/partnership - child/young person given scope to give opinions and adults listen - action taken in relation to these opinions - child/young person involved because of their instrumental value - change occurs as a result of child/young person involvement
Therapeutic terrorism - belief that child/young person can only recover from their experiences through practitioner intervention - child/young person is 'social worked over'	Delegated authority - child/young person controls some of process - trusted adult has active support role - child/young person opinion considered on matters outside of the scope of their control
Information giving - form of tokenism where child/young person told what may happen and given no real choice - can include child/young person agreeing to contracts arranged by adult	Control - involvement wholly on child's terms - action equates with way in which adults cooperate/collaborate

Figure 4: Butler & Williamson's (1996: 87-90) model to involve children in child protection

A Collaborative Model of participation

Mason & Urquhart (2001) have developed a model for children and young people's participation in research, known as the 'Collaborative model' (Figure 5). Like John's (1996) 'Bridge' model, power is acknowledged as a factor, although in this model other factors are also seen as significant. Fundamental to this model is recognition of children and young people's rights as competent participants in social life. Competence is measured by life experience rather than age, unlike models based on traditional ideas of competence.

As indicated in the diagram, the challenge for adherents of the Collaborative model is for children, young people and adults to work together to balance the issues and roles. This involves constituent reflection on, and challenge of, notions such as power, competence, rights and traditional ways of working with children and young people. Another important factor of this model is that the fulcrum of the participation 'see-saw', that is, the conditions and other features which the interaction relies on, is not fixed. Rather it is moved in the direction of either the adults, children or young people participating as deemed necessary by all participants.

	Adultist	Collaborative	Children's Movements
Initiation of participation strategy	Agency/external statutory agency	Agency/external statutory agency	Children (eg children's labour movements)
Ideological framework	Positivist/market forces, consumer involvement	Phenomenological/constructivist	Minority rights, groups struggle
Children viewed as	Passive, incompetent developmentally incomplete 'becomings'	Actors, competent, 'beings' oppressed	Actors, competent human beings
Locus of power	Adults through governance and 'best interests', asymmetrical	Questions the generational order, symmetrical	Children, empowered
Needs identification	Normative from psychological literature	Individualised, from listening to children	Asserted both as a group and individually
Method of decision making	Adults structure procedures	Negotiation between stakeholders	Children dominated
Knowledge	Adult authority	Opportunity for children to shape and contribute	Children experts on own lives, recognises/challenges adults power over children
Professionals	Superiority of expertise used for empowering	Facilitate through alliances	Provide resources
Children's voices	Filtered	Reflexivity by adults and children facilitates children's voices being heard	Challenge and unsettle adults

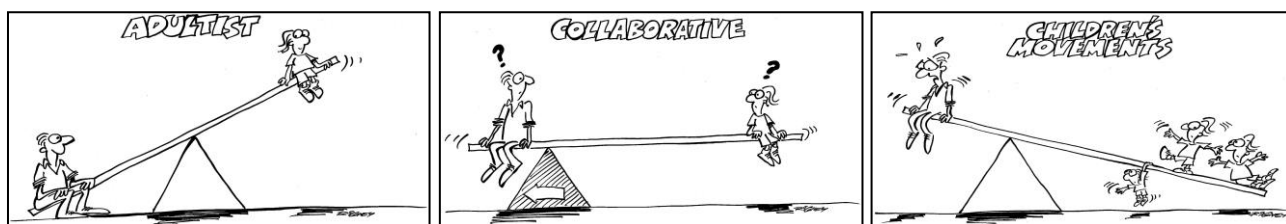


Figure Five: Adaptation of Mason & Urquhart (2001: 16-19) 'Collaborative model'

Section Four

What supports effective participation?

Ideas on what maximises and makes participation possible were raised throughout the selection of literature. Many of the reviewed authors argue that there are certain factors and issues that must be addressed in order for participation to be real. These relate to how children and young people feel, changes in adult attitudes, and issues in relation to collaborative and equal relationships, knowledge, communication, choice, safety and resourcing.

How children and young people feel

According to some of the literature reviewed, participative practice must be such that children and young people feel that they are respected, valued and taken seriously (Rayner 1991; Lindsay 1995; Healy & Walsh 1997), and that they are listened to in a genuine way (Mason 1999; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Bunce 2002). It also appears that children and young people recognise that skills required for decision making are learned, but that they feel they have few opportunities to do so (Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

Changes in adult attitudes

Many of the authors reviewed argue that in order for participation to occur there needs to be a change in adult attitudes. It is believed that when traditional adult behaviour and attitudes towards children and young people change, and subsequently cultural and social structures change, there will be greater opportunity for children and young people to be involved (Hart 1992; Mason & Steadman 1997; Newell & Robinson 2000; Singleton 2000; Nicholson 2001).

There needs to be recognition that engaging children and young people in true, rather than tokenistic, participative practice often involves dealing with complex and challenging situations (Mason & Steadman 1997; O'Brien 1997; Nicholson 2001; Robinson 2001). Adults seeking to engage children and young people in participation must have an attitude of respect for the participants, valuing them and recognising each person's uniqueness, competence and knowledge about the world (Taylor & Henaghan 1997; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). The culture of children and young people should be deemed to be valuable, having as much to contribute to social life as adult culture, and it should be promoted as such (Corsaro 1997; Healy & Walsh 1997; Nyland 1999; Moore 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Sidoti 2000). Alongside this idea some argue that increased recognition of the rights of children and young people is essential (Rayner 1991; Nyland 1999; Newell & Robinson 2000).

Collaborative and equal relationships

A common idea found throughout the selection is that involvement must occur on an equal footing. There is a strong feeling throughout the literature reviewed that the practice framework must be one of collaboration (Davie & Galloway 1996, Corsaro 1997; Healy & Walsh 1997; O'Brien 1997; Long 1999; Mason & Urquhart 2001). Children and young people must be participating as equal stakeholders with adults, where power is shared and hierarchies levelled (O'Brien 1997; CREATE 2000; Moore 2000; Singleton 2000; Nicholson 2001). Children and young people, as well as their opinions and expectations on the project focus and design, must be included and valued from the beginning of the process (Hart 1992; O'Brien 1997; Taylor & Henaghan 1997; Newell & Robinson 2000; O'Kane 2000; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Mason & Urquhart 2001; Nicholson 2001; Rayner 2001).

Some argue that power sharing and flattened hierarchies are not necessarily synonymous with reduced status for adults (Butler & Williamson 1996; Moore 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000), or with a situation where everything that comes from the mouth of a child or young person must be followed (Healy & Walsh 1997). Rather it equates with a few different factors such as the commitment and accountability of adults to children and young people for the process, decision making and outcomes (Healy & Walsh 1997; Healy 1998), recognising children and young people when their ideas and activities deserve praise (Mason & Steadman 1997; Moore 2000) and realising that any person, young or old, can make mistakes (Moore 2000). This change in attitude should include the provision of explanations when a course of action is different to that which was decided upon in collaboration with children and young people (Lindsay 1995; O'Brien 1997; Moore 2000). Healy & Walsh (1997) have argued that it also means that, in consultation with the children and young people, adults may need to be prepared to alter their level of engagement and power throughout the process.

Knowledge

One of the most important factors is a high degree of access to knowledge. It is argued that children and young people must be prepared for their role and informed about the purpose, role and intentions of organisations and adult facilitators (Hart 1992; CSC 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). They must also be aware of the history, structures, prior decisions and anything else that might impact on the current process (Lindsay 1995; Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; CREATE 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). Additionally, they must be included in decision making, informed of the outcomes of the decisions and project as a whole, and given the choice to participate in an ongoing manner throughout the discussion, decision making and implementation process, as they so choose (O'Brien 1997; Healy 1998; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Henderson 2000; Moore 2000; Singleton 2000).

Some also argue that there needs to be ongoing review and examination of models of participation and practice to ensure that policies and politics, research, social commentary, theory and practice about participation is changing as knowledge becomes available (Healy 1998; Henderson 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001). Others argue that this might include greater cross-fertilisation of knowledge between disciplines (Nyland 1999), and that issues in relation to participation are included in training modules in social welfare (Crowley 1996; Henderson 2000).

Communication

It is argued throughout the reviewed analysis that there must be realisation that children and young people communicate differently to each other, and to adults, and that although this can result in conflict, it need not be so (Hill 1997; O'Kane 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Nicholson 2001; Robinson 2001). It has been noted that communication varies across a diverse range of factors across the lifespan, for example age, stage of development, family and cultural context (Hart 1992; Nyland 1999; Nicholson 2001). This means that difficulties in communication cannot be attributed only to children and young people, particularly very young children, and should not form barriers to participation (Hart 1992; Rayner 1992; Davie & Galloway 1996; Long 1999; Nyland 1999). Alternatively, adults should be prepared to consider context, attentively observe, actively listen to and be genuinely interested in children and young people when they are attempting to involve them in participation (Hart 1992; Nyland 1999; Henderson 2000; Moore 2000; Robinson 2001).

Choice

The other significant issue related to engaging children and young people in participative practice is about choice. In much of the literature examined, the argument is presented that in order for participation to be maximised, there needs to be increased and flexible choice for children and young people to decide for themselves on how and when they participate (Hart 1992; Crowley 1996; O'Brien 1997; CREATE 2000; CSC 2000; Moore 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Nicholson 2001). This might include allowing children and young people to choose trusted adults as supports or representatives (Crowley 1996; O'Brien 1997; Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; CSC 2000; Moore 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001). An important issue noted in some of the analysed literature in relation to this is to ensure that the participants have ongoing choice and control over the level of involvement of both their support person and themselves (Healy & Walsh 1997; Newell & Robinson 2000).

Also raised in the literature selection are the ideas that practitioners must:

- seek to discover how and where the specific children and young people who are involved will be interested in communicating, and subsequently best communicate (Rayner 1992; Long 1999; Henderson 2000; O'Kane 2000; Robinson 2001)
- seek to understand the issues from the children and young people's perspective (Cashmore & O'Brien 2001)
- alter methods of communication and practice to meet these findings, for example providing an appropriate amount of time for those participating to think about the issues and form opinions
- use concrete methods rather than abstract, and informal methods instead of formal ones (Healy & Walsh 1997; O'Kane 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

Safety

It is argued in some of the literature reviewed that an important factor to ensure maximum participation for children and young people relates to making sure that the participative environment and process feel safe and comfortable (CSC 2000; Robinson 2001). This includes ensuring relevant, open and safe access to communication and decision making structures, opportunities and processes throughout the entire course of action (CSC 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Singleton 2000). Also related to the issue of safety is the provision of a high level of feedback, where there is easy access for participants to ask questions, provide feedback and evaluate processes with support and without fear of reprisal (Lindsay 1995; O'Brien 1997; Spall, Testro & Matchett 1998; CSC 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

Resourcing

It has been maintained throughout some of the literature selection that an important factor in maximising participation relates to the provision of a realistic level of resources, supplied on the basis of various factors. These include appropriateness and relevancy to the project, extent to which participants will have educational opportunities, time and space to organise, promote and maintain children and young people's participation (Moore 2000; Newell & Robinson 2000; Singleton 2000; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001; Nicholson 2001), and the extent to which more than just a few representatives can be involved (O'Brien 1997).

There are many and varied issues and factors to be considered when attempting to create structures and processes where participation of children and young people is to be maximised. These issues are not merely related to practicalities, such as resourcing and participatory environments. They extend far deeper, into the very attitudes that adults have about and towards children and young people. It seems clear that fundamental to increased participation for children and young people is changing hierarchical systems of power, increasing the level of respect for children and young people and increasing acknowledgment of the value that children and young people bring to human society and culture.

Conclusion

This review has explored some of the literature concentrating on the issues surrounding children and young people's participation in the welfare sector. It has explored some of the patterns throughout history as well as what appear to have been the most significant social movements addressing the issues.

There has also been exploration of what the selection of literature notes about the Australian context. Claims in relation to the developments of children and young people's participation from the perspective of the New South Wales and Federal government were outlined. In conjunction to this the review revealed what the literature analysed indicates about what children and young people have to say about these developments. Section Two explored the same issues from the perspective of social researchers and commentators in New South Wales.

Section Three summarised five of the prominent models being utilised by people attempting to further children and young people's participation in the social and welfare sector. This section also highlighted and summarised the factors supporting children and young people's participation, as found in the literature selection.

Appendix

Meanings and parameters

Throughout the literature reviewed, participation has been defined as a general concept and also as specific to children and young people. The following section explores definitions of participation and outlines influential commentaries found to relate to children and young people's participation. It also profiles how different perspectives define and shape children and young people's participation in practice.

Some writers in the field argue that notions underpinning children and young people's participation can be generalised (Henderson 2000), while others argue that it is important to consider the specific context in which participation takes place (Mason & Urquhart 2001; Healy 1998). An example of this is where Healy (1998) argues that a generalised participation philosophy cannot be used in child protection contexts due to particular power differentials because of the statutory nature of the work. As a result of this difference of opinion, definitions for participation within the literature derive from broadly two bases. The literature selected contains some instances where a general definition for participation is related to children and young people and some where a definition has been formulated out of examination of some of the issues related specifically to participation with children and young people.

Participation, when spoken of in general terms, has been linked to disciplines such as community development and social planning (Hart 1992; Henderson 2000; Kjørholt 2002), as well as social movements such as the women's movement and rights movements (Hart 1992; Healy 1998). It has been defined generically as a participatory and collaborative *process* (Hart 1992; Crowley 1996; Healy & Walsh 1997; O'Brien 1997; Long 1999). Control, power and decision making about significant issues is meant to be shared evenly between participants so that benefit might spread to the individuals involved as well as throughout the community and society (Hart 1992; Crowley 1996; Corsaro 1997; Healy & Walsh 1997; Long 1999; Singleton 2000). In a general sense participation has also been linked to concepts such as the development of citizenship and cultural awareness (Hart 1992; Singleton 2000), the development of social competence, responsibility, ownership and motivation (Hart 1992; Rayner 1997; Bowen 1998), social justice, trust and respect, professional and service user mutuality (Healy 1998) and partnership between children, young people and adults (Corsaro 1997; Moore 2000).

In terms of participation with children and young people's explicitly, definition has come from different bodies of knowledge. Influential literature has come from the children's rights sector (Hart 1992; Long 1997, Henderson 2000), discussion on children and young people as consumers, for example when in out-of-home care services (O'Brien 1997), the child protection sector (Healy 1998), researchers (Henderson 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001) and from children and young people directly (Henderson 2000), although little attention has been paid to this group on most occasions (Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

Some have linked children and young people's participation to 'having a voice' or 'a say' in matters related to their lives (Hart 1992), adults learning about and respecting children and young people by listening to them (Long 1997; Roberts 2000) and adults being involved with them (Henderson 2000). Others have argued that participation is more thorough than that, being more about children and young people's overall involvement in a meaningful way in decision making that affects their lives (O'Brien 1997; Cashmore & O'Brien 2001).

While attempts have been made to define the parameters of the discourse it seems clear that there are many definitions being used as starting points for discussion within the literature. For example, some professionals have pointed out, particularly in relation to children and young people in out-of-home care, that being allowed to speak one's mind is not necessarily the same as being heard or allowed to participate (O'Brien 1997; Roberts 2000; Mason & Urquhart 2001). Alternatively there are times when the terms 'having a voice' and 'participation' are used interchangeably within the same discussion.

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