

Reconsidering “Pathways to Participation”



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Pathways to Participation

Harry Shier 2001

Levels of participation

5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

Openings > Opportunities > Obligations

Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?

Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?

Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.

Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes?

Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes?

Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes?

This point is the minimum you must achieve if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

3. Children's views are taken into account.

Are you ready to take children's views into account?

Does your decision-making process enable you to take children's views into account?

Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making?

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?

Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views?

Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?

1. Children are listened to.

START HERE →

Are you ready to listen to children?

Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?

Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?

Why is it so popular?



- Functional: Easy to put it to use in different situations
- Provides a series of questions that all workers can answer
- Logical and structured, but not academic or complicated
- Can be adapted to many different services and settings (elderly people, families, people living with HIV/AIDS)
- A single diagram that can easily be made into a hand-out!

*Swedish version published by
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Disability Federation.*

What's wrong with it?

The arrows on the original diagram were drawn for effect and simplicity, not for accuracy. The arrows indicate a single pathway, which contradicts the title. As the title suggests, there is not one pathway to participation, there are many, so the diagram is wrong.

It should look like this:

How the "Pathways to Participation" diagram should look if it reflected the reality of how organisations work.

Levels of participation

5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

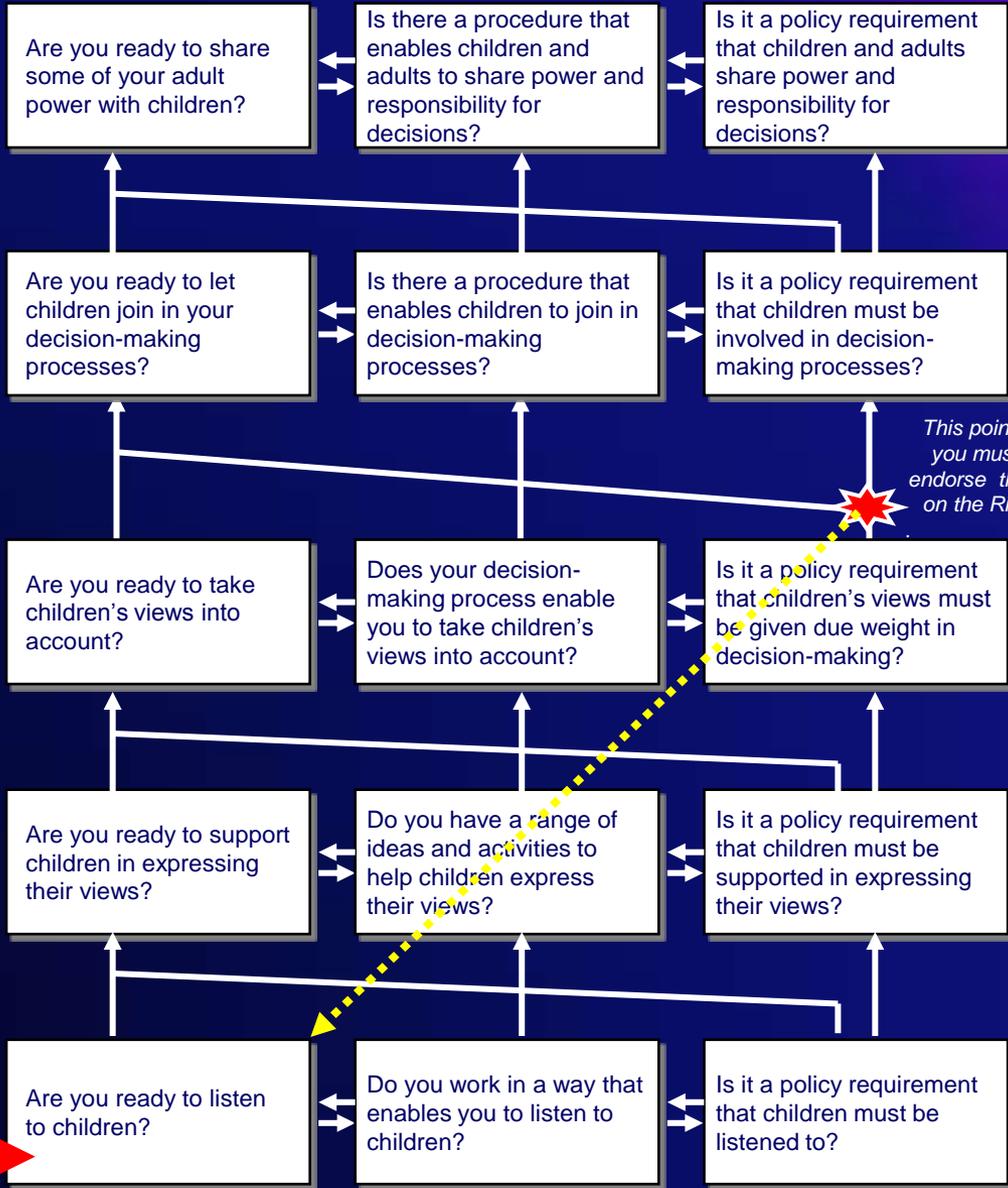
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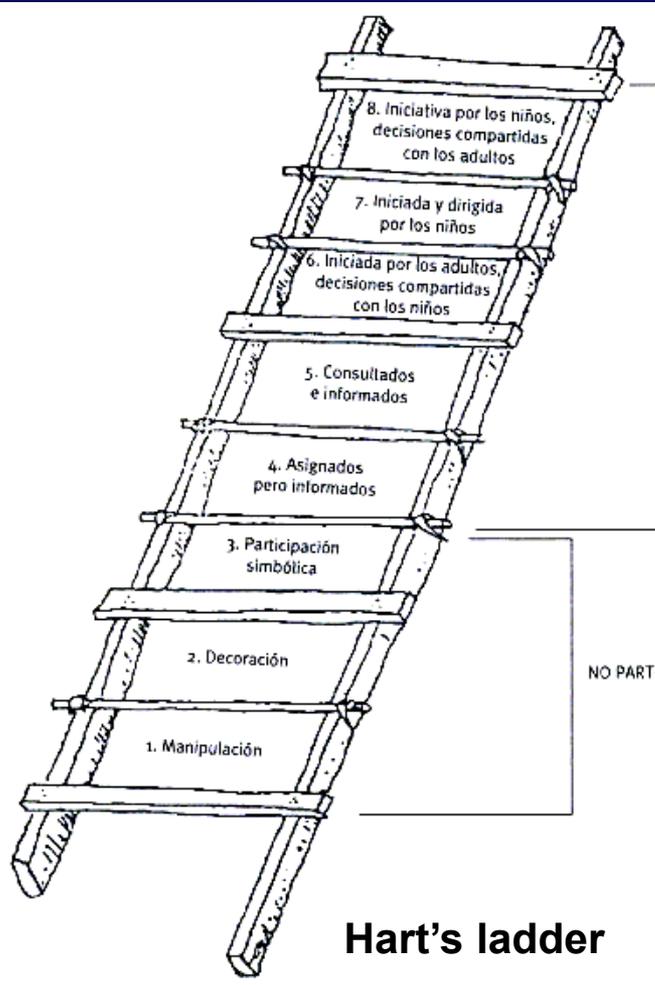
Openings > Opportunities > Obligations



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START HERE →

Is a hierarchy of levels a problem?



“Some commentators say that the hierarchical nature of Pathways to Participation pushes us to move relentlessly from the lower levels to the higher. This feature it shares with Hart’s 1992 *Ladder of Children’s Participation*, the best-known and longest-established conceptual model in this field. Others have commented that the ladder concept implies that higher levels are better ... and one must always aim to reach the top. As these commentators correctly point out, this is not always the case, and different levels of participation are appropriate in different circumstances”.

Quoted from: “Pathways to Participation Revisited” by Harry Shier, *Middle Schooling Review*, New Zealand, Issue 2, Nov. 2006

The Painter

Once upon a time there was a painter. He was good at his job and painted all kinds of things from houses and shops to bridges and railway stations. Besides his brushes, his most important tool was his ladder, because it enabled him to work at exactly the right height to do a good job, whether he was painting a small cottage or a huge factory.



One day a man passed by and said, "That ladder's all wrong. Let me fix it for you".

He proceeded to take the ladder to pieces, separating all the rungs. He threw away the uprights that held the ladder together, and laid out the rungs on the ground in a circle.



“That’s better”, he said, “Now all the rungs are equal”.

“But all the rungs were equal before”, said the painter, “I used them all for my different jobs. But at least before, they had a frame to connect them, and I could rely on them to get me to the right height for every job. Now what use are they?”





“But hierarchical structures are so passé”, said the man.

“But my ladder wasn’t a ‘hierarchical structure’”, replied the painter, “It was a perfectly useful tool that helped me do a better job, and you’ve ruined it.”

...And as far as I know, they are still arguing.