

Building Pathways to Participation

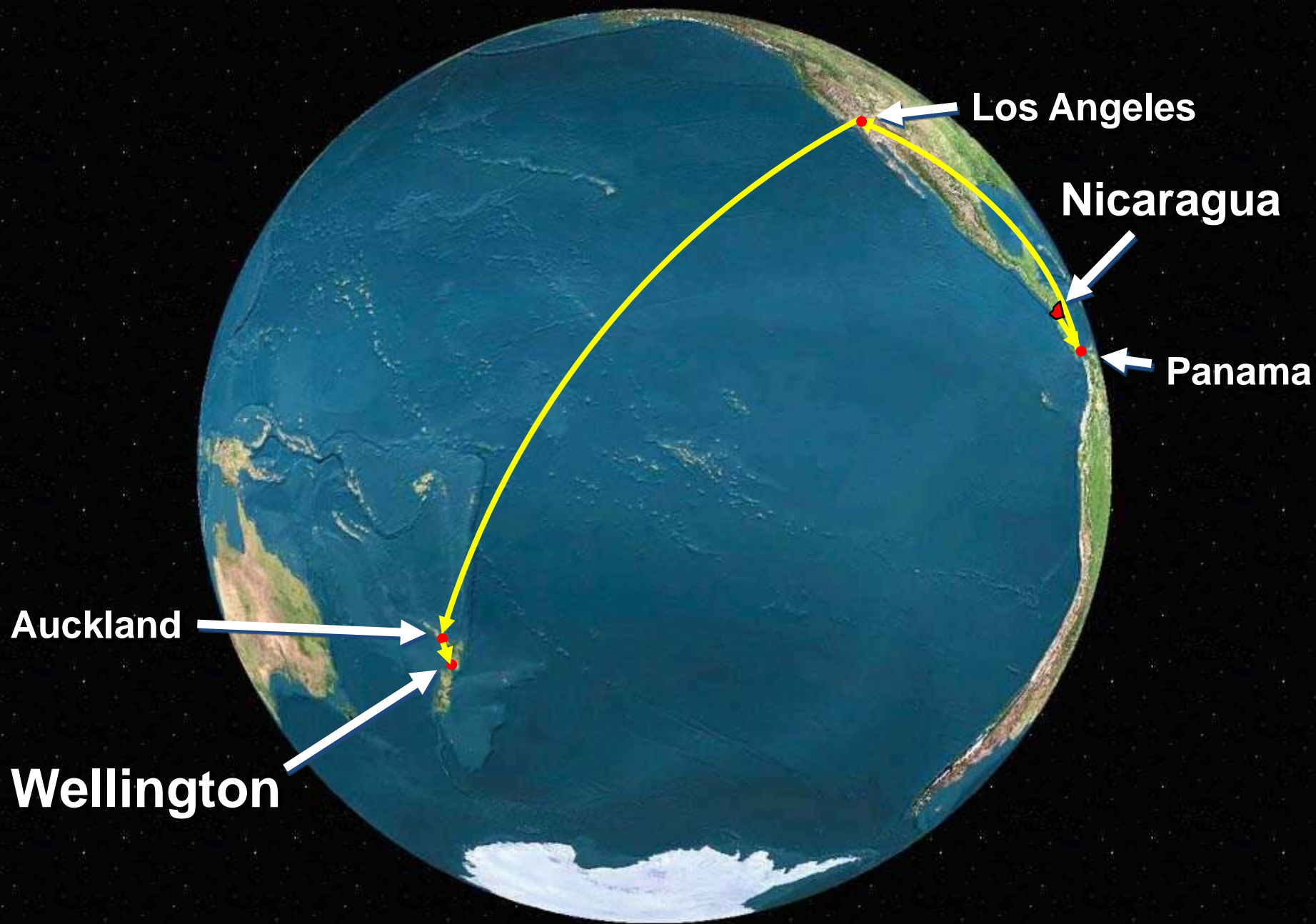


A personal reflection on learning from experience

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1. The importance of my early career working with children through play (England, 1976-88).
2. The “discovery” of children’s rights (Australia, 1993).
3. The creation of “Pathways to Participation” (England, 2001).
4. The revisiting of “Pathways to Participation” from a Nicaraguan perspective (Nicaragua, 2006).
5. “Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents” (Nicaragua, 2012).
6. The shooting of Malala (Pakistan, 2012)
7. From “navigating tensions” to “revealing harmonies” (New Zealand, 2015)

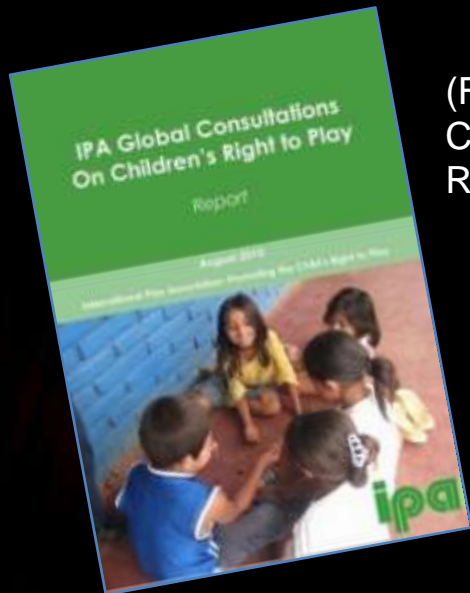
How rights-respecting relationships are healthy relationships in every sense, and vice versa.

1. Working with children at play in the UK: Children set the agenda

At play, children set their own agenda.

In play, adults have supporting, not directing roles (“Playwork” philosophy from UK).

“Adults never have to make children play, and only rarely do we have to help children play. Adults have to let children play. In other words, we have to put a stop to the worldwide violation of the child’s right to play.”



(From IPA Global Consultations Report, IPA 2010)

Respect to kiwi Donne Buck, influential play-worker, commentator and historian of play in the UK for many years.



All other professional adults tend to work to an agenda set by their professional ethos:

- ✓ Teachers want the child to do well in school;
- ✓ Social workers want the child to be looked after and protected;
- ✓ Doctors want the child to be healthy;
- ✓ Politicians want to be re-elected, etc.

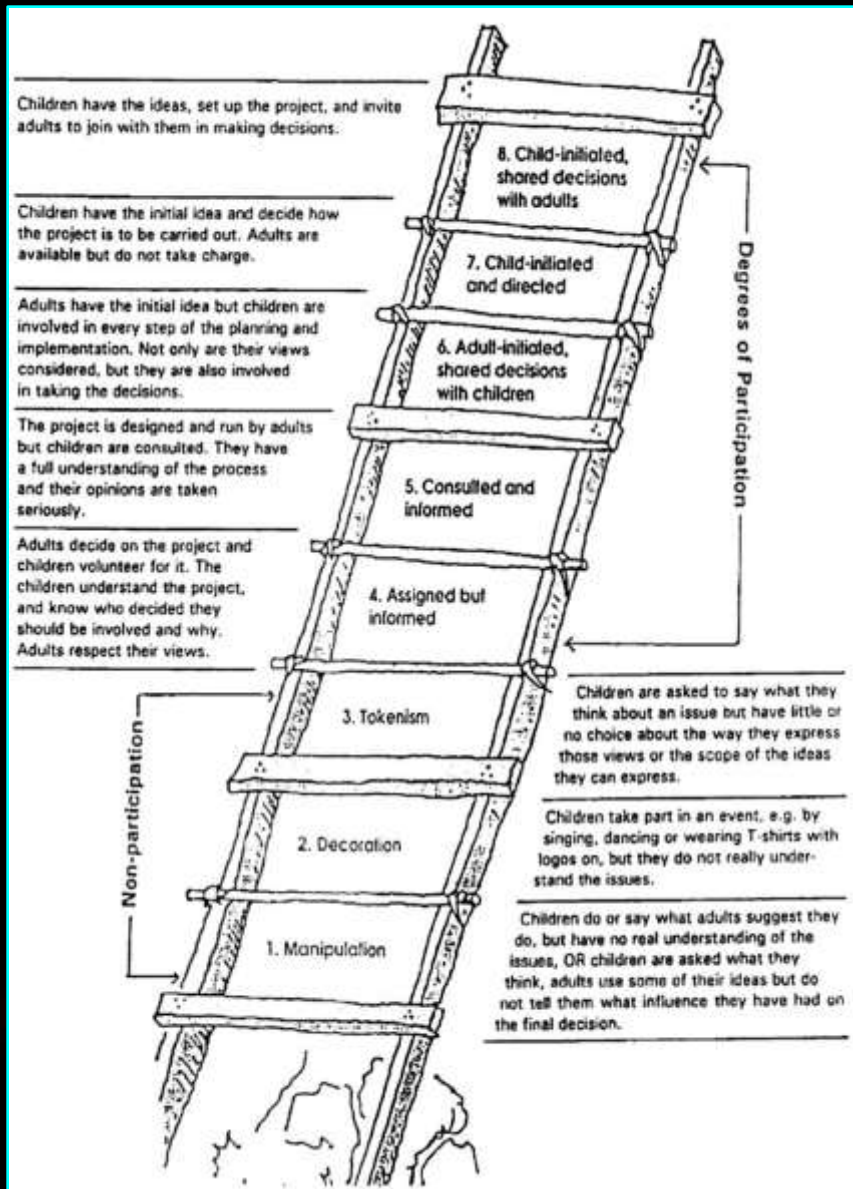
2. How I discovered children's rights:

The World Play Summit, Melbourne 1993



Whatever issue you are concerned about, children's rights provides both an underpinning and an overarching approach – which I have been committed to ever since (and will come back to in the final part of the presentation).

3. The creation of “Pathways to Participation” (published 2001)



When I started working on children's participation, the only tool we had was Roger Hart's "*Ladder of Children's Participation*" (Hart 1992).



Still the best-known and one of the most useful models for children and young people's participation.

For me this is still essential reading because Hart taught us to look out for the three types of false participation: "Manipulation", "Decoration" and "Tokenism".

Background: The Article 31 Children's Consultancy Scheme: Roots in the UK in the 1990s



There was a fashion for making programmes and institutions “child-friendly”, particularly in the arts, culture and recreation sectors.

There was growing awareness of Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: The right to play, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Expert advice was being sought on how to make things “child-friendly” (Shier, 2015).

So where do we find the experts?



Children are experts on what is child-friendly and what isn't, what works for children and what doesn't, what's fun and what's boring, what makes them feel included and what makes them feel excluded.



1998

Child consultants advising the management of the new Manchester City Art Gallery on how to create a child-friendly gallery.





1998

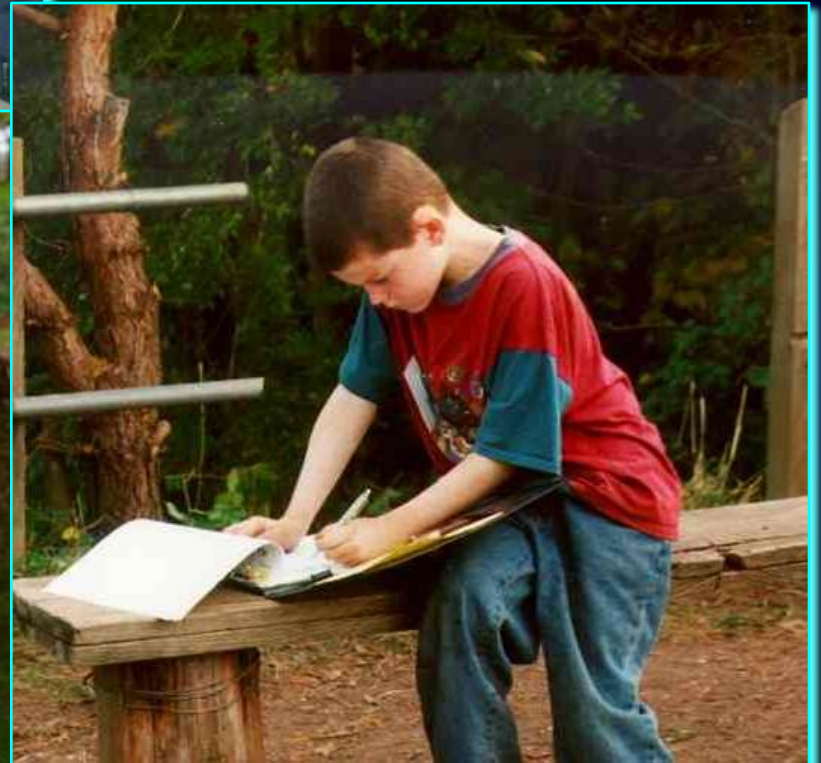
Child consultants commissioned by British Waterways to research the educational and recreational potential of the English canal network.





1999

Child Consultants from the New- Age Traveller community in the South-West of England commissioned by The Children's Society to advise on play and recreation opportunities for traveller children.





2000

Child Consultants advise senior management at the Tower of London on how to make it less boring.



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?

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?

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



Reflecting on this experience led to ...

Shier, H (2001). Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations.



*Swedish version published by **Handikappförbunden**, the Swedish Disability Federation.*

In the academic world, “Pathways to Participation” is by far the world’s most widely-cited journal article on the topic of children’s participation (Google Scholar citations).

In the real world it has been widely-translated and put to use in projects, programmes and policy documents all around the world.

Why?

- 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!

4. Move to Nicaragua



In 2001, at the same time as “Pathways to Participation” was published in the UK, I moved to Nicaragua ... A new life in a new country.

Child labour on coffee plantations (Shier, 2010)



The struggle for the right to education (Shier et al, 2013)





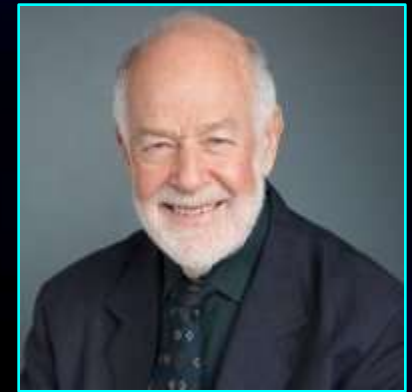
A new approach to participation: "Protagonismo Infantil"

Children and young people organise, advocate, take the initiative (Shier, 2014)



Five years went by, and I didn't think much about "Pathways to Participation" – until I got an email from Pat Nolan in New Zealand.

"Pathways to Participation Revisited" was published in "Middle Schooling Review", Issue 2, November 2006 (Shier 2006).



"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".

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.

5. Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents (TRCA)

CESESMA's approach to working with children and adolescents as researchers.

An evolution of the "Article 31 Children's Consultancy" approach from the UK in the 90s.



CESESMA (2012) *Learn to live without violence*. CESESMA, San Ramón, Nicaragua



The 4 transformations:

1. Empowerment of the young researchers.
2. Transformation of adult attitudes around them.
3. Transformation of those adults who support and facilitate through mutual learning.
4. Social change, policy change, improving conditions of life through research impact and advocacy.



Shier, H. (2015). Children as researchers in Nicaragua: Children's consultancy to transformative research.

6. The shooting of Malala Yousafzai, 9 October 2012 *



Does empowerment involve saying, “This is me. Recognise me. Listen to me”, or is it safer to keep yourself hidden?

Should Malala have been stopped from doing what she did for her own protection?

What role can adults take to support those who want to speak out and challenge their oppressive reality?

(See Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013)

* Unlike the other milestones in this account, this is not part of my own story and I had no part in the shooting of Malala. But I have made it part of my narrative, as it has influenced me profoundly, and because Malala is a hero and I want people to know and reflect on her story.

7. From “Navigating Tensions” to revealing harmonies: The Yin-yang approach

In 2008 I did research comparing children and young people’s participation in UK and Nicaragua, and found 15 “tensions”, most of which were common to both societies.

8 of them were characterised as:

“Tensions between participation as social control and participation as empowerment”.

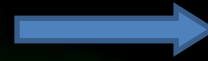
My focus was on how adult professionals could learn to “navigate the tensions”.



Shier, H (2010). Children as Public Actors: Navigating the Tensions.

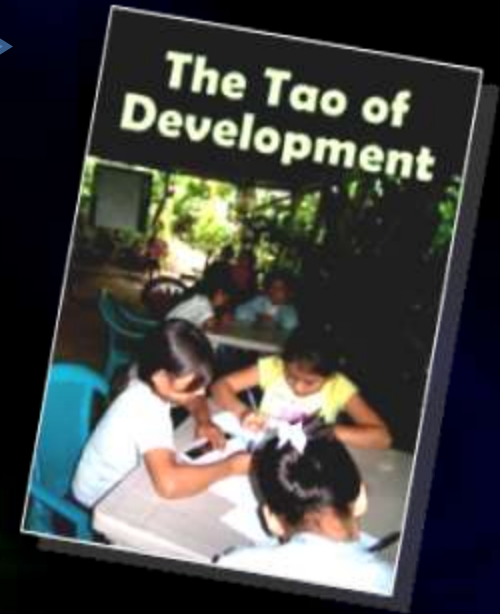
Then in 2010, came CESESMA's research report:

“Policy advocacy by children and young people as active citizens in Nicaragua”.

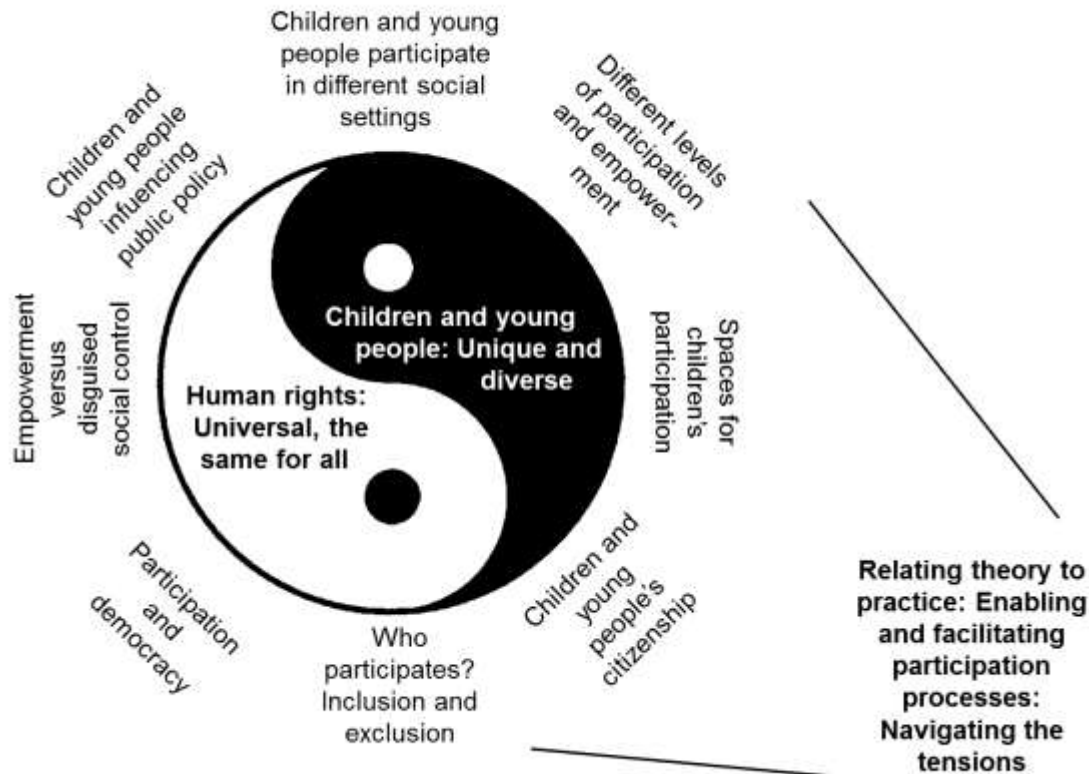


Influenced by the *Tao Te Ching*:

Think of opposites not as polarities or disjunctions, but as complementarities, which should be in harmony.



[My own version of the Tao Te Ching]



Relating theory to practice: Enabling and facilitating participation processes: Navigating the tensions

This diagram is in:
Shier et al (2014). How
children and young people
influence policy-makers:
Lessons from Nicaragua.

I need to go back and re-write "*Navigating the Tensions*":

Turn the tensions into completed complementarities, reveal the harmonies.

Example:

Should we think of children and young people as citizens now or as the citizens of tomorrow?

Pointless question. They are both. The two ideas complement each other.





Another example:

Should we engage with children and young people on policy questions that concern us, or should we let them decide the issues to work on?

Pointless question. We need to do both. Both are important ways of engaging with children and young people, and the two ideas complement each other.

Another example:

Should we think of children and young people as “service users” or as social activists?

Pointless question. They can be both, sometimes both at the same time. The two ideas complement each other.



Another example:

Do we need to involve everyone in our project, or should we identify a small group of interested and committed young people?

It depends what we're doing. Consultations need to include everyone and exclude no-one. Action projects may need smaller groups. Participation is voluntary and it depends who's interested, but everyone must have an equal opportunity to sign up, without discrimination.

Again, the two ideas complement each other.



Last example:

In participation work with children and young people, which is more important, the process or the product (outcome)?



Pointless question. The two aspects mutually determine each other. The two ideas complement each other.

Concluding thoughts: Building Pathways to Healthy Relationships

What has this experience (nearly 40 years in total) taught me about building pathways to healthy relationships - now and into the future?



- Learn about,
- practice
- and trust in
a human-rights-based
approach.

As long as you apply it consistently, this will work for whatever issue you are concerned with.

“A human rights-based approach to building healthy relationships for young people” works like this...

(Note: All the rights referred to here are in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and therefore the NZ government is duty-bound to guarantee them to all children and young people under 18).

- If a relationship subjects you to discrimination (of any kind), it is a violation of your right (Article 2 – a basic principle of the CRC);
- If a relationship involves powerful people acting against your best interests, it is a violation of your right (Article 3 – another basic principle of the CRC);
- If a relationship places limits on your personal development, it is a violation of your right (Article 6 – a third basic principle of the CRC);
- If your voice is not heard and your views are not taken into account in a relationship, it is a violation of your right (Article 12 – the fourth basic principle of the CRC).



Besides these four basic principles:

- In your relationship with your parents or guardians, if they fail to provide appropriate guidance on the exercise of your rights, they are failing in their duty to you (CRC Article 5);
- Unlawful interference in your relationship with your family, or separation from them, is a violation of your right (Article 8);
- If a relationship prevents you from expressing yourself freely, it is a violation of your right (Article 13);
- If a relationship denies you freedom of thought, conscience or religion, it is a violation of your right (Article 14);
- If you are denied the opportunity to gather together and socialise or organise with others, it is a violation of your right (Article 15);
- If you aren't given any privacy, it is a violation of your right (Article 16);



Photo from CESESMA's youth drama project



- If a relationship places you at risk of violence, injury, abuse or exploitation, it is a violation of your right (Article 19);
- If you are unable to be with your family, and do not receive special help and support to find an alternative, it is a violation of your right (Article 20);
- If a relationship means you are required to do harmful or exploitative work, it is a violation of your right (Article 32);
- If a relationship places you in contact with illegal drugs, it is a violation of your right (Article 33);
- If a relationship places you at risk of sexual exploitation or abuse, it is a violation of your right (Article 34).

In short: Relationships where human rights are mutually respected are HEALTHY relationships in every sense.



And that's a human rights-based approach to building healthy relationships for young people.

THE END



Thanks for listening

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(All except the ones with asterisks are available at www.harryshier.net)