

Whose agenda?



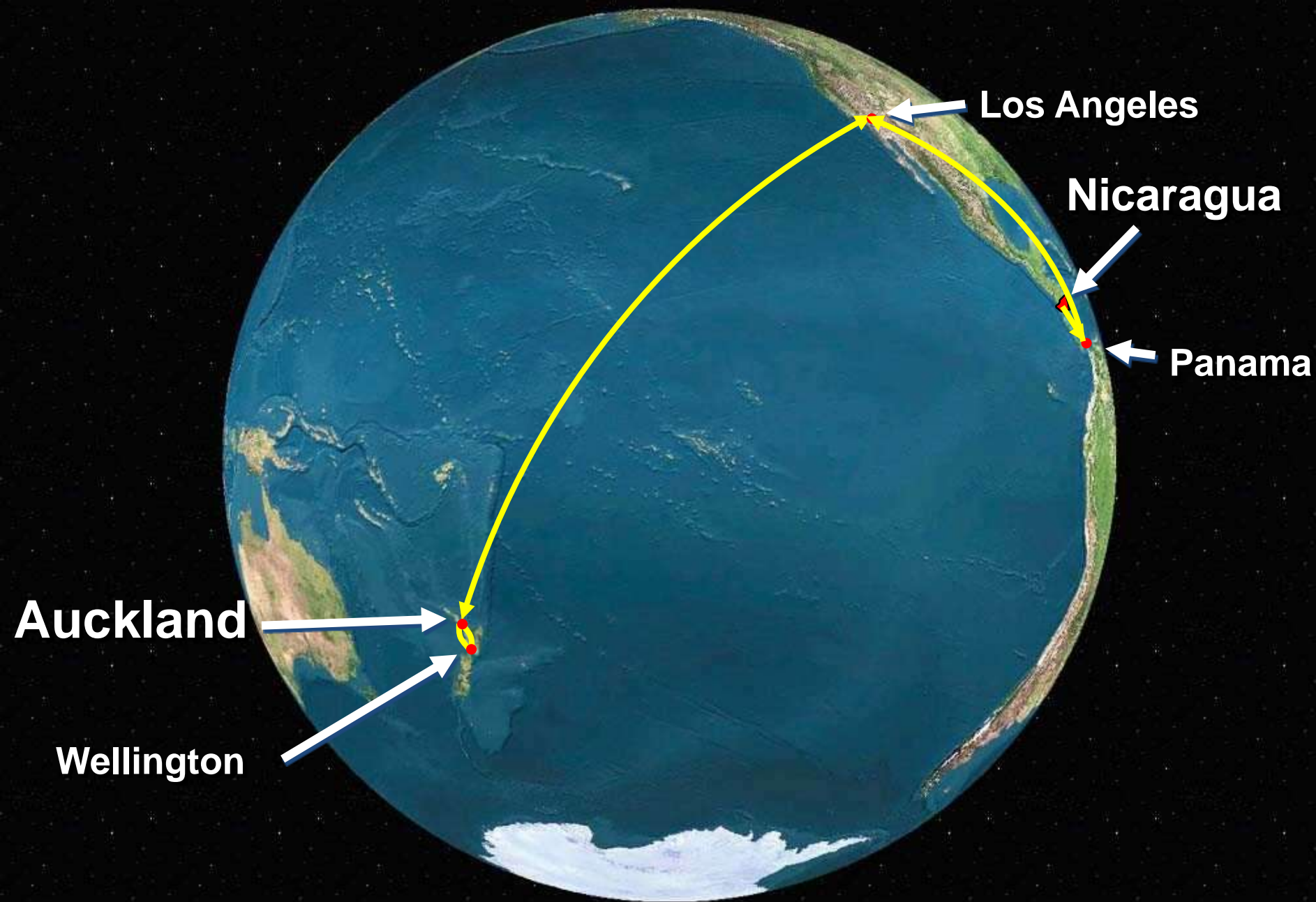
Seeking the balance between engaging young people in (adult-planned) public policy initiatives, and supporting young people's action on their own agendas for challenge and transformation

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...and the Centre for Children's Rights, Queen's University Belfast





Overview



“Whose agenda?": Seven sources of reflection:

1. Working with children at play
2. The Nicaraguan experience: Protagonismo infantil
3. Children and young people as public actors: Navigating the tensions
4. Lansdown's typology of participation
5. The Youth Parliament model
6. Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents
7. Revealing harmonies: The Yin-yang model

Putting it together: Implications for policy and practice

1. Working with children at play

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, Shier [ed], 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. In 2001 I moved to Nicaragua.



A new life in a new country...

...and a new approach to children and young people's participation:
"Protagonismo Infantil"



“Children's protagonism”, or children as social activists: being pro-active, organising, advocating, taking the initiative (Shier, 2014).



In CESESMA's experience, many stay with us: Promoting organic agriculture, volunteering on the children's reading project, in youth theatre groups, the children's radio project, equal rights for girls groups, or our "new masculinities" project (Shier, 2010b).



Others go their own way:
Organise sports leagues, folk-
dance groups, small businesses,
some join the Sandinista Youth
Movement, at least one became
an evangelical pastor.

All are forms of **social activism**.
Who is to judge their worthiness?

3. Children and young people as public actors: Navigating the tensions

My 2008 research comparing child/youth participation in the UK and Nicaragua found 15 “tensions”, most of which were common to both societies, including:

1. *The child as consumer vs. the child as activist*
2. *Government agendas vs. children’s agendas*
3. *Consultation vs. shared decision-making*
4. *“Invited spaces” vs. “popular spaces”*
5. *Reactive participation vs. pro-active participation*
6. *Manipulated voices vs. autonomous voices*
7. *Legitimising the existing power structure vs. challenging it.*
8. *A public service framework vs. a rights framework*

All the above can be characterised as:

“Tension between participation as a form of social control and participation as empowerment”



“From users and choosers to makers and shapers”

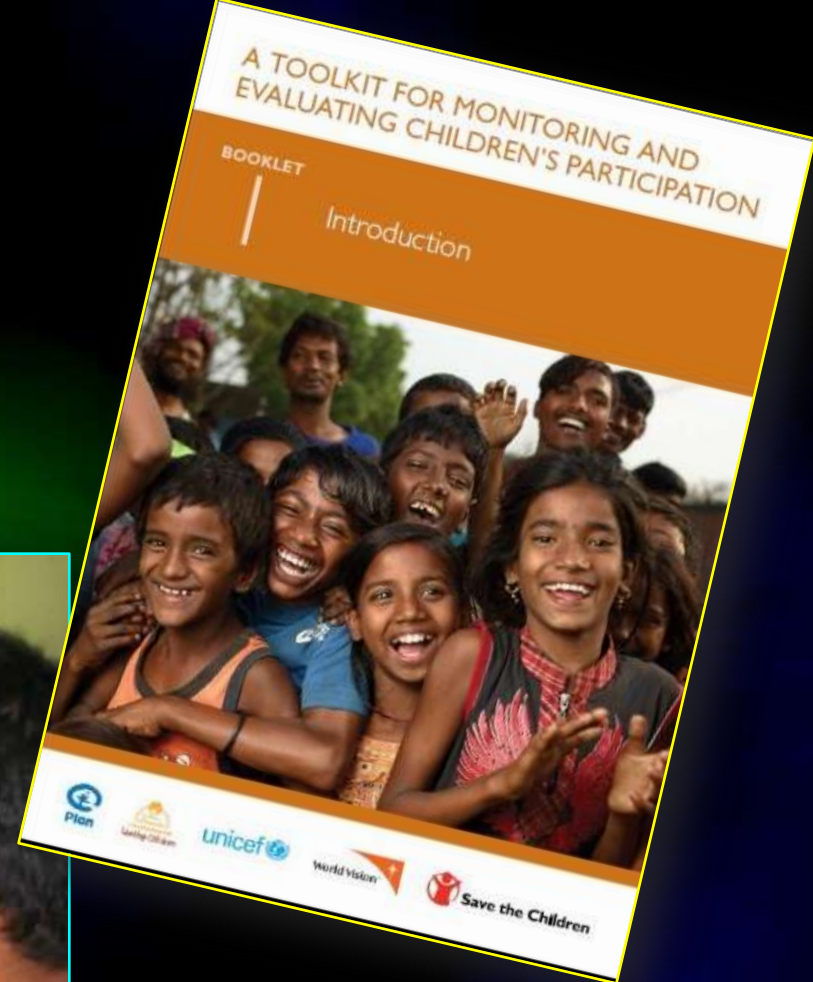


Cornwall A. and Gaventa J. 2001. From users and choosers to makers and shapers: Repositioning participation in social policy.

4. Lansdown's typology of participation

Three significant categories of child and youth participation:

- ☐ Consultative
- ☐ Collaborative
- ☐ Child/youth-initiated and directed



From:

"A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation"
(Lansdown and O'Kane 2014).

CESESMA worked with Save the Children piloting and validating this international resource.

5. The UK Youth Parliament model

In the UK, the Youth Parliament decides on its national campaign each year.

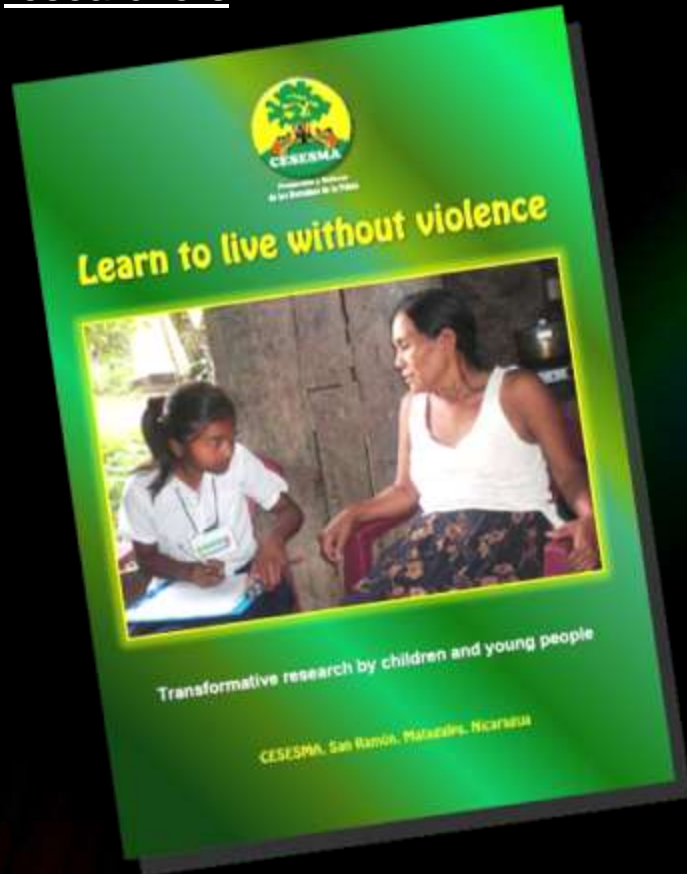
The 2015 campaign is “A Living Wage for All”.

They make the decision. Adult support workers are there to help them run the campaign.



6. Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents (TRCA)

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



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 trans-
formative research.

An important factor in achieving impact:

They decide what to research:

Identifying problems faced in their communities where **new knowledge** from research could help find solutions.

For example a team of young researchers from the community of Yúcul decided to research the problem of alcohol and violence in their community....



Channel 2 Nicaragua evening news, November 2011

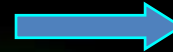


You can't see the video in this PDF, but I will put a link to it on www.harryshier.net/videos.htm.

7. Revealing harmonies: The Yin-yang approach

CESESMA research report (2010):

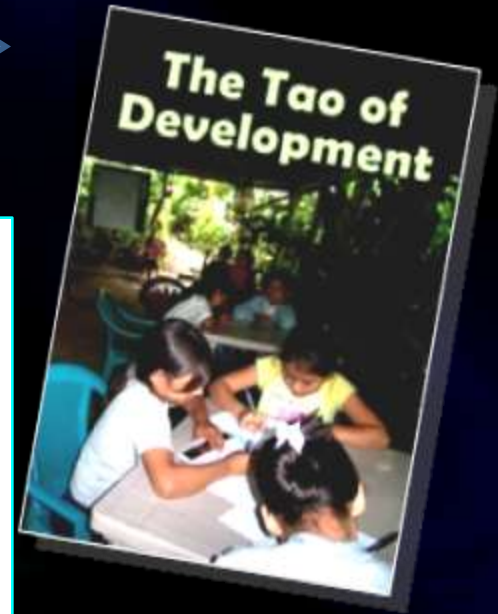
“Policy advocacy by children and young people as active citizens in Nicaragua”.



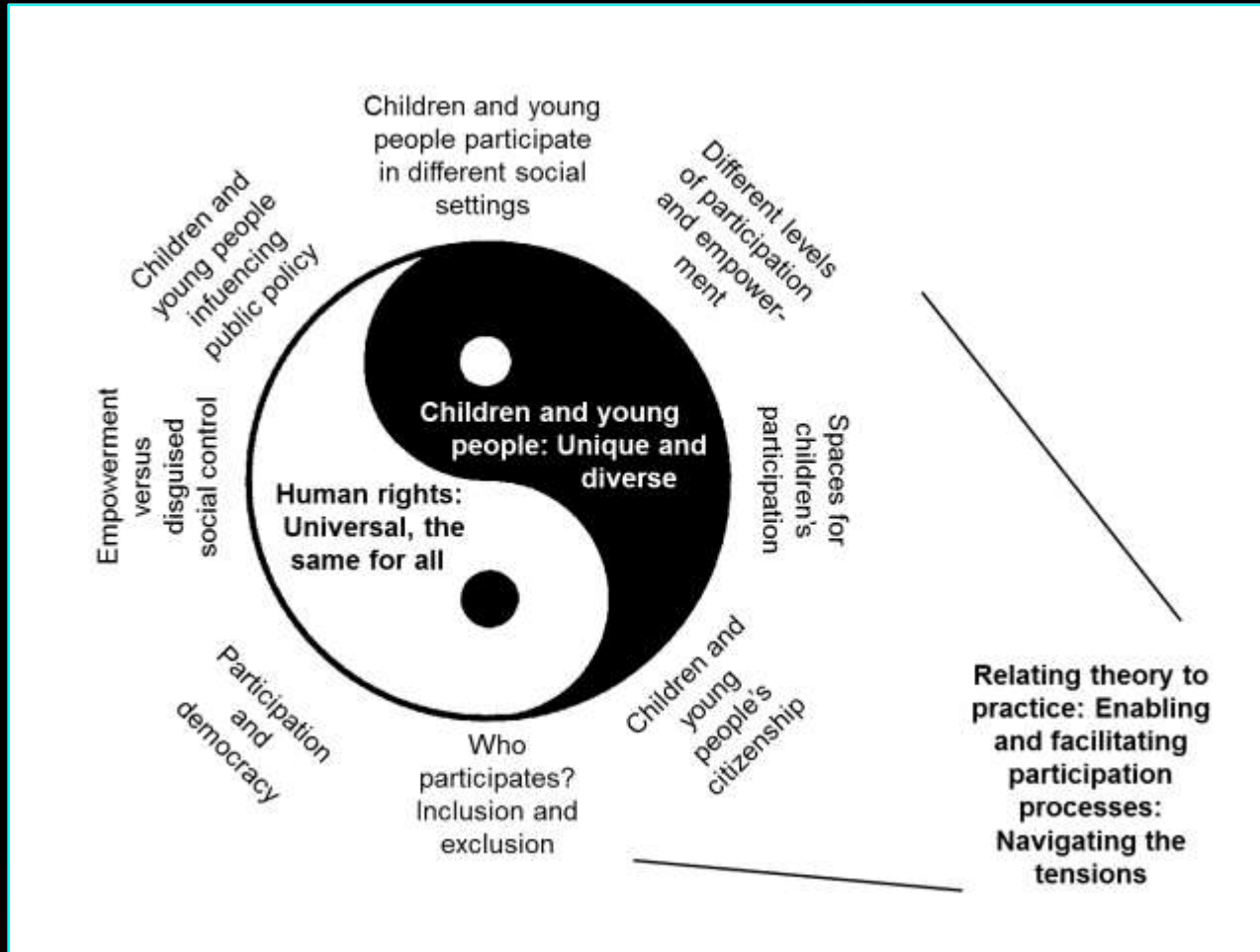
This is all in Spanish, but you can find a summary in English, including the Yin-yang diagram, in: Shier et al (2014). How children and young people influence policy-makers: Lessons from Nicaragua.

Influenced by my study of 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 – available at www.harryshier.net]



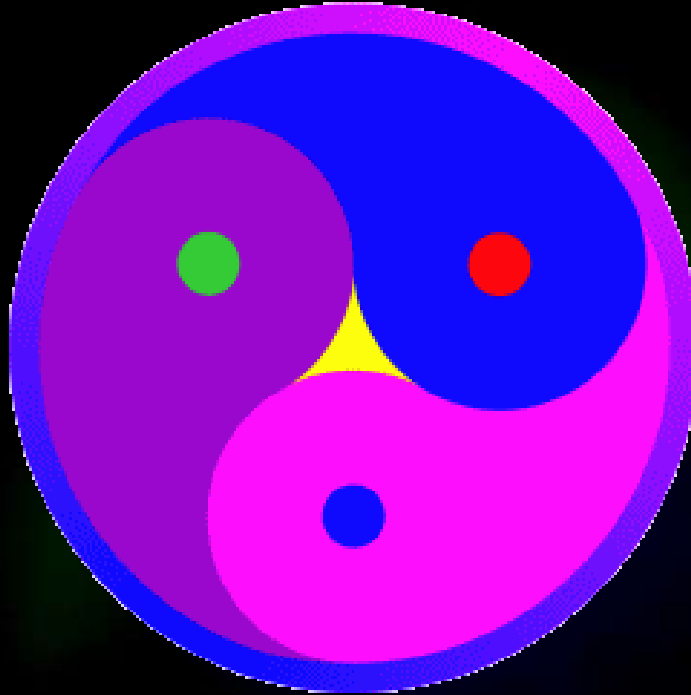
Now I need to go back and re-write "*Navigating the Tensions*":

Turn the tensions into completed complementarities, reveal the harmonies.

Putting it together: Implications for policy and practice

Using Lansdown's typology...

We need to consult
young people – find
out their views

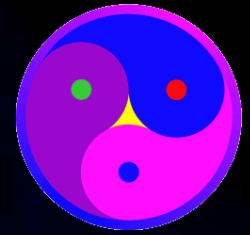


We need to collaborate
with young people:
engage with and
understand them

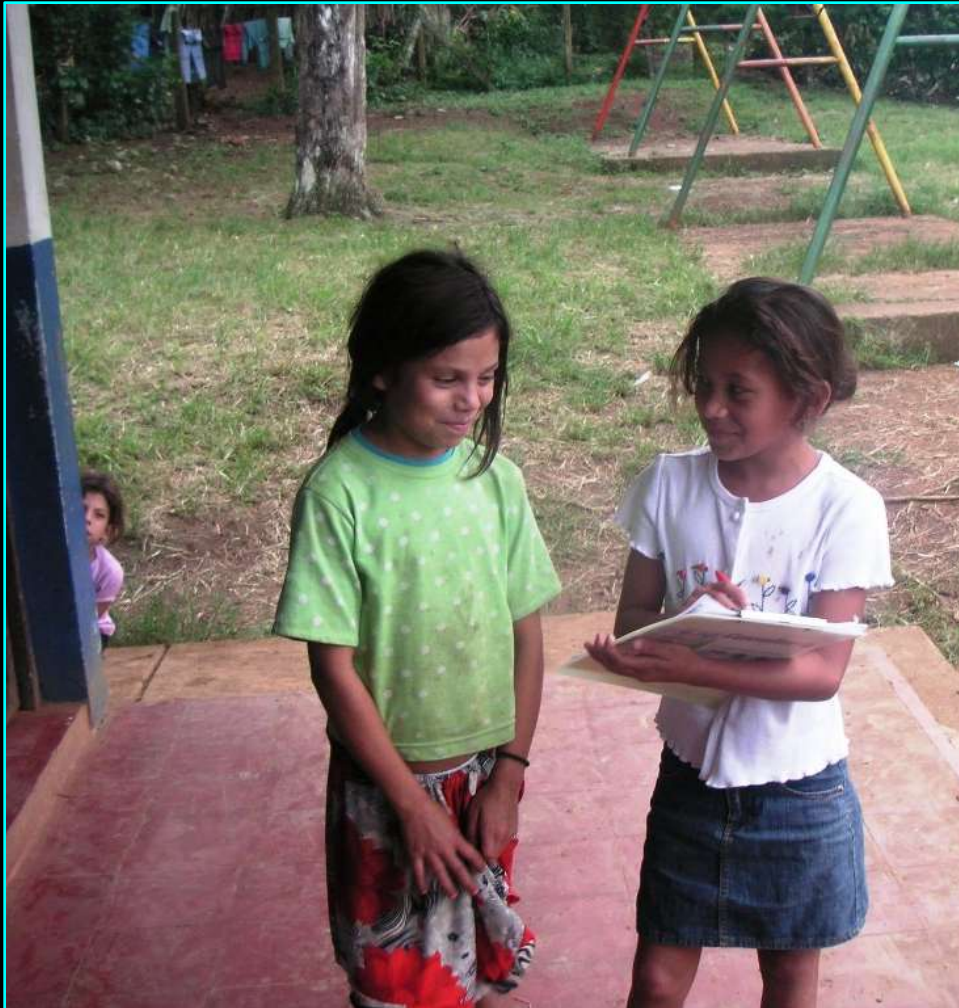
We need to let young people take
their own initiatives and give
them the support they need.

No tension between these: They work in harmony

Putting it together: Implications for policy and practice



Consultation



We need to know the views and opinions of young people, as without these we cannot develop the right policies and programmes.

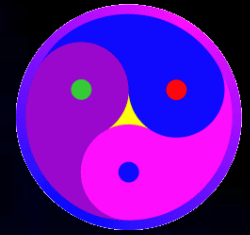
So we need to engage children and young people in our consultative processes. We need to get beyond superficial questionnaire answers, understand how different young people understand problems and generate ideas.

We need to learn how to reach **all** children and young people, so all voices can be included, none are excluded.

Who are the hardest to reach (or the easiest to ignore)?

It need not stop at adults consulting children and young people. Children and young people can work with us on consultation activities: Peer-to-peer consultations.

Putting it together: Implications for policy and practice



Collaboration

So we also need to be able to collaborate with children and young people, and work in partnership with them.

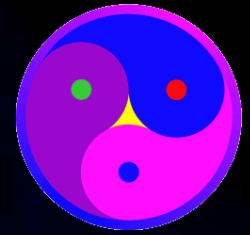
Again this means getting them interested, getting them on board, but in a more committed and challenging way than when we only want to consult them to find out their views.

All such participation must be voluntary. Children and young people can opt out of collaboration with us, but they must not be excluded by discriminatory practice.

Who gets the chance to collaborate?



Putting it together: Implications for policy and practice



“Protagonismo”

We will always have issues we want to explore with children and young people, and hope to engage them on.

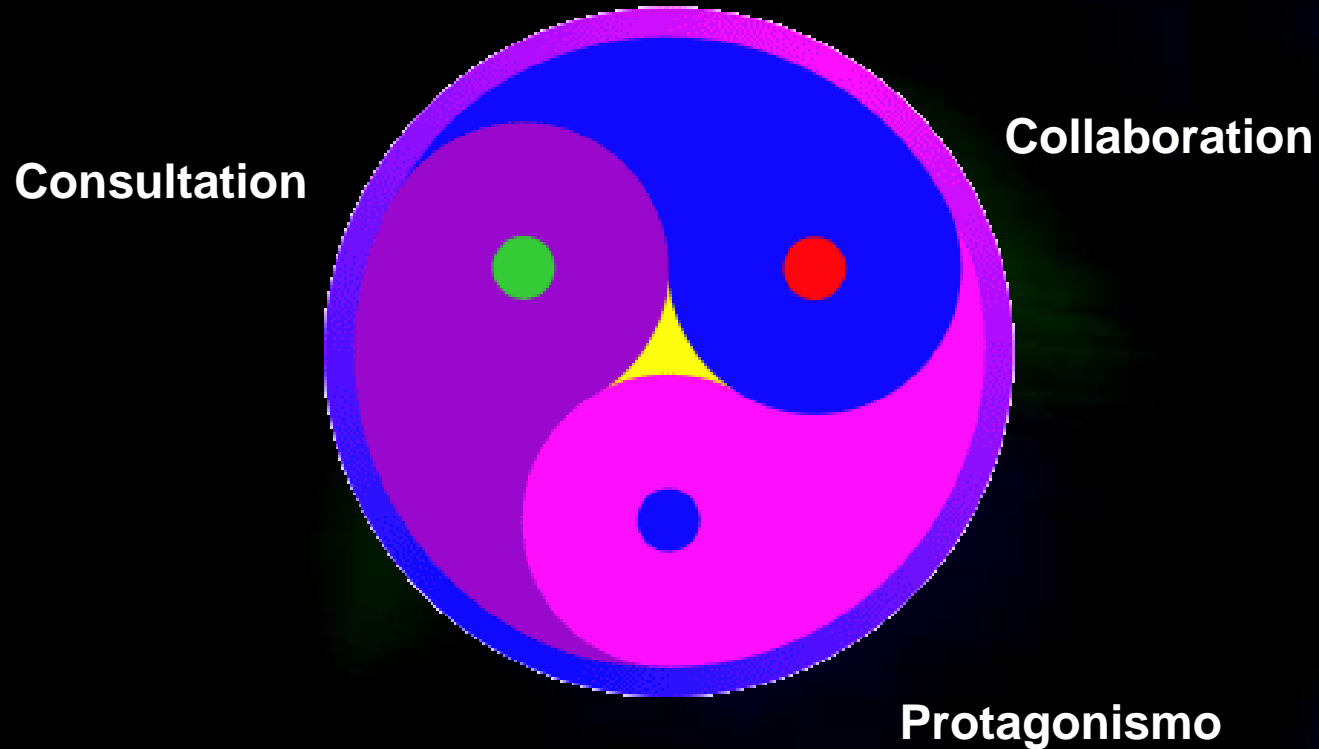
We must also clear space for **their issues**, hear what is on **their agenda**, make support and resources available for them to work on their issues.

Support for advocacy, campaigning, media work (old and new), protest.

When young people take action on their own issues, what if we don't agree?

Where are the limits to what we can support and resource?

Putting it together: Implications for policy and practice



Can we work with all three in harmony?

THE END



Thanks for listening

References

Except where a download link is given below, all are available from www.harryshier.net .

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