

Children's voices and children's rights: Participation, Empowerment and "Protagonismo"



Harry Shier, CESESMA, San Ramón, Matagalpa, Nicaragua

www.harryshier.net

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Overview

1. Participation as the child's right
2. Conceptual models
3. Empowerment
4. "Protagonismo infantil"

Participation as a child's right

Article 12: The child's right to freely express views on all matters that affect him or her, and to have these views given due weight when decisions are made;

Article 13: Freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, through any media of the child's choice;

Article 14: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion;

Article 15: Freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Article 12 is of paramount importance as it is a "General Principle" of the Convention.



Some points on Article 12 ...

1. "Capable of forming a view..."

Children who don't speak have the right to be heard.



This photo from a Nicaraguan coffee plantation was used on Trócaire's Lenten money-box in 2006

2. "All matters affecting the child"

In the school situation, this includes the content of the curriculum and the quality of the teaching.

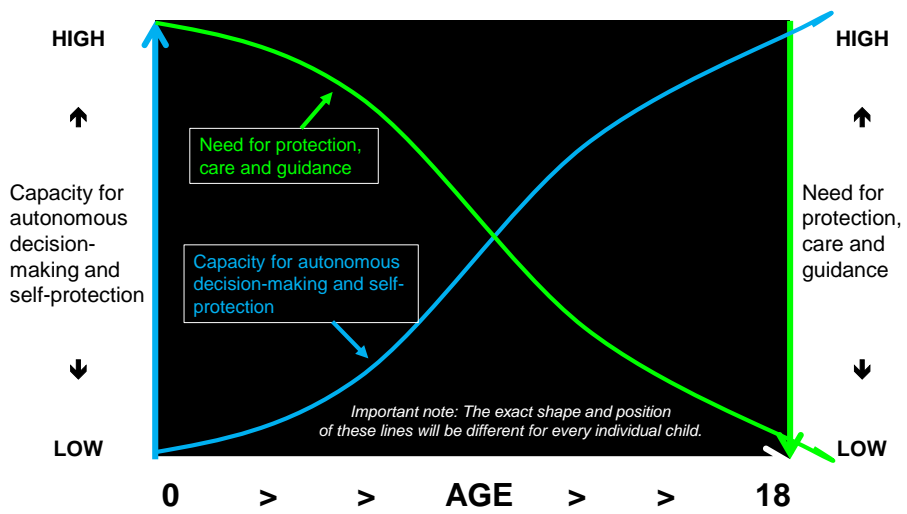


3. "Given due weight..."

"Children must be given their say, but they do not always have to be given their way". *Penelope Leach*



4. Evolving capacities



5. "A right, in its fundamental sense, is power held by the powerless"
Katherine Federle (1994)



6. Recognising student voice as a child's right, there is no need to further justify its practice and promotion.

When one has the right to do something, one is not obliged to give any justification in order to be permitted to do it.

However, benefits are now known to include:

- Improving the quality of schools;
- Improving academic outcomes;
- Reducing anti-social behaviour such as bullying;
- Enhancing social and political education;
- Increasing teacher satisfaction.
- Empowerment of children and young people; enabling them to develop a role as agents of social change rather than subjects of social control.



Conceptual models that have helped adults become more effective in supporting and facilitating participation

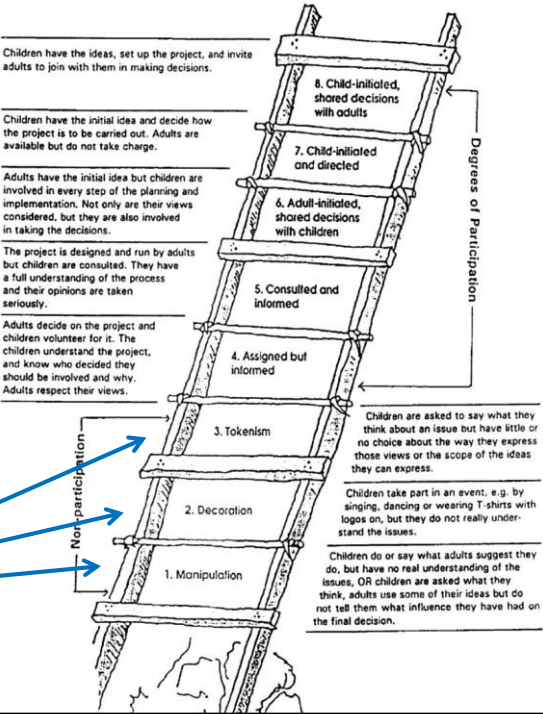
"Essentially all models are wrong, but some of them are useful"
George Box



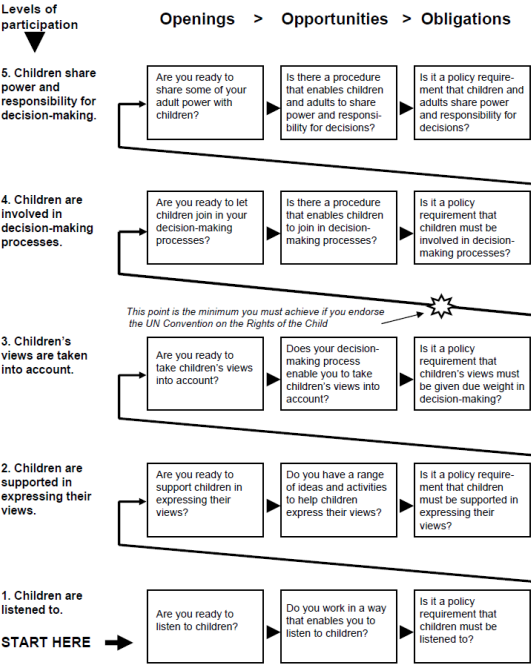
1. Roger Hart's
Ladder of Child
Participation
(1992)



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".



2. Harry Shier's
"Pathways to
Participation"
(2001)



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 rail-way 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.

3. Laura Lundy’s model of “Space, Voice, Audience and Influence” (2007)



4. Gerison Lansdown's three types of participation (2011)



Consultation:

Is when adults ask children for their views, and children are not involved beyond this.



Child-led (*protagonismo*):

Activities initiated, organised or run by children and young people themselves (adults may still provide support, though not always necessary).



Collaboration:

Is when adults and children and young people work together, sharing roles and responsibilities in planning and carrying out an activity.



But there are two sides to each one...

Consultation:

The powerful can listen to and take on board children and adolescents' views and this can have a positive influence on policy-making etc.



OR: They can go through the motions of a consultation and totally ignore the results.

Collaboration:

Adults can facilitate a process in which children/adolescents and adults genuinely work together sharing roles and responsibilities according to their abilities.



OR: Adults can use their greater power and access to resources to manipulate the whole process to get whatever they want at the end of it (especially with younger children who have less experience).

Children and adolescents' pro-active participation:

Adults can support children and adolescents' independent initiatives: provide resources (transport, food, place to meet etc.), help them get access to the powerful who make decisions and control purse-strings.

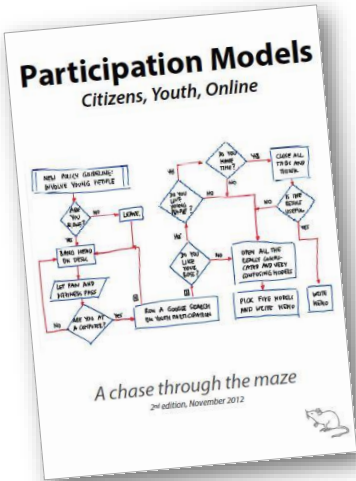
OR: Adults can either completely ignore the children's efforts, or worse, they can attempt to silence them or even punish them for getting out of line.



So ... it's not that one kind of participation is good and another kind is bad.
They all have a good and bad side.

And any kind of participation can be rendered meaningless if the basic requirements are not met.

Want more models?




Andreas Karsten's collection of participation models (2012)



Another collection from the 360° project (Grace and Grace, 2017)

CESESMA's model of Empowerment



(first appeared in Spanish, CESESMA, 2010).

Empowerment

Attitude

- Recognise your own ability.
- Feel capable of taking action and influencing the outcome.
- Recognise yourself as a human rights holder, able to defend your rights.
- Ready to join forces with others to achieve a goal.
- High self-esteem.
- Willing to face a challenge.

Capability

- Ability to do things.
- Backed by knowledge, skills, information etc.
- Autonomy: Able to think and act for yourself as well as in a team.
- Quick to learn: from others and from your own experience.

Conditions y oportunidades

A context that favours my "ability to do things", for example:

- Being part of an organisation or group with other children and young people.
- Having the support of parents, friends and family.

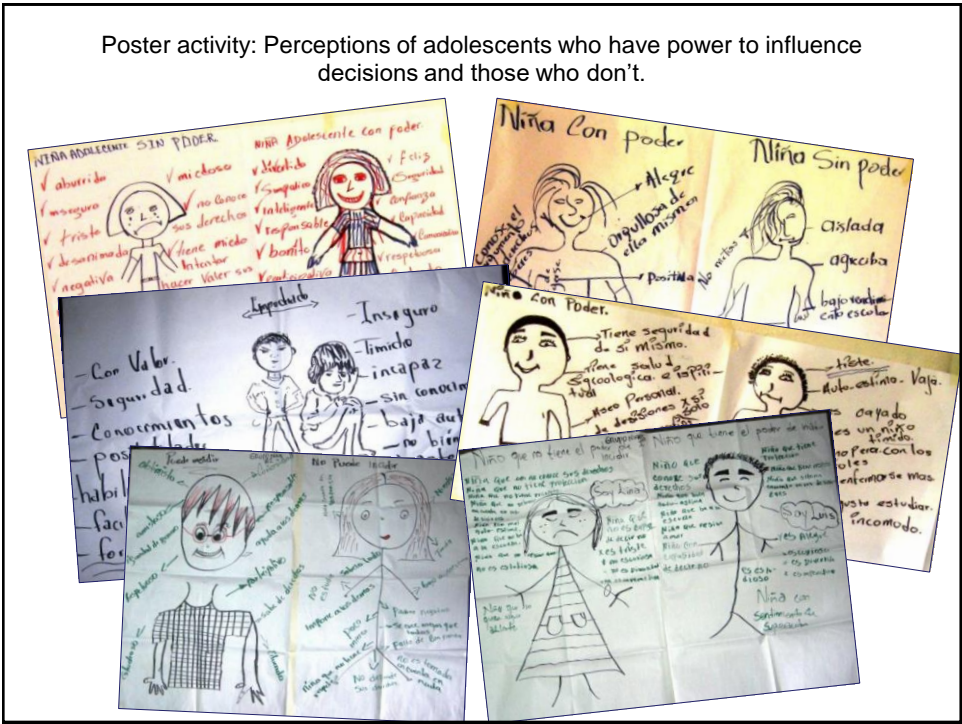
EMPOWERMENT



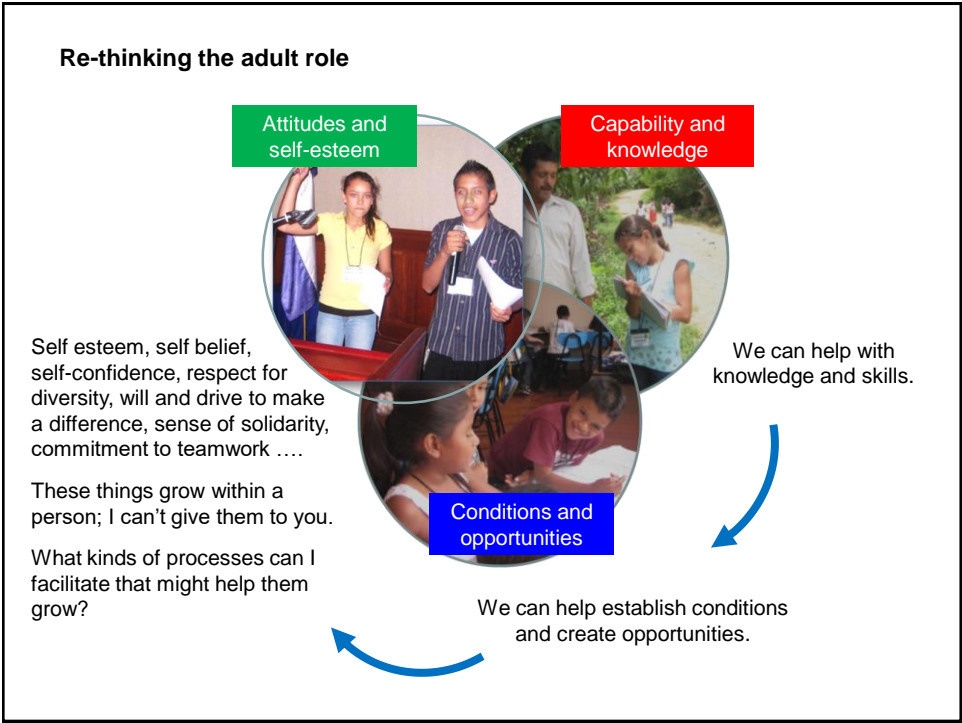
August 2017, working with adolescents in Nicaragua to better understand these ideas

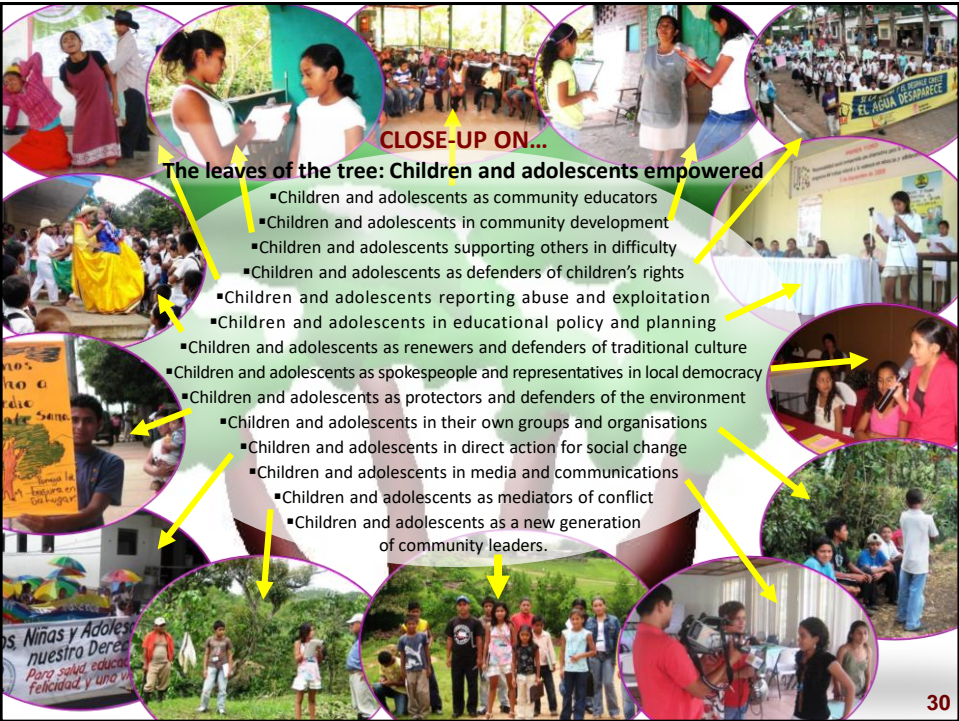
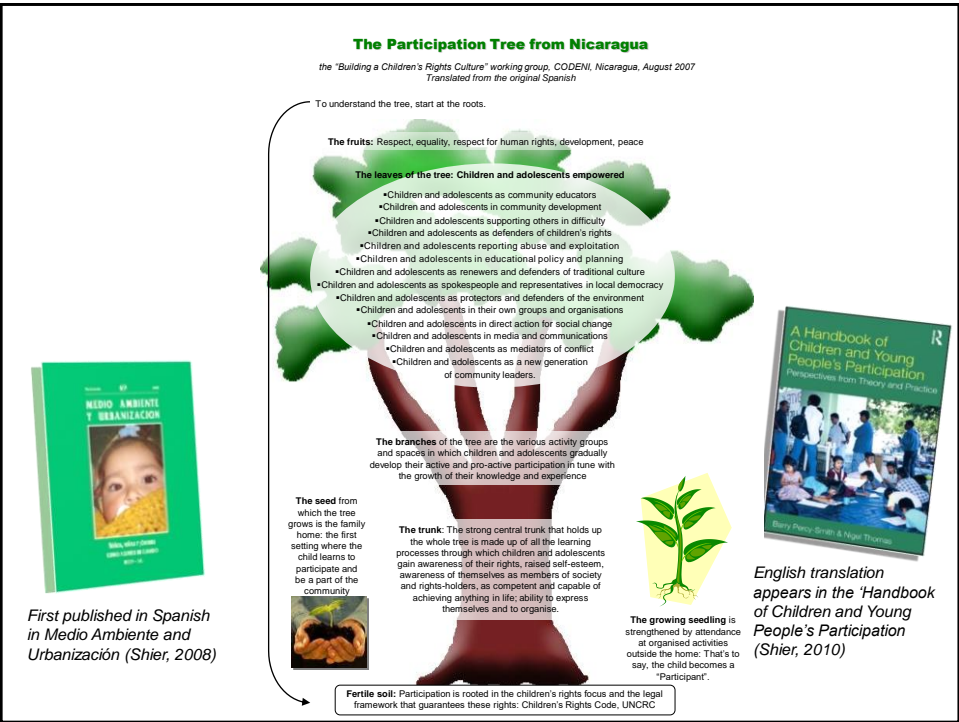


Poster activity: Perceptions of adolescents who have power to influence decisions and those who don't.



Re-thinking the adult role





- How much do children organise and act without any adult involvement?
- How much do we know about it?
- What do we think of it when it happens?
- What roles are adults taking: Facilitating or manipulating? Visible or hidden?



Finally, one from my family album: Birmingham, England, 1997...



Joe Shier, then aged 16

Subcultural youth movements: Another example of adolescents organising themselves without any adult involvement...

Is youth rebellion acceptable "up to a point"?



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