Models for real participation

My story in six chapters

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OVERVIEW

Many of the photos used in this presentation are from CESESMA in Nicaragua. They are used here with permission, and with informed consent of the children and young people featured.

"All models are wrong, but some are useful"
(George Box, 1979)
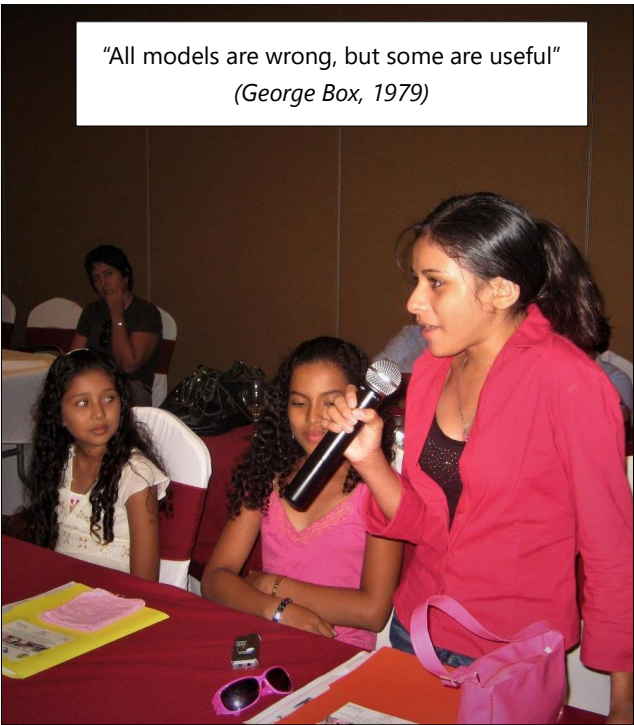
CHAPTER 1: 1993-1996
BEGINNINGS

THE LADDER OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

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Melbourne 1993, the World Play Summit

I started my career in the 1970s, working on Adventure playgrounds in the UK.

Then I 'discovered' children's rights at the 'World Play Summit' in Melbourne in 1993
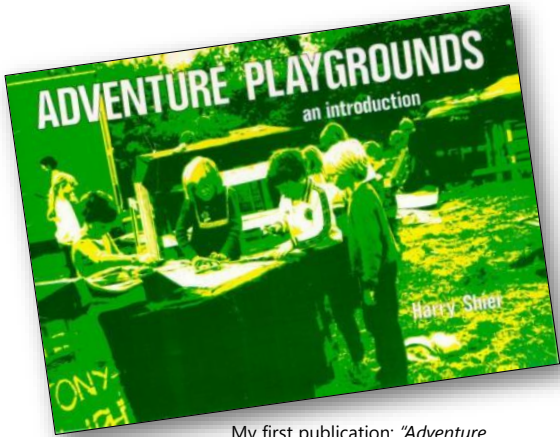
My first publication: *"Adventure Playgrounds, an Introduction". 1984.*
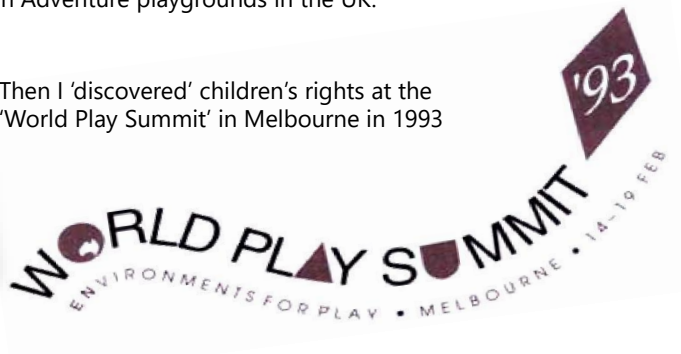
This experience changed the course of my life.

Whatever issue you are concerned about, children's rights provides both an underpinning framework and an overarching approach – which I have been committed to ever since

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1994, Article 31 Conference

On my return to the UK I formed an action committee to organise the first Article 31 Conference
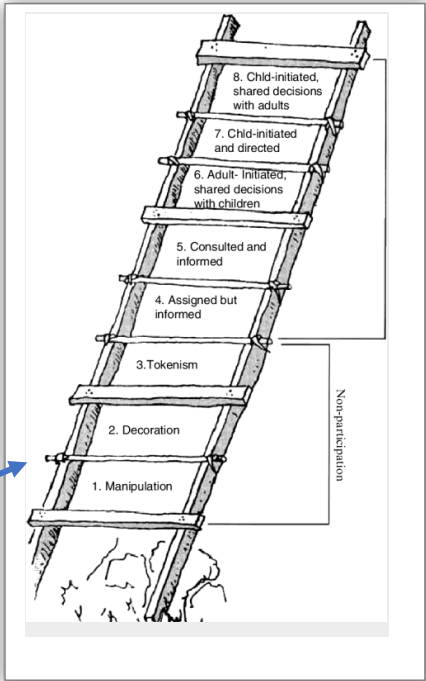
Roger Hart came and introduced us to his Ladder

HART'S LADDER

7. Child-initiated and directed: Children initiate and lead or direct a project. Adults are often (but not always) involved in supporting roles, such as logistical support, technical support, liaison and facilitation.

5. Consulted and informed: Children are consulted about their potential involvement in adult-initiated activities. They are informed about the outcomes of the activity, including decisions made by adults as a result.

3. Tokenism: Adults engineer the appearance of giving children a voice, but only the appearance. Often a small number of children are carefully selected. Their inputs are received and applauded, but there is no intention of learning from the children, and rarely any genuine dialogue.

1. Manipulation: Adults use children to advance causes or projects that are primarily of interest to themselves.
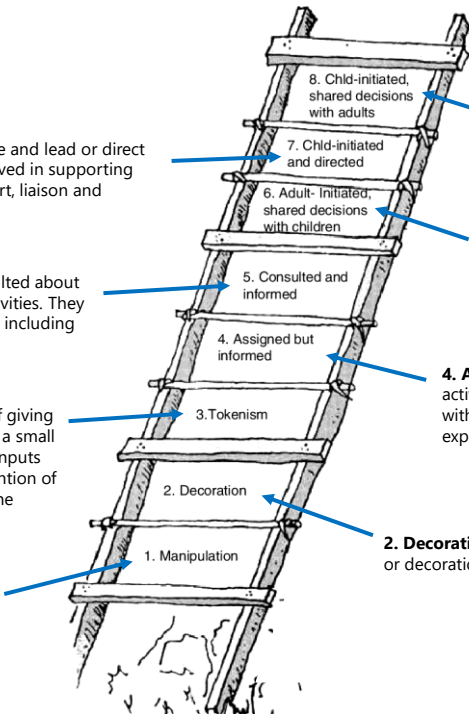
8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults: Children initiate and lead projects, but invite selected adults to share decision-making, usually as equal partners, with shared responsibility.

6. Adult-initiated, decisions are shared with children: Adults initiate and lead projects, but invite children to get involved, and share the decision-making with them.

4. Assigned, but informed: In adult-led activities, children are given a specific role with a legitimate purpose, which is properly explained to them.

2. Decoration: Adults use children as entertainment or decoration at adult-dominated events.

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For me, the ladder model is still an essential part of our tool-kit because Hart taught us to look out for the three types of false participation: "Manipulation", "Decoration" and "Tokenism".
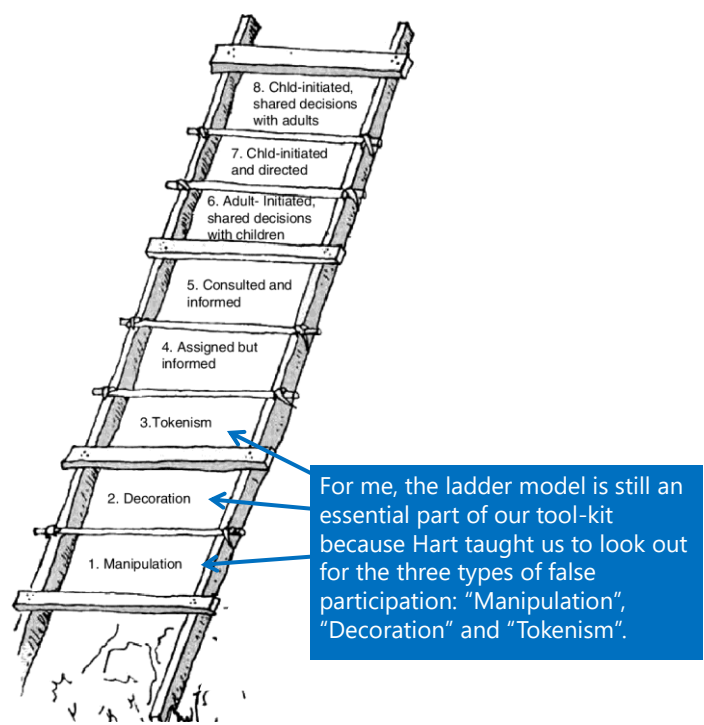
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CHAPTER 2: 1997-2000
THE ARTICLE 31
CHILDREN'S
CONSULTANCY SCHEME

PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION

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THE Article 31 ACTION NETWORK

The Article 31 Conference led to the Article 31 Action Pack

Then the launch of the Article 31 Action Network

Then in 1997, the Article 31 Children's Consultancy Scheme

[Shier (ed) 1995]

There was a fashion for making programmes and institutions "child-friendly", particularly in the arts, culture and recreation sectors. "Expert advice" was being sought.

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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.
(Shier,1999)

1998
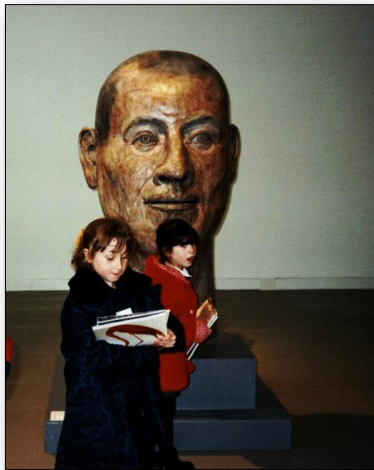
Child consultants advising the management of the new Manchester City Art Gallery on how to create a child-friendly gallery.

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1998

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

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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.
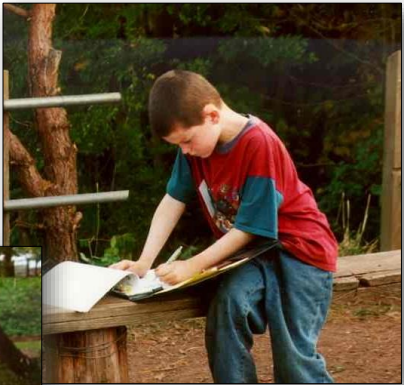
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Emergence of a new analysis

Five levels of participation

⬇

1. Children are listened to.

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

3. Children's views are taken into account.

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.

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

I wanted to understand how adults interact with child citizens in these situations.

At the turn of the Millennium, my new model emerged

Three stages of commitment at each level

↙   ⬇   ↘

Openings >	**Opportunities >**	**Obligations**
An opening occurs when you or your team are ready and willing to work at this level	An opportunity occurs when you have the skills and resources to be able to work at this level	An obligation is established when the organisation's agreed policy requires you to work at this level

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Pathways to Participation
Harry Shier 2001

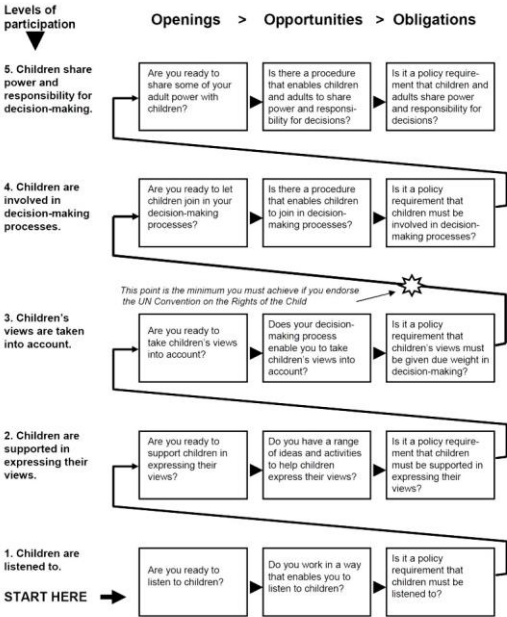| Levels of participation ▼	Openings >	Opportunities >	Obligations
5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.	Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?	Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?	Is it a policy require-ment 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 require-ment 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

Shier, H (2001). Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations. *Children & Society,* 15: 107-117

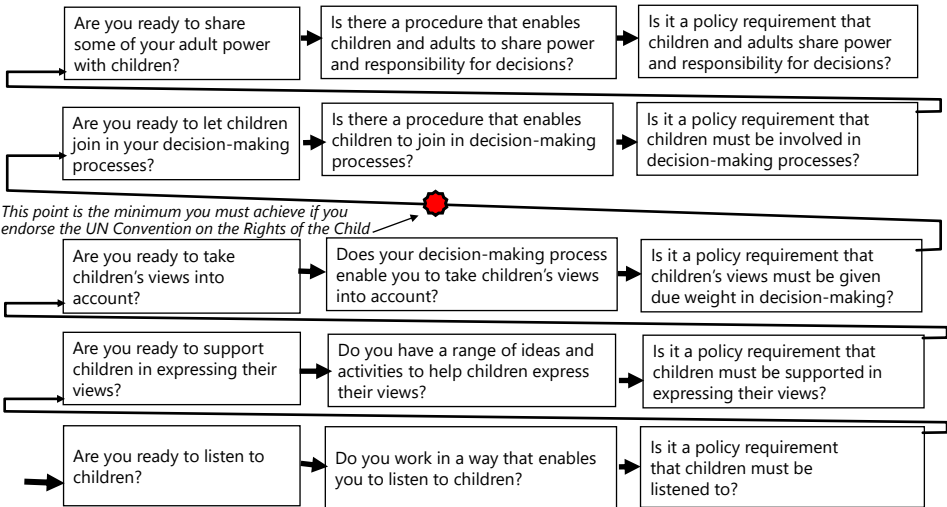# Openings > Opportunities > Obligations

Levels of participation
▼

5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.	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?
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START HERE 1. Children are listened to.	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?

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"Pathways to Participation" was published in the UK over 20 years ago, in April 2001.

Today it is one of the most widely used tools for analysing and enhancing children's participation, in academic study, policy and practice, throughout the world.

CHAPTER 3: 2001-2006
"PROTAGONSIMO" IN
NICARAGUA

THE PARTICIPATION TREE

Three weeks after "Pathways" was published, I arrived in Nicaragua...

Child labour on coffee plantations

The struggle for the right to education

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CESESMA, the Centre for Education in Health and Environment

A local voluntary organisation based in San Ramón, Nicaragua.

The CESESMA team in 2010.

CESESMA's office in the town of San Ramón – bought and renovated with support from the Irish Government through Irish Aid.

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Our Mission

"Contribute to the promotion and defense children and adolescents' rights through processes of learning and empowerment in rural schools and communities, in partnership with children and young people and other members of the community."

A new approach to participation: "Protagonismo Infantil"

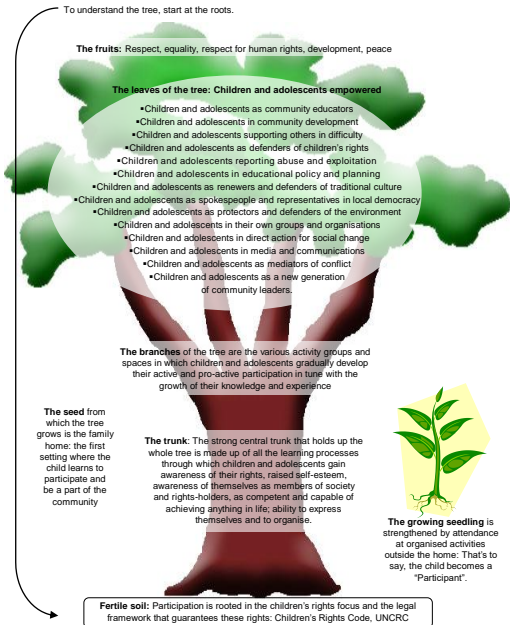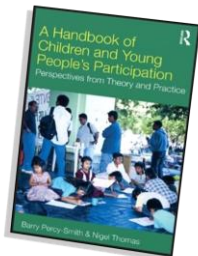Children and young people organise, advocate, take the initiative.

(Shier 2019; Taft 2019)

The Participation Tree from Nicaragua

First published in Spanish in Medio Ambiente and Urbanización (Shier, 2008)

English translation appears in the 'Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation (Shier, 2010)

To understand the tree, start at the roots.

The fruits: Respect, equality, respect for human rights, development, peace

The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

- Children and adolescents as community educators
- Children and adolescents in community development
- Children and adolescents supporting others in difficulty
- Children and adolescents as defenders of children's rights
- Children and adolescents reporting abuse and exploitation
- Children and adolescents in educational policy and planning
- Children and adolescents as renewers and defenders of traditional culture
- Children and adolescents as spokespeople and representatives in local democracy
- Children and adolescents as protectors and defenders of the environment
- Children and adolescents in their own groups and organisations
- Children and adolescents in direct action for social change
- Children and adolescents in media and communications
- Children and adolescents as mediators of conflict
- Children and adolescents as a new generation of community leaders.

The branches of the tree are the various activity groups and spaces in which children and adolescents gradually develop their active and pro-active participation in tune with the growth of their knowledge and experience

The seed from which the tree grows is the family home: the first setting where the child learns to participate and be a part of the community

The trunk: The strong central trunk that holds up the whole tree is made up of all the learning processes through which children and adolescents gain awareness of their rights, raised self-esteem, awareness of themselves as members of society and rights-holders, as competent and capable of achieving anything in life; ability to express themselves and to organise.

The growing seedling is strengthened by attendance at organised activities outside the home: That's to say, the child becomes a "Participant".

Fertile soil: Participation is rooted in the children's rights focus and the legal framework that guarantees these rights: Children's Rights Code, UNCRC

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CLOSE-UP ON…

The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

- Children and adolescents as community educators
- Children and adolescents in community development
- Children and adolescents supporting others in difficulty
- Children and adolescents as defenders of children's rights
- Children and adolescents reporting abuse and exploitation
- Children and adolescents in educational policy and planning
- Children and adolescents as renewers and defenders of traditional culture
- Children and adolescents as spokespeople and representatives in local democracy
- Children and adolescents as protectors and defenders of the environment
- Children and adolescents in their own groups and organisations
- Children and adolescents in direct action for social change
- Children and adolescents in media and communications
- Children and adolescents as mediators of conflict
- Children and adolescents as a new generation of community leaders.

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CHAPTER 4: 2007-2009
ADVENTURE IN ITALY

**THE NINE BASIC
REQUIREMENTS**

25 25

What is effective, ethical and meaningful participation?

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is an official UN body made up of 18 independent experts elected by UN members. Its main job is to monitor implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by State Parties.

*Wilson Palace in Geneva, Switzerland,
where the Committee has its HQ*

As well as reviewing 5-yearly reports from all the countries in the UN, the Committee issues general guidance to the world's governments on their obligations with respect to children and young people's rights, and what they must do to fulfil these.

These guidance papers for governments are called **"General Comments"**.

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A trip to Florence

In September 2007, I got a surprise invitation to visit the UNICEF Children's Research Centre in Florence, Italy.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child was working on a new General Comment on "**The Right of the Child to be Heard**".

UNICEF was supporting the process, and had hired UK-based Gerison Lansdown as international consultant.

Gerison Lansdown is like the godmother of children's rights. She ran the UK Children's Rights Development Unit in the 1990s, and is now a leading international consultant. She is the author of many United Nations children's rights reports and handbooks.
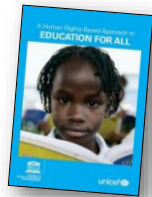
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The UN Expert Working Group

UNICEF had called together an international Expert Working Group to work on the final draft of the new General Comment. I was invited to join this group, and we worked together for three days to produce an improved draft for the UN Committee.

General Comment No. 12: "The right of the child to be heard" was published in July 2009
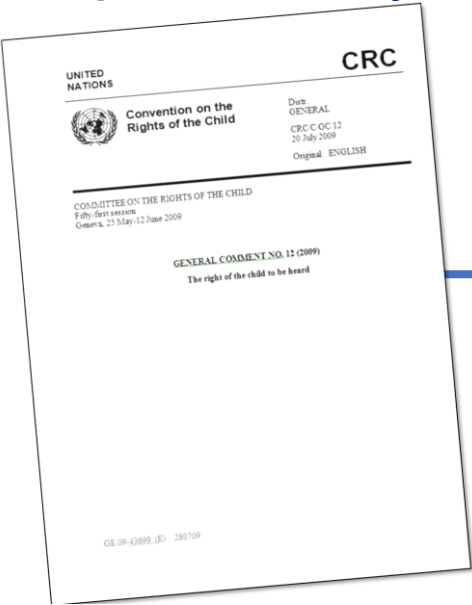
It said:

> If participation is to be effective and meaningful, it needs to be understood as a process, not as an individual one-off event. Experience since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 has led to a broad consensus on the basic requirements which have to be reached for effective, ethical and meaningful participation.
> *(Para 133)*

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REQUIREMENT 1: Participation is transparent and informative

A team of young consultants working to create a child-friendly version of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendations to the Government of Nicaragua

Children and young people must be given information about their participation in a child-friendly and accessible format. The information should include **how** they will participate, **why** they have been given this opportunity, the scope of the activity and its potential impact.

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REQUIREMENT 2: Participation is voluntary

Children and young people must be able to choose whether or not they would like to participate in an activity, and should be able to withdraw from activities at any time. They must not be coerced into participating or expressing their views.

Children and young people on a training course to develop community education skills

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REQUIREMENT 3: Participation is respectful

Children and young people should be treated with respect and provided with opportunities to express their views freely. Staff should respect and understand the family, school and cultural context of their lives.

A team of young researchers present their findings and recommendations to the municipal children and young people's commission.

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REQUIREMENT 4: Participation is relevant

Participation activities should build on children and young people's own knowledge and should be focused on issues that are relevant to their lives and interests.

A young researcher interviews her classmates on their experience of rights on school.

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REQUIREMENT 5: Participation is child-friendly

Child-friendly approaches, based on participants' ages and abilities, should be used to ensure that children and young people are well prepared for participation and are able to contribute meaningfully.

Children who created "The Dragon of Violence", as a symbol for violence-prevention in their community, lead the local Children's Day parade.

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REQUIREMENT 6: Participation is inclusive

Carnival parade launching a municipal festival for prevention of gender-based violence.

Participation initiatives must provide opportunities for marginalised children and young people to be involved and should challenge existing patterns of discrimination.

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REQUIREMENT 7: Participation is supported by training for adults

Primary school teachers at a training workshop on equality, respect and positive feelings

Staff must have the knowledge and capacity to facilitate children and young people's meaningful participation. This may involve training and preparation prior to the activities.

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REQUIREMENT 8: Participation is safe and sensitive to risk

Young people at a workshop on gender equity meet an alien from a planet where there is no gender difference, who asks them to explain how gender roles work on earth.

Adults working with children and young people have a duty of care. Staff must take every precaution to minimise risks of abuse and exploitation and any other negative consequences of participation.

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REQUIREMENT 9: Participation is accountable

Children and adults collaborate on a research project to investigate how children and young people influence public policy in Nicaragua.

After they have been involved in a participation activity, children and young people must be provided with feedback that clearly explains how their input has been interpreted and used, and how they have influenced any outcomes.

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IT IS IMPORTANT TO MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS BECAUSE...

➡ If participation is not **transparent and informative**, it is secretive and manipulative.

➡ If participation is not **voluntary**, it's being forced on children and young people against their will.

➡ If participation is not **respectful**, it's disrespectful.

➡ If participation is not **relevant**, it's pointless.

➡ If participation is not **child-friendly**, it's alien to children and young people.

➡ If participation is not **inclusive**, it's discriminatory.

➡ If participation is not **supported by training for adults**, it's being run by people who don't know what they're doing.

➡ If participation is not **safe and sensitive to risks**, it's dangerous.

➡ If participation is not **accountable**, the powerful can and will ignore it.

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CHAPTER 5: 2010-2011
GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS

THE PARTICIPATION MATRIX

40 40

2011: International partnership to develop and pilot a new global framework for monitoring and evaluating children's participation

Asia

Africa

Latin America

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CESESMA was one of the partners

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Starts with Gerison Lansdown's 3-way model

Consultation:

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

Collaboration:

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

Child-led *(Protagonismo)***:**

Activities initiated, organised or run by children and young people themselves (adults may still provide support, though not always necessary).
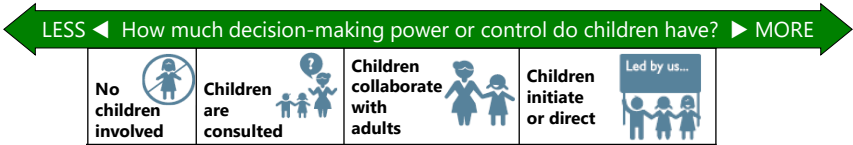
Taken from "*Every child's right to be heard*" (Lansdown 2010):

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The simplicity of this model gives it several advantages:

☑   It is easy to discuss participation activities with children – even quite young children – using this simple framework.

☑   It also provides the foundation for a number of more sophisticated tools...

LESS ◄ How much decision-making power or control do children have? ► MORE

No children involved	Children are consulted	Children collaborate with adults	Children initiate or direct

Lansdown's simple model becomes the basis for a matrix

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LESS ◄ How much decision-making power or control do children have? ► MORE

|	No children involved	Children are consulted	Children collaborate with adults	Children initiate or direct	Who is involved and who is excluded (and why)?
Finding out what the problems are (situation analysis)		Children are asked for their views about problems in the community.	Children are asked to be part of the process for finding out what the problems are.	Children undertake their own research to identify issues of concern.	**Which children get involved in determining the problems?**
Deciding what to do (planning)		Project planning takes account of the issues raised by children.	Children are involved in deciding what programmes to run and how to run them.	Children decide for themselves what issues they want to work on, and plan their own actions.	**Which children get involved at the planning stage?**
Taking action (implementation)		Children are invited to join in a programme of activities that is organised for them	Children work with adults to implement a programme of activities	Children organise their own programme and take responsibility for seeing it through (adults may support them).	**Which children get in on the action?**
Assessing and reporting what happened (monitoring and evaluation)		Children are asked for their views as part of project evaluation.	Children work with adults to plan and carry out a project evaluation.	Children decide what to evaluate and, carry out their own evaluation of the programme (may get help from adults).	**Which children get involved in monitoring and reporting?**
Acting on findings (dissemination, feedback, advocacy and new plans)		Children are asked what they think should happen next.	Adults involve children in discussion about findings and explore options for future actions.	Children reflect on the findings, and come up with their own proposals for follow-up action (which may be shared with adults).	**Which children get involved in the follow-up actions?**

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The global pilot programme eventually led to the Toolkit (Lansdown and O'Kane, 2014)
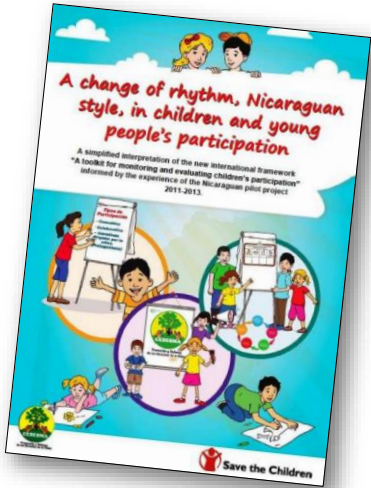
Save the Children Nicaragua commissioned this simplified, contextualised version from CESESMA (Shier, 2014)

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A few years later I borrowed this idea and created a similar matrix to help researchers plan and evaluate children's participation in research.
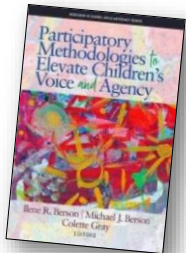
PUBLISHED IN: Berson, Berson and Gray (2019) *"Participatory Method-ologies to Elevate Children's Voice and Agency".*
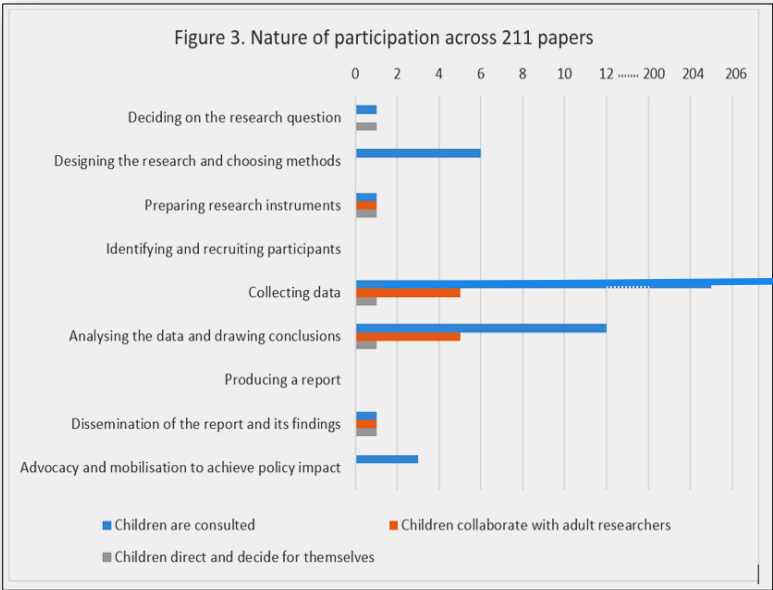
Phases of research process	◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►				Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children are not involved	**Consulted**	**Collaborate with adult researchers**	**Child initiated or directed** Led by us…	
Deciding on the research question		Children asked about problems that concern them.	Children and adults jointly define research question.	Children choose their own research question.	Who has a say in the research question?
Designing the research and choosing methods		Children consulted on what research methodology to use.	Children and adults deliberate and jointly decide on the methodology to use.	Children decide what methodology they want to use.	Who is invited to get involved in the research design?
Preparing research instruments		Children consulted on (and perhaps test) research inst-ruments before use.	Children and adults work together on design of research instruments.	Children create their own research instruments.	Who gets to work on the research instruments?
Identifying and recruiting participants		Children asked to advise on recruiting participants.	Children and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	Children identify and recruit research participants.	Who has a say in choosing participants?
Collecting the data		Research involves adults interviewing children or surveying their opinions.	Children and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	Children organise and carry out data collection activities.	Who gets involved in data collection?
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show preliminary findings to children and ask for feedback.	Children and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	Children analyse data and draw their own conclusions.	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?
Producing a report		Adults consult children on aspects of the final report.	Children and adults work together to produce a report.	Children produce their own report in their own words.	Who gets credit for the report?
Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact		Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.	Who is active in follow-up campaig-ning and advocacy?

◀ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ▶					Who is involved and who is excluded?
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Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact		Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.	Who is active in follow-up campaigning and advocacy?

Phases of research process

● Applying the matrix to my own PhD project

In 2019 a scoping review looked at methods of participatory research with children in Australia

Figure 3. Nature of participation across 211 papers

In the vast majority of studies reviewed, children were not involved <u>at all</u> outside of the data-collection phase.

Grace et al, "*Where are the silences? A scoping review of child participatory research literature in Australia*". (Children Australia, 44: 172-186)

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How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have?					Who is involved and who is excluded?
Phases of research process	Children are not involved	Consulted	Collaborate with adult researchers	Child initiated or directed / Led by us...	
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Identifying and recruiting participants		Children asked to advise on recruiting participants.	Children and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	Children identify and recruit research participants.	Who has a say in choosing participants?
Collecting the data		Research involves adults interviewing children or surveying their opinions.	Children and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	Children organise and carry out data collection activities.	Who gets involved in data collection?
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show prelim-inary findings to children and ask for feedback.	Children and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	Children analyse data and draw their own conclusions.	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?
Producing a report		Adults consult children on aspects of the final report.	Children and adults work together to produce a report.	Children produce their own report in their own words.	Who gets credit for the report?
Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact		Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.	Who is active in follow-up campaig-ning and advocacy?

● Applying the matrix to my own PhD project

● The norm for involving children in research *(as verified by Grace et al in Australia)*

CHAPTER 6: 2012-2015
RETURN TO IRELAND

SPACE, VOICE, AUDIENCE AND INFLUENCE

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Doctoral research at Queen's University Belfast

Studies supervised by Professor Laura Lundy, director of the Centre for Children's Rights

"Voice is not enough"

Lundy took a fresh look at Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. She saw that Article 12 contains two linked essential rights.

The right to express views

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.

The right to have views given due weight in decision-making

"Voice is not enough"

Lundy observed growing interest in hearing children's voices, consulting children, and "student voice" in schools.

But for her, this approach goes only half-way to uphold the rights guaranteed to children by Article 12.

The right to express views

ARTICLE 12

The right to have views given due weight

For these rights to be fully upheld, four elements must be put in place...

The Lundy model

Children must be guaranteed a safe space.

SPACE

VOICE

Children must be supported to speak out and express their views.

The right to express views

ARTICLE 12

The right to have views given due weight

Decision-makers must listen.

AUDIENCE

INFLUENCE

Decision-makers must take children's views into account in decisions affecting their lives.
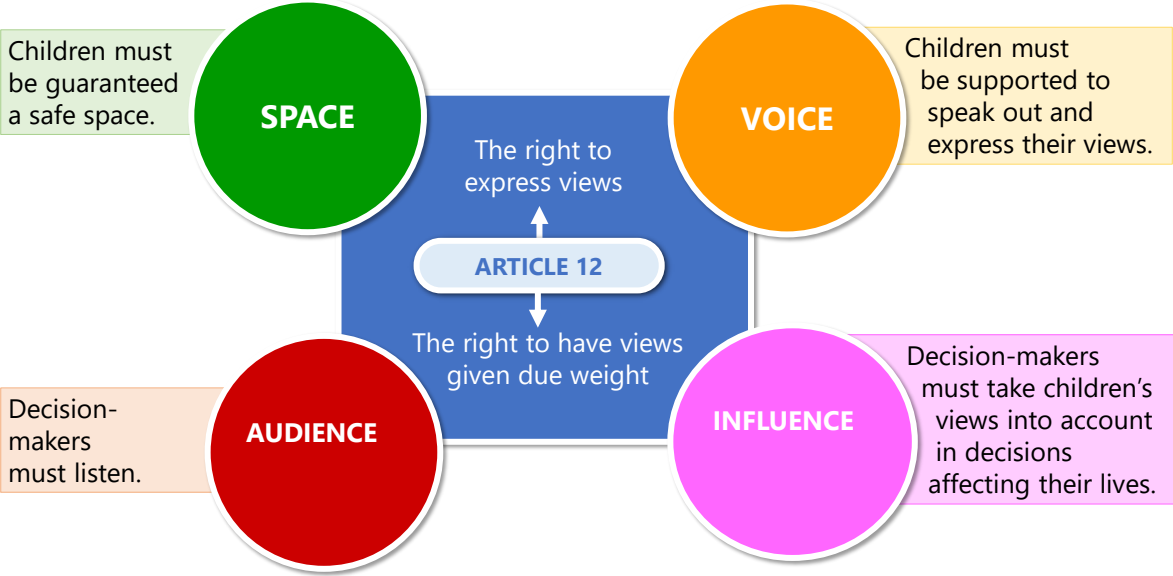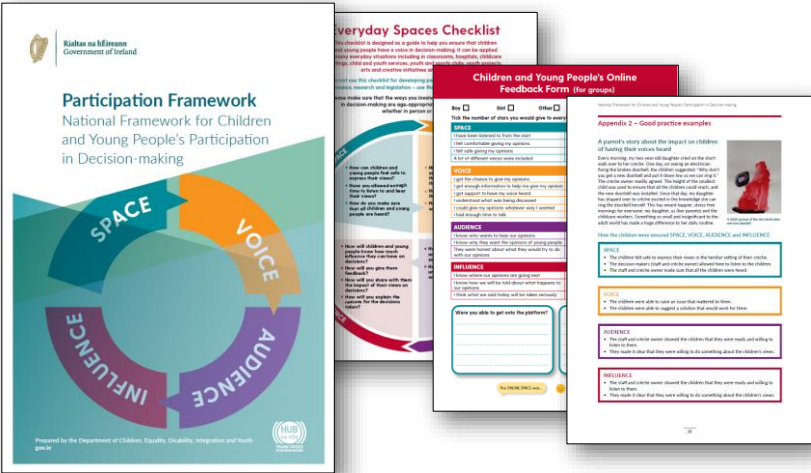
The Lundy model

First published in 2007, like Hart's and Shier's models, this model is now widely used around the world.

In the Republic of Ireland, it is now the official model featured in the Irish National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015).
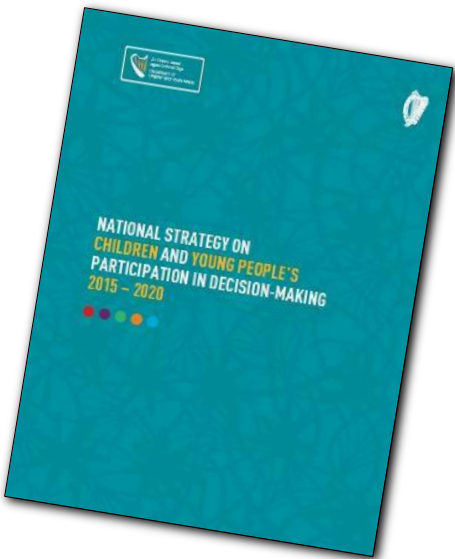
The Lundy model

In 2021, the Irish government produced a Participation Framework document to support practical application based on the Lundy model.
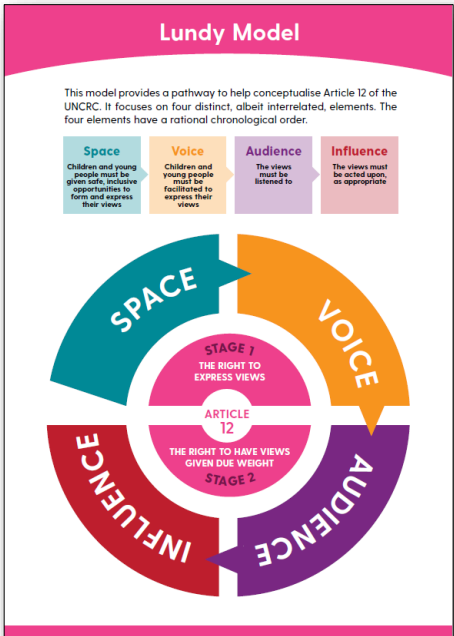

☑ Checklists

☑ Child-friendly feedback forms

☑ Good-practice examples

All very practical and relevant to the Irish context.

The Lundy model

Try these tools for:

- ☑ planning events and activities;

- ☑ analysing situations;

- ☑ identifying strengths and weaknesses;

- ☑ solving problems.

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EPILOGUE: 2016-2021

WHICH MODEL?

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WHEN DO I USE EACH MODEL?

Hart's Ladder	Pathways to participation	The Participation Tree	The Nine Basic Requirements	The Participation Matrix	The Lundy Model
To identify and weed out manipulation and other kinds of false participation.	To critically assess current practice, and identify ways to improve it.	To inspire and motivate: To remind ourselves of what is possible, and what children can achieve with the right support.	To review and appraise a project or process: Is it ethical, relevant and meaningful?	To plan a project from start to finish, or to evaluate a project during or after.	To analyse situations, identify strengths and weaknesses and solve problems,

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YOU WANT MORE MODELS?

- We have looked at the most tried and tested participation tools; some that have stood the test of time, and some that have come to the fore in recent years.

- These tools are all freely available, and links are included in the reference list.

- But there are plenty more that you can explore if you are interested. For example, here is a huge on-line collection of participation models from *Organising Engagement*.

But always remember the wise words of George Box:

"All models are wrong, but some are useful"

https://organizingengagement.org/models/

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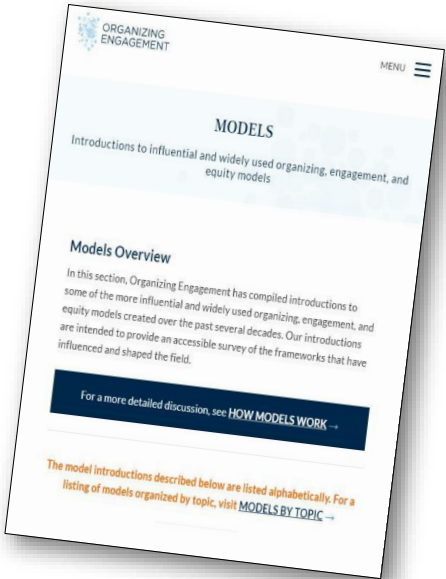
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All works by Shier are available at **www.harryshier.net**

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