

## DR JOSEPH McDOWALL

Joseph McDowall has a PhD from the University of Queensland in social psychology. He has lectured both there and at Griffith University in the areas of research methods, statistics, social skills, and empirical aesthetics. Since 2002 he has been involved in child protection and has provided consultancy services to the Queensland government within the out-of-home care sector and for the Recognised Entities. He joined the board of the CREATE Foundation in 2008 and is now Executive Director (Research). He has written three Report Cards (2008, 2009, and 2011) that have provided a comprehensive review of the state of transitioning from care in Australia. Following the introduction of the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care, Dr McDowall produced, in 2013, the first national survey of life in the Australian care system from the perspective of children and young people. His report in 2015 drew attention to the issues surrounding the placement of siblings in care, and a recent paper (in press) addresses the degree of connection to culture experienced by Indigenous young people.



# ARE WE LISTENING? THE NEED TO FACILITATE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

**DR JOSEPH McDOWALL**

Executive Director (Research)  
CREATE Foundation

## Why consider involving children in decision-making?

A major impetus for considering the involvement of children in making their own life decisions was the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; United Nations, 1989). Since that event, there has been concerted interest in demonstrating that we as adults, and representatives of 'the system', should no longer follow the old adage that children be 'seen but not heard'; rather we are encouraged to ensure that young people have every opportunity to participate in decision-making affecting their lives. In this paper, I will explore the levels of involvement that need to be achieved before participation is recognised (as defined by theory and research); look at some areas where children's participation has been encouraged, both in research and in practice; focus on participation relevant to children and young people in out-of-home care; discuss barriers identified as inhibiting participation in the care context; and investigate how workers can facilitate meaningful involvement of children and young people in decision-making to improve positive outcomes.

## What is meant by participation?

Participation is a multifaceted concept. As Thomas (2007) indicated, confusion can occur because the term is sometimes used to refer generally to just 'taking part' in an activity (e.g., Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011); but also it can more critically indicate 'taking part in decision-making' (which Shaw et al. termed 'involvement'). Other writers have chosen to differentiate between consultation and participation. Hill, Davis, Prout, and Tisdall (2004) described consultation as often being about seeking the views of young people, but it can 'be a substitute for participation in that decisions are made without the direct involvement of children' (p. 83). However, active participation should refer to situations where there is 'empowerment of those involved—that children believe, and have reason to believe, that their involvement will make a difference' (Sinclair, 2004, p. 111). This is the view supported in this paper.

Various models of participation have been proposed to help clarify the range of engagement between these extremes. Many researchers have developed their current understanding of children's participation by adapting

the ladder typology introduced by Arnstein (1969) to describe citizen participation in adults. This was later modified by Hart (1992), with reference to the UNCRC, to provide a useful tool for evaluating the level of children's participation in community projects. The Hart model comprised eight steps as shown in Table 1. He maintained that true participation was not achieved until Step 4 had been reached, and then the strength of that participation increased until the ultimate involvement occurred at Step 8.

This ladder concept has appealed to many researchers because it allows a distinction to be drawn between token and real participation. For example, Vis and Thomas (2009) incorporated a 6-step framework into their threshold model of participation. In their cross-cultural study involving Norwegian and UK children, they described the levels of child and young person involvement as ranging from where the child was consulted but had little understanding of what was going on, to situations where the child defined the problem and made the decision. Children functioning at the third level and beyond (viz. expressed

own views but did not take part in decision-making) reached the threshold of Vis and Thomas's first criterion, which appears to be an elaboration of Hart's (1992) stages 4 through 7. However, they required an additional criterion be met; for full involvement, 'the child's participation had to have affected the actual decision' made in each case (p. 160). How this requirement can be demonstrated is becoming an increasingly important consideration when defining participation.

However, the ladder model has been criticised because of its inherent hierarchical nature, and the possible expectation that there always should be a striving to reach the final step. As Sinclair (2004) indicated, 'different levels may be appropriate for different tasks as part of an activity' (p. 109). Others have moved away from a simple linear description by incorporating other dimensions in defining participation. Shier (2001) extended a basic five-step children's participation framework by adding three levels that could be used to question organisational commitment at each stage (by incorporating

**Table 1: Hart's Ladder Model of the Steps of Participation**

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Level of Participation</i>
1	Manipulation	Non-Participation
2	Decoration	Non-Participation
3	Tokenism	Non-Participation
4	Assigned but informed	Participation
5	Consulted and informed	Participation
6	Adult initiated, shared decisions with children	Participation
7	Child initiated and directed	Participation
8	Child initiated, shared decisions with adults	Participation

Source: Adapted from Hart (1992, p. 8)

Openings, Opportunities, and Obligations). For example, at Level 4: 'children are involved in decision-making processes' (the minimum that should be achieved to satisfy the UNCRC expectations), 'Openings' tested if organisations were ready to let children join their decision-making process; 'Opportunities' explored whether or not procedures were in place to enable this to happen; while 'Obligations' questioned if there was a formal policy requirement for children to be involved. Such a model articulates clearly the necessary adult actions required to facilitate participation by children and young people. These models are presented for comparison in Kellett (2011b).

Other approaches have moved even further from a linear structure. Treseder (1997) made the point that we should treat the top five steps of Hart's ladder as different but equal. Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, and Sinclair (2003) made a point of advocating for a model where none of their four levels is seen as better than any other; rather 'the appropriate level will need to be determined according to the circumstances and the participating children/young people' (p. 22). The degrees of participation under this structure include situations where children and young people (a) may simply have their views taken into account; (b) are involved in decision-making (together with adults); (c) share power and responsibility for decision-making with adults; and (d) make autonomous decisions (p. 22). Participatory contexts might include several of these adult-child interactions at different times depending on the different decisions to be made.

## Principles of participation

The extent of participation by children and young people allowed or encouraged in any given decision-making situation will depend on the principles adopted by the organisation or group engaging the children and young people, and the extent to which professionals understand the importance of upholding these principles, reflecting a strong culture of participation (Kirby et al., 2003). Stephenson, Gourley, and Miles (2004) identified four basic conditions that need to be met before children and young people can participate effectively:

*If respect, opportunity, responsibility and support [emphasis added] are not always provided to children, their participation will be unbalanced and slowed down, just as a broken spoke or a flat tyre will affect the movement of a bicycle. When children are given respect, opportunity, responsibility and support, they will be able to participate in a way that increases their capacity and effectiveness in decision-making. (pp. 13–14)*

Lansdown (2001) articulated a set of seven tenets that she believed should underpin democratic participation. These are worth reiterating and keeping in mind as fundamental requirements for any interactions involving children and young people (see Table 2).

Treating these requirements in a more common-sense way, Gal (2015) proposed eight guidelines for achieving inclusive child participation; these are shown in Table 3. Gal strongly makes the point that it should not be assumed that children and young people only want to be listened to and taken

**Table 2: Lansdown's Principles of Participation**

<i>Number</i>	<i>Principle</i>
1	Children must understand what the project or the process is about, what it is for, and their role within it.
2	Power relations and decision-making structures must be transparent.
3	Children should be involved from the earliest possible stage of any initiative.
4	All children should be treated with equal respect regardless of their age, situation, ethnicity, abilities, or other factors.
5	Ground rules should be established with all the children at the beginning.
6	Participation should be voluntary and children should be allowed to leave at any stage.
7	Children are entitled to respect for their views and experience.

Source: Lansdown (2001, pp. 9–10)

**Table 3: Eight Guidelines for Achieving Inclusive Child Participation**

<i>Number</i>	<i>Guideline</i>
1	Children should be treated holistically instead of addressing the current problem in isolation.
2	Tailor-made processes should be designed to enable children to participate in the most comfortable setting for them.
3	Children should be treated as partners during the process, acknowledging their irreplaceable role in the discussion.
4	Participation should be considered as a continuum, starting from an informed decision not to participate and ending in full and equal participation.
5	Adults are responsible to 'liberate children's voices,' to find ways to faithfully decipher children's messages.
6	Adults should 'let go' and allow children to take calculated risks while taking the needed precautions to prevent harm.
7	A deliberative, empowering, restorative process should be seen as a goal in itself rather than a mere instrument to reach a decision.
8	When relevant, child representation should provide children with an experience of 'empowering advocacy' rather than one of disempowerment.

Source: Gal (2015, pp. 457–458)

seriously. They also want to feel that their input has made a difference; this expectation deserves consideration regarding how it can be achieved and demonstrated.

### **Areas of participation**

The UNCRC stipulates (Article 12) that children and young people who are capable of forming a view have the right to express these views freely in all matters affecting their lives. This can

include where they live, how they present themselves to others, and how they spend their time (daily activities, education etc.). However, their views can extend beyond their immediate existence to broader questions. Kirby et al. (2003) identified three areas where children's voices need to be heard. These included (a) basic personal and social development (building knowledge, skills, and confidence), (b) evaluating the development and delivery of services for young people, while (c) ultimately advocating for citizenship responsibility and social inclusion. They believed that encouraging early participation 'is a powerful means of persuading disadvantaged young people that they count and can contribute' (p. 29). Thomas (2007) addressed similar themes in his differentiation of social and political participation, and Percy-Smith and Thomas's (2010) *Handbook* presented studies of children's participation dealing with a variety of issues and contexts.

In the general community, social participation has been associated with positive and healthy youth development. For example, Rivera and Santos (2016) have shown that, when young people grow up in a context that promotes family discussion and concern with well-being, and where the youth engage in out-of-school cultural activities, their levels of civil and political participation increase. However, peer-group networks in which engagement with issues is not encouraged can reduce the extent of participation. How then do these situations apply to children and young people in out-of-home care? What specific areas of participation might be of concern to this particular group?

### Participation in out-of-home care

All state and territory governments throughout Australia have expressed their support for children by establishing Charters of Rights<sup>1</sup> specifically for those in out-of-home care. While some variation exists in how the rights are expressed across jurisdictions, all Charters refer to the right of the child or young person to be heard and to participate in important decisions. Many workers and researchers support involving children and young people in decision-making, because they are seen as being the 'experts in their own lives' (Mason & Danby, 2011; Yardley, 2011); others would like to see their expertise recognised regarding wider social concerns (Uprichard, 2010). But to what extent do we find *consultative*, *collaborative*, or *child-led* participation (Lansdown, 2010, p. 20) in the out-of-home care system?

Several strategies identified within the Third Action Plan (2015–2018) developed under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 (Department of Social Services, 2015) call for evaluation of programs and services supporting young people in care, and during their transition to independence. One of the most effective means of obtaining this feedback is listening to what children and young people have to say about the conditions in which they live, with the intention of giving agency to this voice.

However, how these voices are collected is an important consideration; young people need to be given a choice of how they want to be involved, how they want to interact with adults, and with which adults they choose to share their thoughts. The 'official' National

Survey of children and young people in out-of-home care (AIHW, 2015, 2016) presented data that were collected from the young respondents using a computer-based survey tool; caseworkers and carers were available to assist the young people when responding. Once collected, the data were then processed and filtered by government departments and forwarded to AIHW where the reports were compiled. Recent research (e.g., West & Peytcheva, 2014) has highlighted the influence that variable behaviour of assistants can have on results obtained using ACASI methods. When gathering the views of children and young people, it would seem to be better practice to have respondents assisted or interviewed by a person having no connection with their case management or placement, or allow them to undertake a completely anonymous online survey. Children and young people should be able to have confidence to say what they really feel, and that their views are recorded directly without the possibility of selective reporting.

As Stafford, Laybourn, Hill, and Walker (2003) observed, children want to be consulted 'if it is done properly, if it is about issues directly affecting them and if they see it as likely to yield results that are likely to benefit them or other young people' (p. 361). McDowall (2013b) also showed that young people were more likely to want to participate in decision-making if they felt that 'the people who have the power to change the system are listening to what they have to say' (p. 50).

### Benefits of participation

The benefits of children's participation in decision-making have long been recognised. Chawla (2001) summarised the positive outcomes well, and showed that not only were the children directly influenced, but also the organisations that supported them experienced positive outcomes (see Box 4, p. 5/13, reproduced here as Table 4). Cashmore (2002), in her early attempt to inspire the participation of children and young people in out-of-home care, pointed to many benefits. These included the

**Table 4: Expected Outcomes of Children's Participation**

<p><b>For children themselves:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More positive sense of self</li> <li>• Increased sense of competence</li> <li>• Greater sensitivity to the perspectives and needs of others</li> <li>• Greater tolerance and sense of fairness</li> <li>• Increased understanding of democratic values and behaviours</li> <li>• Preparation for a lifelong pattern of participation</li> <li>• New social networks</li> <li>• New skills</li> <li>• Enjoyment</li> </ul>	<p><b>For the organisations that serve children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme and policy development that is sensitive to children's priorities</li> <li>• The establishment of processes for participation</li> <li>• Increased commitment to children's rights</li> <li>• Innovation</li> </ul> <p><b>For children's communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public education regarding children's rights</li> <li>• More positive public attitudes and relationships to children</li> <li>• Increased social capital</li> <li>• Improved quality of life 'scaffolding'</li> </ul>
---	--

Source: Chawla (2001, Box 4)

building of self-esteem and confidence (particularly important for those placed in care because of neglect and abuse); providing the opportunity to see themselves as active agents (not powerless victims); and learning the process of decision-making that is essential when transitioning to independence. She also noted that when children and young people have a say about their placement, it is likely to be more stable because the arrangement is more likely to be acceptable to the child who consequently is less likely to feel resentful.

Sinclair (2004) added that involvement of young people, as well as leading to enhanced citizenship and social inclusion for them, also could result in more supportive and accessible services being provided. In the education context, Anderson and Graham (2015) found that students reported that having a say and being listened to and respected was positively associated with well-being. Although Sinclair was welcoming of such outcomes, she expressed a degree of pessimism when she observed that, at that time, 'more is known about how to support young people to make participation more rewarding for them—but less about how that participation can bring about change so there is a more balanced emphasis between the agendas of adults and those of children' (p. 115). This last point is a precursor to current thinking about how meaningful participation of children and young people can be achieved. The role played by significant adults (parents, caregivers, caseworkers) is now recognised as playing a pivotal role in facilitating or inhibiting participation (Berrick, Dickens, Pösö, and Skivenes,

2015; Coyne & Harder, 2011; Murray, 2015).

### Participation in research

One area of young people's participation that perhaps, not surprisingly, has received much attention from researchers is the involvement of children and young people in research activities. The position supported by most writers flows from the apparently contrasting view 'intrinsic to childhood research' (Uprichard, 2008) that children can be viewed either as 'being' children or 'becoming' adults. However, this is a false separation, as children at any point in time exist and function in both states. As Fernandez (2011, p. 487) opined in her editorial for a special edition of *Children and Youth Services Review*:

*Changing views of childhood have advanced thinking in this area by moving the focus on children's future development towards adulthood (well becoming) to understanding children's present lives (well being), and towards consideration of 'quality of life' for children. Current approaches stress the importance of understanding children in terms of the present as both 'being' and 'becoming.'*

When 'being' children, the issues of concern tend to be vulnerability and protection; when 'becoming' is emphasised, competence and responsibility are of greater significance (Salveron, Finan, & Bromfield, 2013). In her call for authentic research, Grover (2004) suggested that, where possible we should adopt an approach that enables children "to a degree to be 'subject' or 'collaborator' in the research



process rather than simply study ‘object’” (p. 81). Others extended this claim; for example, Powell and Smith (2009) stressed that children should not be seen merely as vulnerable, passive victims, but as social actors capable of deciding how they would like to participate in research. Even young children (e.g., 4 or 5 years of age; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011) can be involved meaningfully in certain projects with beneficial outcomes. Indeed, Bradwell et al. (2011) question ‘the legitimacy of research into children’s worlds and children’s lived experiences, where the research is conceived wholly from an adult perspective’ (p. 221).

As might be expected following the introduction of the UNCRC (1989), much emphasis has been placed on a rights-based approach, not only regarding how children and young people should be encouraged to engage in research, but also how they should be supported to achieve their desired level of involvement (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; McNamara, 2013). However, as Coyne and Harder (2011) cautioned, ‘children prefer to be protected in some situations and to share decision-making in others’ (p. 312); this balance has to be respected, with an emphasis on what is considered by all parties (including the child) to be in the child’s best interests. Various professionals (e.g., Bradbury-Jones, 2014; Shaw, 2011) have provided useful manuals to assist those working with children in creating the most appropriate set of conditions in which a young person’s desired research involvement can be expressed, whether as a respondent or as a co-researcher.

One issue fundamental to, and a necessary precursor of research is ethical clearance. While few

researchers would expect that their work should not conform the highest ethical standards, there is growing concern in many quarters with the vagaries, inconsistencies, and bureaucratic delays of the current process involving Human Research Ethics Committees (van den Hoonaard & Hamilton, 2016). Questions being raised are of particular relevance regarding research with children and young people. Randall, Anderson, and Taylor (2015) want to avoid the possibility of children and young people being maltreated or exploited within the research context and consequently advocate for safer research through better training of those involved in the process. While acknowledging that children must be protected from harm, Powell, Fitzgerald, Taylor, and Graham (2012) warn against using a strong protectionist discourse to inhibit young people expressing their views on matters of concern to them. They specifically want to avoid situations where ‘children may be gate-kept out of research on the basis of potential risk’ (p. 2). Their suggestions for changing the process focus on involving children and young people in the ethics review. In a similar vein, Daley (2015) argued against ethical processes being so risk averse that young people’s right to participate in discussions is overlooked. More information is needed about how children and young people can be supported more effectively to provide informed consent and engage appropriately in the research process (Parsons, Abbott, McKnight, & Davies, 2015).

### **Barriers to participation**

What factors might contribute to low levels of participation in decision-making by children and young people?

If the COM-B model of Michie and West (2013) is taken as a basic framework for behaviour change, viz. a model that focuses on a person's capability, motivation, and opportunity to perform, the two main influences on a child or young person's participation would be (a) the individual's physical and psychological attributes, and (b) the physical and social determinants of the context in which he or she is functioning.

As Kellett (2011a) has said, 'Children are busy people too and their time is a precious commodity' (p. 208). Even though we, as adults, might believe that their involvement in a particular decision or project would be valuable for them, if they don't appreciate the importance at the point in time when the opportunity for participation is presented, competing interests will win out and the young people will not be motivated to respond. Many young people, possibly because of their less than favourable experiences with the system, 'disappear' or become uncontactable. Gilbertson and Barber (2002) provided useful data on this occurrence in a series of studies, where 14 of their 91 respondents went missing, and 12 others actually declined to participate. Possibly more significant incentives could help increase involvement; however, transient young people are difficult to contact.

It would appear that, irrespective of the child or young person's attributes or inclinations, a critical factor is how the adults with whom they interact perceive their contribution, again demonstrated empirically in Gilbertson and Barber's (2002) study. Of the four 'schools of thought' on how children should be treated that Stoecklin (2012) summarised, including (a) the

paternalistic view; (b) the welfare view; (c) the empowerment view; and (d) the liberationist view,<sup>2</sup> 40.7% of the non-responses were attributed to application of the first two categories.

In situations where paternalism and protection are dominant, meaningful participation of children and young people is unlikely. Results from studies where the attitudes and practice of case managers and social workers have been explored clearly demonstrate that overt or covert gatekeeping can occur (Cele & van der Burgt, 2015; Križ & Skivenes, 2015; van Bijleveld, Dedding, Bunders-Aelen, 2015). As Coyne (2010, p. 454) concluded, with reference to the hierarchy of gatekeeping, 'researchers need to be prepared to question and reflect critically on gatekeepers' role and attitudes towards children as research participants, in order to ensure that all children are given equal opportunities of being heard.' It also is important that the supporting professionals become more aware of children's competencies and their right to participate. The exclusion from participation of children with particular knowledge often relates more to the adults' sensitivities than to those of the young people (Powell & Smith, 2009). Although this situation still seems to dominate practice, it is encouraging that the action research project Graham, Fitzgerald, and Cashmore (2015) described showed that professionals' attitudes could change, with the facilitators in their workshops ultimately discussing how children's participation could be encouraged while keeping them safe (not seeing the two outcomes as incompatible alternatives).

If the authenticity of children's voices that Spyrou (2011) advocated is to be achieved, it is essential that, firstly, 'the

insidious power imbalances that seem to exist around relationships between adults and young people' be addressed (Bolzan & Gale, 2011, p. 271). For some time, researchers have recognised that, to gain a real understanding of children's participation within child protection, the fundamental power difference between worker and service user must be acknowledged (Healy, 1998). More recently, some workers, while acknowledging the importance of enabling children's voices, have sounded a note of caution in interpreting the message because of power differentials. For example, Nybell (2013) reflected on how such relationships might have 'distorted, muted, or amplified their [children's] abilities to express their need and interests' (p. 1227). McLeod (2007, p. 278) observed that 'the practice of listening is . . . rarely straightforward' and questioned whose actual agenda was being addressed. She argued that many interactions within the case management context can involve power plays between the participants, with young people resisting the adults' agenda and operating by their own rules. Time is needed to develop trusting relationships.

### **The Future of participation**

Of the six challenges to successful participation listed by Tisdall (2015), including tokenism, lack of feedback, who is included, consultation not dialogue, emphasis on adult procedures, and lack of sustainability, all could be met if time and space were made available to build meaningful, respectful relationships between the children and young people and their adult partners in the process. As Leeson (2007, p. 268) noted, 'the debate becomes one of adult ability and

preparedness to involve young people in decisions about their own lives, rather than whether they are able to participate effectively.' Adults need to strive to earn a sufficient level of trust from the children and young people to encourage their participation.

In their article focusing on how participation has developed as a struggle over recognition, Fitzgerald, Graham, Smith, and Taylor (2010) described a chronological transition for children and young people from an emphasis on equality (rights), through consideration of the difference (from adults) of their roles in social and political life, to a contemporary view based on the need for dialogue. 'This dialogical shift implies that children's participation . . . emerges within a mutual interdependence, recognition and respect for children and their views and experiences' (p. 300). The nature of relationships with significant adults is critical for the interdependence to be acknowledged (Gal, 2015). Currently, in most situations, adults set the agenda for interactions with children and young people; indeed, there are times when adults are the legally responsible parties and can be held accountable for outcomes. Also, on some occasions, adults are in the best position to advocate on behalf of children (Wyness, 2012). However, establishing and maintaining intergenerational dialogue will ensure that children and young people are less likely to see adults as the automatic decision-makers; both groups can be recognised as 'differently equal partners' (Bjerke, 2011). Children's rights are of paramount importance, but adults must be part of the equation (Wyness, 2012).

Children and young people must have their rights respected to be involved in

joint projects to whatever extent they wish, and we need to provide whatever support is necessary to facilitate that process. Some will not want to participate at all for a variety of personal reasons; others will be happy to be consulted; some will enjoy collaborating; and some might decide to act as co-facilitators. We need to accept Treseder's (1997) view that all contributions are equally valuable in giving us a greater understanding of how the issues under consideration affect us all.

Dialogue is important so that children and young people feel involved and supported as a legitimate party in the process. They must feel confident they have the time and space to express a range of views, to change their mind, to be inconsistent, but still respected for their unique insights. Gal (2015) emphasised that an important role dialogue can play is in managing expectations. Young people increasingly want to feel they are making a difference, and in many cases their participation is contingent on this. Open discussions can help everyone involved realise what is likely to be achieved through any collaboration, so further strategies can be planned, and disappointment minimised.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have summarised some of the recent literature showing current thinking about children and young people's participation in decision-making, with a focus on the out-of-home care context. Constructs and principles were discussed that practitioners may find useful in their attempts to engage and support young people. If workers adhered to these guidelines, it is more likely that the

children and young people with whom they interact would want to become involved in personal decision-making. Resources and toolkits are available to aid practitioners in this process of engagement with young people. Some of the classic manuals (e.g., Thomas, Phillipson, O'Kane, & Davies, 1999; Treseder, 1997) now can be difficult to obtain, but their content has been assimilated into currently available, online resources (e.g., Charnwood, 2016; Jones, 2010; Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014; McGowan & Moody, 2008; Save the Children, 2003). Morgan, Davies, and Wood (2012) produced a particularly useful program, with young-person-friendly examples, that could be adapted to most participatory contexts. These resources are exemplars of the principles discussed here, summarised and simplified in BSWHN (2002), where it is emphasised that children and young people must have knowledge, opportunity, and support before they can participate effectively.

Adults wishing to respect the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child need to be concerned to ensure that the system provides the opportunity for the voices of children and young people to be heard and to be influential. In Australia, one organisation (viz. the CREATE Foundation) was established specifically to advocate on behalf of children and young people in out-of-home care, based on insights they share about their lives through various levels of participation (McDowall, 2013a). These voices are harnessed in an attempt to improve the care system. If we needed any further justification for striving for this outcome than the benefits such changes provide for young people, we can turn to the words of McLaughlin (2015, p. 78) who

observed that, by facilitating the participation of children and young people in our joint endeavours we may:

*benefit from the insights, personal experiences and views that children have on our society. If we do not do this we impoverish our knowledge and potentially end up writing policies or delivering practices that remain adult-centric, do not meet the needs of children and ignore the rich potential of what our children have to teach us – if only we would listen!*

## References

- Anderson, D. L., & Graham, A. P. (2015). Improving student wellbeing: Having a say at school. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, October, 1–19. doi: 10.1080/09243453.2015.1084336
- Arnstein, S. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4), 216–224.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2015). *National standards for out-of-home care data*. Canberra: AIHW. Retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/nfpac/out-of-home-care/data/>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2016). The views of children and young people in out-of-home care: Overview of indicator results from a pilot national survey. *Bulletin 132*. Retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129554764>
- Berrick, J. D., Dickens, J., Pösö, T., & Skivenes, M. (2015). Children's involvement in care order decision-making: A cross-country analysis. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 49, 128–141.
- Bjerke, H. (2011). "It's the way they do it": Expressions of agency in child-adult relations at home and school. *Children and Society*, 25, 93–103.
- Bolzan, N., & Gale, F. (2011). Expect the unexpected. *Child Indicators Research*, 4, 269–281.
- Bradbury-Jones, C. (2014). *Children as co-researchers: The need for protection*. Edinburgh: Dunedin.
- Bradwell, J., Crawford, D., Crawford, J., Dent, L., Finlinson, K., Gibson, R., Porter, E., & Kellett, M. (2011). How Looked After Children are involved in their review process. *Child Indicators Research*, 4, 221–229.

- BSWHN (Barwon South West Homelessness Network). (2002). *Research and resources about participation*. Retrieved from <http://www.bswhn.org.au/index.php/document-categories/category/60-children>
- Cele, S., & van der Burgt, D. (2015). Participation, consultation, confusion: Professionals' understandings of children's participation in physical planning. *Children's Geographies*, 13, 14–29.
- Charnwood. (2016). *Children and young people participation toolkit*. Retrieved from [https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/children\\_and\\_young\\_peoples\\_participation\\_toolkit/Children and Young Peoples Participation Toolkit.pdf](https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/children_and_young_peoples_participation_toolkit/Children_and_Young_Peoples_Participation_Toolkit.pdf)
- Chawla, L. (2001). Evaluating children's participation: Seeking areas of consensus. *PLA Notes*, 42, 9–13. London: IIED.
- Coyne, I. (2010). Accessing children as research participants: Examining the role of gatekeepers. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 36, 452–454.
- Coyne, I., & Harder, M. (2011). Children's participation in decision-making: Balancing protection with shared decision-making using a situational perspective. *Journal of Child Health Care*, 15, 312–319.
- Daley, K. (2015). The wrongs of protection: Balancing protection and participation in research with marginalised young people. *Journal of Sociology*, 51, 121–138.
- Department of Social Services. (2015). *Driving change: Intervening early. Third three-year action plan, 2015–2018*. Canberra.
- Fernandez, E. (2011). Child inclusive research, policy, and practice. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(4), 487–489.
- Fitzgerald, R., Graham, A., Smith, A., & Taylor, N. (2010). Children's participation as a struggle over recognition: Exploring the promise of dialogue. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Gal, T. (2015). Conclusion: From social exclusion to child-inclusive policies. In T. Gal & B. F. Duramy (Eds.), *International perspectives and empirical findings on child participation: From social exclusion to child-inclusive policies* (pp. 451–463). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Graham, A., Fitzgerald, R., & Cashmore, J. (2015). Professionals' conceptions of 'children', 'childhood', and 'participation' in an Australian family relationship services sector organization. In T. Gal & B. F. Duramy (Eds.), *International perspectives and empirical findings on child participation: From social exclusion to child-inclusive policies* (pp. 257–280). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grover, S. (2004). Why won't they listen to us? On giving power and voice to children participating in social research. *Childhood*, 11, 81–93.
- Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. *Innocenti Essays, No. 4*. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- Healy, K. (1998). Participation and child protection: The importance of context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 28, 897–914.
- Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A., & Tisdall, K. (2004). Moving the participation agenda forward. *Children and Society*, 18, 77–96.
- Jones, H. (2010). *Putting children at the centre: A practical guide to children's participation*. London: International Save the Children Alliance.
- Kellett, M. (2011a). Empowering children and young people as researchers: Overcoming barriers and building capacity. *Child Indicators Research*, 4, 205–219.
- Kellett, M. (2011b). *Engaging with children and young people*. Centre for Children and Young People Background Briefing Series, no.3. Lismore: Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University.

- Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K., & Sinclair, R. (2003). *Building a culture of participation: Research report*. Annesley, Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.
- Križ, K., & Skivenes, M. (2015). Child welfare workers' perceptions of children's participation: A comparative study of England, Norway and the USA (California). *Child and Family Social Work*, 1–12. Advance online publication.
- Lansdown, G., & O'Kane, C. (2014). *A toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation*. Booklet 1: Introduction. Retrieved from <http://www.alnap.org/resource/11623>
- Leeson, C. (2007). My life in care: Experiences of non-participation in decision-making processes. *Child and Family Social Work*, 12, 268–277.
- Lundy, L., McEvoy, L., & Byrne, B. (2011). Working with young children as co-researchers: An approach informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Early Education and Development*, 22, 714–736.
- Mason, J., & Danby, S. (2011). Children as experts in their lives: Child inclusive research. *Child Indicators Research*, 4, 185–189. doi:10.1007/s12187-011-9108-4
- McLeod, A. (2007). Whose agenda? Issues of power and relationship when listening to looked-after young people. *Child and Family Social Work*, 12, 278–286.
- McDowall, J. J. (2013a). *Experiencing out-of-home care in Australia: The views of children and young people (CREATE Report Card 2013)*. Sydney: CREATE Foundation. Retrieved from <http://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2013-CRE065-F-CREATE-Report-Card-2013-Web-File-web.pdf>
- McDowall, J. J. (2013b). Participation of children and young people in decision-making in out-of-home care in Australia. *developing practice*, 36 (Spring), 41–51.
- McGowan, B., & Moody, J. (2008). *Essentials: Participation*. Retrieved from [https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/supportingchildren/youth/youthparticipation/toolkits/Documents/Czone Essentials Participation.pdf](https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/supportingchildren/youth/youthparticipation/toolkits/Documents/Czone%20Essentials%20Participation.pdf)
- McLaughlin, H. (2015). Reflections on children's involvement: Future trajectories. In H. McLaughlin (Ed.), *Involving children and young people in policy, practice and research*. London: National Children's Bureau.
- McNamara, P. M. (2013). Giving voice to children and young people in research: Applying rights-based frameworks to meet ethical challenges. *developing practice*, 37 (December), 55–66.
- Michie, S., & West, R. (2013). Behaviour change theory and evidence: A presentation to Government. *Health Psychology Review*, 7, 1–22.
- Morgan, S., Davies, J., & Wood, H. (2012). *Enabling participation by young people: Method and resource handbook*. Retrieved from <http://www.cwvys.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/HB-Enabling-Participation.pdf>
- Murray, R. (2015). 'Yes they are listening but do they hear us?' Reflections on the journey of the Barnardo's Participation Project. *Child Care in Practice*, 21, 78–90.
- Nybell, L. (2013). Locating 'youth voice': Considering the contexts of speaking in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 1227–1235.
- Parsons, S., Abbott, C., McKnight, L., & Davies, C. (2015). High risk yet invisible: Conflicting narratives on social research involving children and young people, and the role of research ethics committees. *British Educational Research Journal*, 41, 709–729.
- Percy-Smith, B., & Thomas, N. (Eds.). (2010). *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

- Powell, M. A., Fitzgerald, R., Taylor, N. J., Graham, A. (2012). *International Literature Review: Ethical Issues in Undertaking Research with Children and Young People* (Literature review for the Childwatch International Research Network). Lismore: Southern Cross University, Centre for Children and Young People / Dunedin: University of Otago, Centre for Research on Children and Families.
- Powell, M. A., & Smith, A. B. (2009). Children's participation rights in research. *Childhood, 16*, 124–142.
- Randall, D., Anderson, A., & Taylor, J. (2015). Protecting children in research: Safer ways to research with children who may be experiencing violence or abuse. *Journal of Child Health Care, 1*–10. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/1367493515587060
- Rivera, R., & Santos, D. (2016). Civic and political participation of children and adolescents: A lifestyle analysis for positive youth developmental programs. *Children and Society, 30*, 59–70.
- Salveron, M., Finan, S., & Bromfield, L. (2013). Why wait? Engaging with children and young people in child protection research to inform practice. *developing practice, 37* (December), 24–34.
- Save the Children. (2003). *So you want to consult with children: A toolkit of good practice*. Retrieved from [https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/So\\_you\\_want\\_to\\_consult\\_with\\_children\\_-\\_Toolkit\\_2004\\_1.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/So_you_want_to_consult_with_children_-_Toolkit_2004_1.pdf)
- Shaw, C., Brady, L-M., & Davey, C. (2011). *Guidelines for research with children and young people*. London: NCB Research Centre.
- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities, and obligations. *Children and Society, 15*, 107–117.
- Sinclair, R. (2004). Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective, and sustainable. *Children and Society, 18*, 106–118.
- Spyrou, S. (2011). The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood, 18*, 151–165.
- Stafford, A., Laybourn, A., Hill, M., & Walker, M. (2003). 'Having a say': Children and young people talk about consultation. *Children & Society, 17*, 361–373.
- Stoecklin, D. (2012). Theories of action in the field of child participation: In search of explicit frameworks. *Childhood, 20*, 443–457.
- Thomas, N. (2007). Towards a theory of children's participation. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 15*, 199–218.
- Thomas, N., Phillipson, J., O'Kane, C., & Davies, E. (1999). *Children and decision making: Toolbox and training pack*. Swansea: International Centre for Childhood Studies, University of Wales.
- Tisdall, E. K. M. (2015). Addressing the challenges of children and young people's participation. In T. Gal & B. F. Duramy (Eds.), *International perspectives and empirical findings on child participation: From social exclusion to child-inclusive policies* (pp. 381–403). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Treseder, P. (1997). *Empowering children and young people: Training manual*. London: Save the Children.
- United Nations. (1989). *The United Nations convention on the rights of the child*. London. doi:10.1093/tropej/fmp024
- Uprichard, E. (2008). Children as 'being and becomings': Children, childhood and temporality. *Children & Society, 22*, 303–313.
- Uprichard, E. (2010). Questioning research with children: Discrepancy between theory and practice? *Children and Society, 24*, 3–13.
- van den Hoonaard, W. C., & Hamilton, A. (Eds.). (2016). *The ethics rupture: Exploring alternatives to formal research ethics review*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.



Vis, S., & Thomas, N. (2009). Beyond talking—children's participation in Norwegian care and protection cases. *European Journal of Social Work, 12*, 155–168.

West, B. T., & Peytcheva, E. (2014). Can interviewer behaviors during ACASI affect data quality? *Survey Practice, 7*, 1–10.

Wyness, M. (2012). Children's participation and intergenerational dialogue: Bringing adults back into the analysis. *Childhood, 20*, 429–442.

Yardley, A. C. (2011). Children as experts in their own lives: Reflections on the principles of creative collaboration. *Child Indicators Research, 4*, 191–204. doi:10.1007/s12187-010-9102-2

## Endnotes

1 The Charters of Rights for children and young people in out-of-home care can be found at the following URLs:

ACT	<a href="http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/103771/Charter_of_Rights_explanatory_document.pdf">http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/103771/Charter_of_Rights_explanatory_document.pdf</a>
NSW	<a href="http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/322254/charter_7-12.pdf">http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/322254/charter_7-12.pdf</a> <a href="http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/322255/charter_13-18.pdf">http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/322255/charter_13-18.pdf</a>
NT	<a href="http://childrenandfamilies.nt.gov.au/library/scripts/objectifyMedia.aspx?file=pdf/88/11.pdf&amp;siteID=5&amp;str_title=Charter%20of%20Rights%20-%20Booklet.pdf">http://childrenandfamilies.nt.gov.au/library/scripts/objectifyMedia.aspx?file=pdf/88/11.pdf&amp;siteID=5&amp;str_title=Charter%20of%20Rights%20-%20Booklet.pdf</a>
QLD	<a href="https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/foster-care/charter-kids-rights.pdf">https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/foster-care/charter-kids-rights.pdf</a>
SA	<a href="http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au/charter-of-rights-2/">http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au/charter-of-rights-2/</a>
TAS	<a href="http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SmallBooklet.pdf">http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SmallBooklet.pdf</a>
VIC	<a href="http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/577565/1_Charter_for_children_in_out-of-home_care.pdf">http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/577565/1_Charter_for_children_in_out-of-home_care.pdf</a>
WA	<a href="https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildrenInCare/Documents/Advocate%20for%20Children%20in%20Care/Charter%20info%20for%20staff.pdf">https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildrenInCare/Documents/Advocate%20for%20Children%20in%20Care/Charter%20info%20for%20staff.pdf</a>

2 Liberationist view: "consider children as independent actual citizens ['beings'] who make competent and rational decisions, and therefore claim for equal rights to those of adults" (Stoecklin, 2012, p. 444).