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1

Introduction

Westwood, Larkins, Moxon, Perry and Thomas

Abstract: ICRYNet, an interdisciplinary research network concerned with children’s and young people’s participation, held their second conference in 2012 at The University of Central Lancashire in Preston UK. Over 200 academics, practitioners and children’s rights advocates, together with groups of children and young people from across the globe discussed, debated and decided upon new ways of connecting with each other. The chapter introduces the highlights from these “Global Conversations” which are captured in this book. The chapter describes how children, young people and adults joined forces to develop new ways of working together producing a website (DVIGC.COM), a participation toolkit, and this volume of research papers covering three key areas: Participation and Citizenship, Spaces of Intergenerational Relations and Children and Young People as Researchers.

In recent decades there has been a major growth of interest in research about and with children and young people. One recent manifestation of this was the creation in 2008 of the International Childhood and Youth Research Network (ICYRNet). This network promotes the interdisciplinary study of children and young people, in order to further awareness and understanding of issues that affect their well-being. In 2012 The Centre for Children and Young People’s Participation at the University of Central Lancashire hosted ICYRNet’s second international conference on the theme ‘Children, Young People and Adults: Extending the Conversation,’ which attracted more than 200 delegates from all over the world. A unique feature of the conference was that it ran alongside an international gathering of children and young people, planned by children and young people, on the theme ‘Young Citizens: Different Voices in Global Conversations.’ The young people’s planning group and the conference organising committee worked in partnership to deliver these two events in collaboration. The two events were hugely successful; in addition to several, varied opportunities for debates and discussions about research with children and young people, we saw presentations on many innovative projects about and with children and young people as co-researchers as well as participants.

Working with a group of undergraduate research interns funded by UCLan, the local organising committee working with Joshua Buckley developed a conference website, http://www.dvigc.com/. During the summer of 2013 Mark Barlow worked with us to update and revise the website, and you will find references to the website throughout this book. The website provides additional visual and audio materials linked to several chapters in the book, as well as information about the presentations and activities at the conference. In addition, as part of the work for the conference Charlotte Connolly developed a toolkit for young people’s participation in conferences. This toolkit draws on the experiences of developing the ‘Different Voices in Global Conversations’ event to provide guidance for future conference organisers on participatory methods and approaches, with insights into the different stages of planning, organising and delivery and highlighting key areas of success that may be replicated in other events. Sonia Kaur Virk developed and implemented several interactive evaluation activities for participants to feedback to the conference and young people’s planning committee their thoughts and views about a range of elements of the conference. The evaluation report and the aforementioned conference participation
toolkit are both available on the website http://www.dvigc.com/participation-toolkit-and-evaluation/. DVIGC.com is also open for new contributions and acts as a platform through which children and young people and the adults working with them on participatory research can share their findings, views and experiences (http://www.dvigc.com/young-people-conference/).

After the conference, the conference organising committee and the young people's planning group seized the opportunity to continue the ground-breaking ‘global conversations’ and proposed this edited collection of work. Young people were involved in contributing their critique of academic debates on participation – first at the conference and now through these chapters. During the preparation of the book, members of the editorial team met regularly with young people from three different groups and devised creative ways of exploring the chapters with them. Details of this process can be found within the opening chapters of each part of the book.¹ Author feedback was co-created by the young people and the editorial team, a collaboration which bridges the knowledge divide among young people, practitioners, students and academics. In this way we have produced a book for all of us, co-creating a space which is challenging, dynamic and takes debates about participation and citizenship forward in an inclusive manner. Our aim in working this way has been to set new standards for intergenerational dialogue through which children and young people can inform and shape the knowledge base about them, and guide the way adult researchers work and understand their lives.

Citizenship, participation and intergenerational relations

Citizenship is a contested concept, defined both as a status and as a set practice that enables and outlines the distribution of resources in a given political unit (Isin and Turner, 2007; Turner, 1993). It can be seen as a set of building blocks – rights, responsibilities, respect/recognition, participation and inclusion (Lister, 2007; Delanty, 2000). Legal or social practices connected with formal political institutions tend to dominate understandings of citizenship. This book, however, focuses on the practices in everyday lives through which children and young people enact citizenship by creating, transforming and challenging distributions of
Children and young people do not of course act alone. Adults too are social actors actively engaged in negotiating, receiving, contributing to or limiting the achievement of rights, responsibilities, respect/recognition participation and inclusion for themselves and for other adults, children and young people. Citizenship then can usefully be seen as relational and intergenerational, reflecting the interdependence of adults and children and young people (Cockburn, 2013).

Our intergenerational focus (Alanen, 2009) in this book is the interactions between two social categories – adults, and children and young people. But, as the term ‘children and young people’ suggests, there are of course many differences within each of these generational categories and these social positions intersect with other social experiences like gender, race and class. Taking a relational focus, however, enables us to study childhood and adulthood as processes rather than children and adults as entities (Alanen, 2009).

Participation is central to citizenship (McGinley & Grieve, 2010) and is the core of intergenerational practice studies in this book. Hart (1992) equated movement upwards on a ladder of participation as movement towards citizenship. This hierarchical understanding has however been challenged (Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997). Participation can be seen as generally ‘taking part in an activity or specifically ... taking part in decision-making’ (Thomas, 2007, p. 199). A majority world perspective (Mason & Bolan, 2010) widens this to include contributing to self, family and community. In some European definitions, however, participation initiatives remain as attempts to ‘reinforce the connection between young people and public life’ (Loncle, 2008, p. 37).

Tisdall (2010) however cautions that participation should be seen as a process of governance and not simply engagement in representative government. Participation may also be seen in children's involvement in the explicit and concealed decisions about ‘routines, structures and interests that affect children’ (Alderson, 2010, p. 94). These struggles for definition of participation echo the different understandings of citizenship, as both are then concerned with the spaces in which participation or other actions associated with citizenship take place, such as formal structures, civil society, family relationships or friendship groups. In whatever formal or informal, invited or created space, participation is a relational process through which children and young people
communicate or take action with others and with resources to try to bring about change.

This book is divided into three parts, based on the themes from the ICYRNet conference:

- Part I: Participation and citizenship
- Part II: Spaces of intergenerational relations
- Part III: Children and young people as researchers

In the opening chapter Roshni Nuggehalli introduces us to the transformational potential which child-led research has for community and cultural change, drawing on examples of work undertaken by children in India. In these examples we can see how children's perspectives shaped and influenced the direction and impact of their research. The importance of distinguishing between children and young people as rights holders and trainee citizens is also a key issue. Nuggehalli reminds us that as academics and practitioners we have a responsibility to inform the theoretical dimensions of the discipline of childhood studies and support a shift towards a protagonist- and rights-based ideology. Her chapter concludes with a series of questions which challenge us to engage with this paradigm shift.

Part I of the book focuses on the theme of participation and the ways in which it can be made meaningful and result in change. Members of Preston Youth Council (PYC) worked with Yasmin Perry and Cath Larkins to write the introductory chapter to this section. Their chapter ties in Nuggehalli’s work with that of Crowley, Hatton and Jupp-Kina and their own experiences. They reflect on the differences between approaches to participation in different locations and point to the need for further research on participation to explore the influence of environments, backgrounds, confidence levels and emotions, to pick apart the different roles children and young people engage in and the factors that influence whether or not change occurs as a result.

Anne Crowley continues the theme introduced by Roshni Nuggehalli, beginning her chapter with a discussion of what participation means for children and young people and reminding us that the realisation of rights to participate depends on solid political support if it is to move beyond tokenism. In this sense, whilst there has been progress, there is still a long journey ahead. Crowley argues that it is not simply a question of defining participatory approaches but also of evaluating their impact. She draws on four case studies from the United Kingdom and India and
an international panel to explore the problems of measuring the impact of participation on children and young people's lives and relationships, and on policies and services. Utilising a range of research methods, she interrogates the processes of participatory work with children, young people and adults. Her contribution, together with Nuggehalli’s, shows how the involvement of children and young people in community campaigns can really influence policy changes.

What do we understand meaningful participation to be? Amanda Hatton poses this question and examines how we conceptualise this. Her work with children and young people across the United Kingdom informed a practice model which she discusses in this chapter. The model involves an on-going reciprocal dialogue between children, young people and adults (p. 50). Hatton’s chapter highlights the quality issue in participatory work and the importance of integrity in participatory processes.

In the final chapter in Part I, Victoria Jupp-Kina examines how adults operationalise participatory work, drawing on a research project undertaken with young people and community participation workers in Brazil. Jupp-Kina’s work exposes some of the tensions and barriers in participatory work and in doing so highlights the hidden or unintended outcomes of participatory work with children and young people. When reflecting on the participatory process the impacts were found to go well beyond speaking out, as discussed in the case study of one young woman. The transformational potential of participation is once again illustrated through the articulations of young people engaged in these participatory projects.

Part II of the book looks at some examples of the spaces in which intergenerational processes of participation, representation and contribution can be seen. This section is introduced by Youthforia and Dan Moxon and starts by discussing the methods the group used to review two chapters, one on child language brokering in families and one on youth social capital. The group raised a set of issues in their discussions about the chapters, which related directly to their experiences of being empowered and disempowered in professional and familial exchanges including as child language brokers, and in terms of their access to or exclusion from public spaces. These valuable contributions bring insights from the lived experiences of children and young people to the research and practice issues which Siân Lucas and Paulina Billett present in their respective chapters.
In Vicky Johnson’s chapter we are introduced to the ‘Change-scape’ model, an attempt to account for the multi-dimensionality which characterises the participation of children and young people. Drawing on examples from different parts of the globe, Johnson illustrates the development and potential of both the model and the process of participation. Importantly she argues that starting with theory can alert both facilitators and children and young people to the development of participatory approaches that work in their context.

Billett’s chapter examines young people’s access to public space. The media representations of young people would sometimes have us believe that our public spaces are mobbed by young people; the privatisation and subsequent exclusion of young people from formerly public spaces poses serious questions about how young people are treated as citizens and as consumers. Whilst Billett discusses these issues in the context of Australia, they are relevant to other countries as well. The shift towards young people’s occupation of virtual space challenges the notion that we can simply move young people on, and provides a level of privacy for young people that has hitherto been absent in their lives. Conversely, virtual spaces and young people who occupy them are subject to surveillance, scrutiny, threat and public exposure. Billett’s discussion draws attention to the questions about young people’s use of public space and the on-going power struggle between them and adults, and the subsequent impact on young people’s social capital.

International migratory movements and globalisation expose a range of issues about childhood and children’s contributions in families. Language brokering can enable access to goods and services as well as facilitate social relationships and community cohesion. The involvement of children as language brokers (CLBs) brings a set of concerns related to their maturity and capacity to translate, interpret and advocate for adults, be they a member of the child or young person’s family or local community. These issues and the tensions experienced by children and young people who interpret are discussed in Lucas’s chapter. CLBs opine that such brokering is a normal part of everyday life, at least for some children, and, as Lucas argues, supports cognitive and cultural development and language acquisition skills and produces certain stressors. Drawing on a qualitative study of CLBs in England, Lucas presents a case study which illustrates the range of language brokering activity ‘Simran’ undertakes for her family. In doing so Lucas exposes the contribution that CLBs like ‘Simran’ make to their immediate family and society,
as well as drawing attention to the unresponsive systems which have neglected to provide effective language services.

Part III of this book considers the intergenerational practice of co-research with children and young people. This section is opened by a co-written chapter produced by Cath Larkins and a group of disabled young researchers. In this chapter the young people discuss the work of Kerawalla, Hughes and Michail, all of whom work with and write about children and young people as researchers. Larkins and the young people’s group describe the process of co-authoring the chapters. They found the models discussed by Kerawalla, Hughes and Michail to be helpful and make suggestions for effective child/young person led research, which include reflecting on the processes involved to ensure that adults relinquish power – and for adult researchers it is clear that time and intensity of the work involved should not be underestimated if this process is to be meaningful for children and young people. Researcher commitment and engagement with children and young people as individuals, as well as with group participation, are key factors for the success of research which is undertaken in partnership with children and young people.

In her chapter Lucinda Kerawalla brings together issues related to civic participation, inclusion and children’s rights in her discussion of a project that illustrates the processes involved in a community research project which draws on inquiry learning theory and practice. The model draws together disciplines of knowledge from education and sociology, and provides a starting point for a community-based research project which was carried out beyond the confines of the formal educational establishment. Kerawalla applies the model to the development of a research project with girls and young women (Girl Guides) and illustrates how the model facilitated the shift from them focusing on their individual opinions and views about the local community shopping facilities to achieving a group-wide consensus about what was needed in their community.

Continuing the theme of young researchers, Samia Michail discusses the shift towards this position for children in research, specifically in relation to the motivations of children and young people who lead research projects. Michail draws on developmental theories of attachment and argues for academic attention to be paid to the relationships between young people and adult researchers. The Child Led Research (CLR) discussed in this chapter was carried out by children and young people who were marginalised or excluded in some way and were
receiving support from community-based services. However, the CLR project moves beyond seeking views of children and young people as service-user participants, instead facilitating their involvement as researchers and prioritising relationship-based approaches. In reflecting on the process, Michail describes how flexibility in the design of the programme was crucial to being responsive to the ways in which children and young people chose to engage (or not). Michail's work also raises the challenge of how such projects encourage children to adopt a researcher role – albeit a temporary and time limited one – and children will eventually return to their everyday lives.

The final chapter in this book is by Martin Hughes, and he reflects on how children and young people experience their engagement as co-researchers. Using Q sort methodology Hughes seeks to understand the viewpoints of young researchers. The explanation for employing Q sort in this context is grounded in it being an ethical method which gives voice to all participants. He identifies five distinct ways in which young people have experienced their engagement in research; three of these can be seen as co-researching. Hughes's study raises some important questions about the extent to which children and young people's role as researchers is congruent with the requirements of the research. Indeed Hughes suggests ownership by young researchers tends to be limited to aspects of the process rather than expecting them to engage with the whole.

The theoretical underpinning to these three final chapters combines rights, philosophy and epistemology. The glue binding these chapters together consists of the values and integrity of the researchers who wish to engage children and young people in research above and beyond the more common tokenistic consultative status they are often ascribed. In the conclusion to this edited collection, we consider how the conversations between children and adults contribute to our understanding of the three themes around which this book is focussed – participation, citizenship and intergenerational relations – as well as setting out some of the challenges which lie ahead for children, young people and adults in continuing the participatory project.

**Note**

1 See also http://www.dvigc.com/book/introduction/
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DOI: 10.1057/9781137379702.0022
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