Childhood

Children's participation and intergenerational dialogue: Bringing adults back into the analysis

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Abstract
Within the field of children's participation there has been a shift from adults mediating children's worlds to children themselves becoming the sole interpreters of their own standpoints. In the process this has sometimes led to the marginalisation of adults' perspectives on and contributions to children's participation. In this article the author argues that analyses of children's participatory roles need to take account of the form and nature of children's relationships with adults. Drawing on the notion of intergenerational dialogue the article explores a range of political and global themes that highlight the participatory roles of children and their interdependence on adults.

There has been a significant shift in research orthodoxies in the field of childhood studies: from a focus on adults mediating children's worlds and in the process muting children's voices, to children's perspectives being central to the research field. This is particularly the case in the area of children's participation where the search for more authentic forms of participation has led to adults occupying more marginal positions and standpoints (Mannion, 2007). The partial and regulatory roles of adults with a vested interested in children's participation, the dominance of adult-centred agendas and structures and the linking of participation to children's development as future adults rather than the recognition of the importance of children's present everyday lives, have been key focal points within a powerful critique of children's participation (Skelton, 2007; Wyness, 2009). The response within the academic and professional fields has been greater emphasis on children's agency and competence and the development of more

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autonomous spaces for children, which on occasion has led to adults being pushed into the background as marginal players within the participation field (Franklin, 1997).

It is important to assess children's participation in terms of the extent to which they can make a formative difference to decision-making processes. However in making the case for children's participation in English schools Fielding (2007: 304) argues that there is 'too sharp and too exclusive a focus on the standpoints of young people'. In some respects this focus has led to a search for more authentic forms of children's participation with adult involvement receding into the background. Analyses of children's participation have also focused on the child as a rights-bearing individual, in the process neglecting the interdependent relationship between children and adults in a range of diverse settings. Given the current prominence placed on children's standpoints, in this article I want to bring adults back into the analysis as partners, collaborators and actors who play a diverse range of roles within participatory contexts. This means relocating children's participation within a framework of intergenerational dialogue which incorporates a range of globally distinct forms of children's participation.

In the first part of the article I explore a number of themes that suggest adults' involvement and perspectives have become less important in analyses of children's participation. In part two I offer a critique of this position by exploring the difficulties of positing a pure and authentic version of one key feature of participation, children's voice. I go on to examine children's own conceptions of their participation and their assessment of the roles adults play. Finally in this section I want to take issue with a globally dominant rights-based model of participation which emphasises more individualised models of childhood and which generates less inclusive models of adult participation.

In the final part of the article I offer a more 'conciliatory' approach bringing hitherto 'dominant' adults into the foreground working with and alongside newly 'empowered' child participants. I explore some of the conceptual terrain which focuses more on interdependent adult–child relations. I draw on Alanen's (2009) structural analysis, Fielding's (2007) concept of intergenerational dialogue, Wall's (2008) ethical rights position and a revised concept of space in providing a framework for an analytical reconciliation of 'child' and 'adult' thus superseding a centre/periphery model. I go on and illustrate this reconciliation in two ways: the child–family–state nexus, which opens up the possibility for more complex adult–child relations, and the global context, which offers a diversity of conceptions of children's participation and thus suggests a variety of ways in which children through their participation collaborate with adults.

Participation and authenticity

The promotion of children's participation has often been followed by the search for authentic forms of participation, particularly in relation to voice. There is critical engagement within childhood studies over the extent to which we can talk about the child's voice free from adult distortion or mediation (Thomas, 2007). Hitherto, it has been argued adults have played a dominant even overpowering role in children's lives (Kitzinger, 1997). This has extended to participatory initiatives where arguably adult agendas and methods have also dominated. The structuring and regulating of participatory initiatives by adults have led to critical commentary on the artificial and often

tokenistic nature of children's involvement (Hart, 2008). A key research and professional focus is on developing strategies for restricting adult influence from channels of communication within a number of institutional social settings, granting children a degree of autonomy in articulating their interests from a genuinely child-focused perceptive. In more institutional contexts this means that children have more agenda-setting powers, with adults in the background acting as facilitators. Pinkney (2011), for example, analyses children's voices in terms of relations that English welfare professionals have with child clients. One respondent, a children's rights officer, discusses the difficulties of uncovering the child client's 'pure' voice. Pinkney (2011: 41) goes on and speculates: 'an impure voice in this scenario might be one that was mediated, muffled, directed, coached, constrained or interpreted'. The 'purity' of the child's voice here is associated with the authenticity of the child's message connecting with the fundamentals of children's interests allowing adults limited interpretive powers.

Within a research context the search for children's authentic voice is argued to be hampered by the role that adult researchers play in structuring the research process (Mandell, 1991). The desire of the adult researcher to tap into the authentic voice of children and generate data that are as close as possible to children's perspectives comes into conflict with researchers' ethical responsibilities to protect children in the absence of other responsible adults (Christensen and Prout, 2002). Nevertheless, the aim of the researchers here is to either remove themselves from or minimise their roles as adults within the research context so that researchers are in a stronger position to generate 'pure', unmediated forms of data from child respondents.

Hierarchy of participation

One influential model that has been applied by a number of academics and professionals is Hart's (1997) ladder of children's participation. This typology orders a number of different forms of participation hierarchically from levels of 'non-participation' numbered from 1 to 3 and forms of genuine participation from 4 to 8. The top rung of the ladder represents the most advanced level of participation. Hart does not view his model as a blueprint for removing adults from participatory initiatives – the most advanced form of child participation, 'child initiated, shared decisions with adults' envisages children working alongside adults. Nevertheless, there is a strong emphasis on children taking charge and having full agenda-setting powers at this level. Moreover, from rungs 4 until 7 there is a progressive move away from adults setting the agenda to children taking control, which implies that adults progressively recede into the background as we move up the hierarchy.

Hart's work has sparked a number of revisions generating different typologies of children's participation (Franklin, 1997; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997). Franklin's (1997) version, for example, offers a more unambiguous focus on the shift of power from adult to child with each form of children's participation giving way to less involvement from adults. In these terms children become progressively more powerful as we move up the ladder and adults become progressively less important. Children's participation in these terms becomes a strategy for challenging adult power with more genuine and authentic forms of participation helping to shift the balance of power from adults towards children (Thomas, 2007).

Rights agenda

Within a political and global context children's participation since the 1990s has become more central due to the rights agenda. Much of the research on children's participation has been structured around the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Banks, 2007; Skelton, 2007). The CRC puts pressure on nation-states to provide for children and protect their physical, social and moral wellbeing. At the same time Articles 12 and 13 of the Convention introduce a more discursive dimension to children's wellbeing, children have 'voice'-based rights that in theory give them opportunities to articulate their interests in a number of different ways. Some see these discursive rights as a precondition of children's provision and protection rights (Hart, 2009). There is also some ambiguity between provision and protection that places children within an ambit of parental or adult responsibility and the idea of children having their own voice-based participation rights that potentially puts them at a distance from adults (Lee, 2005).

Despite the global scale of the CRC these rights connect with the values of more western affluent nation-states including individualism and self-reliance. This individualism still dominates the social sciences, particularly developmental psychology, where the child 'is like the pilgrim, the cowboy, and the detective on television – is invariably seen as a free-standing isolable being who moves through development as a self-contained and complete individual' (Kessen, in Morss, 1996: 43–44). The child here is viewed as negotiating various developmental stages en route to becoming a rational independent individual, a necessary preparation for membership of a wider individualistic culture.

The focus on the individual child as articulated through the CRC is also reflected in child-related policy in England and Wales. The 1989 and 2004 Children Acts, which focus on children's welfare, have redefined the unit of analysis from the integrity of the family towards the individual child. In political and legal terms children are disaggregated or separated from their families as 'rights-bearing individuals'. The individual child is more visible in this legislation with children's consultative roles as individuals given prominence, status and significance.

The individual participating child: Some critical points

A dominant motif within childhood studies is the participating child in search of an authentic, unmediated voice within a social and political space relatively free from adult intervention. In this section I want to look critically at this notion of the participating child. First, Lee (2001) has questioned the idea of the child being able to acquire an unmediated voice. If we associate participation and voice with a move towards individual autonomy, then we are starting to see the autonomous adult as the benchmark from which assessments of the participating child are made. Lee (2001) argues that postmodern social theory of the past 30 years has focused on the 'incomplete' nature of adulthood. Adults have to rely on others in order to get their messages across; their understandings of the world are always mediated by other people and objects. The search for an authentic adult voice is seen as a fruitless task. Thus the search for the authentic unmediated voice of the child must suffer a similar fate. Feminist theory

draws out the implications of Lee's argument by identifying autonomy in more relational terms. The child as the proto-autonomous individual is overly 'masculinist and rationalistic' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 3). Autonomy needs to be located within social relationships which are 'emotional, embodied and creative' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 21). Thus the links between participation and autonomy are embedded within more interdependent adult–child relations.

Second, children's authentic voice is located near the top of Hart's hierarchy of participation and greater adult involvement near the bottom. It may be more useful to classify children's participation and the involvement of adults horizontally rather than vertically. Treseder (1997) revises Hart's ladder by identifying any of his five legitimate forms of participation as different rather than inferior than any of the other forms. Thus judgements whether participatory initiatives are more or less authentically adult-free or child-empowered are less appropriate than the institutional context within which participation takes place. Barber (2007) asks whether consultation with children is always an inferior form of participation. Factors such as institutional capacity and the dispositions of the children and adults often dictate the nature of children's participation. 'Lesser' forms of participation such as timely consultations with adults are often preferable where children have to weigh up their commitment to participatory forums against a desire to retain control over their 'free' time (Hill, 2006). By the same token we might also question the extent to which the advocacy of children's interests by adults is a lesser form of participation than more direct involvement of children. While the child's voice is unheard in a literal sense, sometimes adults are in a better position to promote children's interests than children themselves, particularly at a political level where children have limited access to the political mainstream and where countries are now more likely to have a children's commissioner or ombudsperson for children (Wyness, 2009).

A third problem with the search for authenticity is the implicit idea that we can talk about a unitary child's voice. While various authors have challenged a dominant western conception of children's participation, one important issue is the extent to which we can ever identify a singular voice that represents the views of all children (Burke, 2007; Hart, 2008). The dominance of the child within analyses of participation sometimes obscures the myriad ways in which notions of age are interspersed with other dimensions of difference such as social class and gender. The diversity of childhoods here not only challenges any unitary model of the participating child, it also holds out the possibility for different groups of children connecting with different modes of participation, incorporating adults in a number of different roles.

This diversity is much more apparent if we locate children's participation within a global context. The unitary model of the participating child is to some extent dependent on the notion of the child as an individual rights bearer. Moreover this model of the participating child reflects much broader cultural global trends where less affluent populations have been subject to powerful neoliberal and Eurocentric norms, which privilege rationality and individualism (Ling, 2004). The structuring of children's participation takes place within a dominant frame of the individual child with the opportunity to play ever increasing roles in decision-making processes. As I have already argued this is a culturally specific frame of reference that reflects the values and norms of more affluent western nation-states, which cannot be generalised at a global level. If we broaden our

focus to incorporate less affluent contexts globally, we are more likely to find children immersed in their families, communities and regions where they participate alongside and sometimes on behalf of adults. In these terms children's participation takes on a more collective character.

Children's voices on children's participation

The idea of the autonomous participating child is not a prominent feature of children's preferences for different modes of participation (Cockburn and Cleaver, 2009; Prout et al., 2006). The dominant mode of participation in institutional settings in more affluent countries has been the representative mode, where children mimic the adult liberal democratic approach by holding elections in which children vote among their peers for a child representative or councillor (Wyness, 2009). This has not always been the most child-friendly way of introducing political concepts to children, nor the means of participation favoured by children themselves (Cockburn and Cleaver, 2009). In turning to the latter there is a modest body of work on children's views on the concept of children's participation and by implication the involvement of adults in this participation. Bjerke's (2011: 97) sample of Norwegian children stress the importance of being treated as 'differently equal partners' by adults rather than having greater independence from adults when being involved in decision-making processes. In Hill's (2006) analysis of children's reflections on voice within research and consultation contexts, children see participation as an entitlement rather than a gift. Children are also outcomes oriented: having a voice is viewed as a means to generate change (Hill, 2006). However, there is much less concern expressed over the involvement of adults, and more emphasis placed on children having some input into the type of method adopted by the researcher or the adult facilitator. Thus the issue here is not so much giving children more autonomy from adults within which they can participate, but creating an environment within which children feel more comfortable participating alongside adults.

In focusing on adults' presence in participatory contexts, my own research on school councils generated mixed views (Wyness, 2003). A sample of pupil school councillors from four secondary schools in England reflected on the role of teachers during school council meetings, where children represent the interests and concerns of their peers. Two broad categories emerged: the 'separatists', who saw teachers' (and older pupils') presence at council meetings compromising their ability to articulate the interests of their peers, and thus potentially compromising the council agenda; and a second group, those committed to 'sharing space' with teachers. The presence of teachers here, particularly senior teachers, was seen to give the council a higher profile within the school, but teachers were also seen by younger pupils to act as a buffer against the more powerful contributions of older pupils.

In other regional contexts there is no unambiguous commitment among children to the involvement of adults in their participation. Kranzl-Nagl and Zartler's (2010) study of participation across six European countries identified children's commitment to adults playing a facilitative rather than interventionist role in their participation. In Mason and Bolzan's (2010) cross-cultural research with children in the Asia-Pacific region, there was variation in the meaning of participation across the region. Nevertheless, one

convergent claim made by the children was that participation involved working along-side adults.

In one sense the question over the role that adults play in children's participation creates a paradox. The clearest example of children's autonomy is to grant them a position within society that is at odds with the social conventions, and thus distances them from the protective and structured environments controlled by responsible adults. The notion of the political child is sometimes seen as oxymoronic: children simply cannot inhabit political spaces. This was clearly stated by Hannah Arendt (1959) in her concept of the polis, a necessarily child-free realm. Children are located within the private domestic realm of 'natality, love and intimacy', where they are protected from the pressures of the public realm and at the same time socialised in order to enter the public realm (Bethke Elshtain, 1996: 14). To talk of a political child is to remove children from their normal social contexts where they are less protected, less nurtured – in effect, more adult-like. While there are a number of historical and contemporary examples of political children which belie the claims made by Arendt, the point I want to make here is that children's political voices are sometimes at their most potent when they are calling for the return of adult authority (Bethke Elshtain, 1996), potentially putting them in conflict with adults.

One example of this is the role that children and young people played in the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. While the main focus of the political activities of South African youth was the challenge to white minority rule, there was also a commitment to restoring 'normal' adult–child relations, in effect the attempted restoration of adult authority (Ndebele, 1995). The perception among the young was the loss of adult leadership and guidance in the home and in the classroom. Ndebele talked about an 'ontological crisis' for Black South African parents for both failing to bring about political change and being 'dismissed by children for having failed to protect them' (Ndebele, 1995: 331). Children's commitment was not about increasing their power over adults or the creation of adult-free spaces for children, but a call for adults to give children more support and guidance, to re-establish their authority where children's voices are an integral part of 'normal' adult–child relations.

Participation and interdependent relations

In reflecting on the emphases on autonomy, and the movement towards adult-free forms of children's participation, I want to focus on ways that adults can be brought back into the analysis as collaborators and protagonists. This is a conciliatory move in bringing two approaches or two 'moments' in childhood studies together: the emphasis on the adult as the child's mediator and a recognition of the child's capacity to have a voice in what Zeiher (2003: 68) calls children's 'individual life spaces'. The aim is to provide a more relational approach to children's participation, recognising the respective roles and positions of children and adults.

Alanen's (2009) structural analysis is a useful starting point. First of all, she proposes 'child' and 'adult' as distinctive categories and dimensions of difference. At the same time each category presupposes the other: there is an important relational dimension to this theory with both adults and children developing and refining their generational identities in and through routine engagement with each other. In applying this framework

to children's participation Fielding (2007) refers to the importance of intergenerational dialogue and collaboration as student voice is established in schools. Adult–child relations are characterised within the broader structure and culture of schooling as more collegial and trusting. Cooke-Sather's notion of 'translation' is useful here: ongoing dialogue means the teacher 'can relate to students in a way that isn't imposition; she can translate herself rather than focus on translating students; and she can support students translating themselves' (Fielding, 2007: 305). There is genuine dialogue between both parties, and there is an ethical and political commitment to sharing information which implies a more interdependent relationship.

Wall (2008: 537) goes further in establishing interdependence as a basis for children's participation. He argues from an ethical rights-based perspective when referring to 'a circle of responsibility to each human other' which incorporates children as both responsive to the arrangements made by adults for their welfare and implicated in these arrangements as active participants. Woodhouse (2009: 820), from a feminist 'ecogenerist' perspective, argues for the same form of interdependence in her analysis of the CRC. She challenges the individualism of rights and emphasises their interconnectedness 'in demand[ing] that we recognize our shared interconnectedness and our shared vulnerabilities, as well as our rights to individual autonomy and privacy'. Within this framework we can start thinking about children's participation as a social or collective category, which becomes a characteristic of the concept childhood as adults become more responsive to children's capacities as participants. While this is an attempt to synthesise a hitherto dominant model of adult power with more recent notions of child participation, this is not a conflict-free model of adult–child relations. Children and adults are involved in a dialogue where 'claims and principles are contested and contextualised, invoked and revoked' (Behabib, cited in Wall, 2011: 92).

Institutional modes of participation encourage dialogue between children and adults as a means of heightening the roles that children play. They also open up the possibility of refining the identities of professionals working with children. Watts and Youens' (2007) research on the work of what they called 'professional pupils' in an English school illustrates well the notion of establishing an intergenerational dialogue. Groups of pupils were trained as pupil mentors in order to support and develop the capacities of student teachers who were in school as part of their teacher education. Pupils were learning a range of social and educational skills in and through their work with trainee teachers, while the latter were becoming more confident in their teaching abilities through the support from the pupils. These are not common practices in English schools. Nevertheless, they do draw out generational interdependencies with children's participation being mutually beneficial for children and adults.

The concept of children's spaces is also important here. There has been a tendency to view space as a concomitant of autonomy. That is, children are able to exercise a proper degree of agency where they have their own child-friendly spaces within which they have degrees of control. However, the work of Moss and Petrie (2002) challenges this notion of space, arguing that the concept is more multifaceted. There is a material or geographical dimension to giving children space, particularly where children's use of physical space is highly regulated. There is clearly a sense in which children can use space to gain some respite from adult surveillance.[1] At the same time the use of space

here comes close to Barber's (2007) notion of the 'engagement zone', where children and adults creatively engage and find new ways of utilising these spaces. Implicit here are the ethical and social dimensions of space, where adult–child relations are interdependent, where this interdependence allows for children to be heard and where children work alongside adults. The role of the pedagogue is critical here. Pedagogues are typically used in some European countries as professional child workers to engage with children, and work alongside them in strengthening their voices as well as encouraging dialogue between themselves and children. As Moss and Petrie argue, this 'approach is relational. The child is not regarded as an autonomous and detached subject, but as living in networks of relationships, involving both children and adults' (2002: 143).

Child's mediate role

One area where intergenerational relations have been crucial is in the institutional realm where families come into contact with agencies of the state. In English-speaking and Northern European countries the policy domain has started to redefine children's roles as third parties in negotiations between parents and child professionals. Hitherto issues relating to children's welfare tended to be framed in terms of an uneasy bipartite relationship between parents and the professionals (Dingwall et al., 1995). Similarly, within the educational realm the rise of a quasi-market in the state education sector in the UK and USA in the 1990s strengthened the view that parents have significant public responsibilities for their children's educational wellbeing and thus heightened the relationship between parent and teacher (Wyness, 1999). Parents and on occasion the state mediated on behalf of children. Children's voices were either absent or privatised. Within the welfare and education realms children are now immersed in more complex networks of relations between different agencies. In a number of countries there has been a move towards more tripartite relations whereby children as well as parents and the state are active in shaping arrangements for their welfare (Arild Vis and Thomas, 2009 [in England and Norway]; Goldson, 2006 [in New Zealand]).

In the UK the student voice agenda is starting to have an impact on policy and practice. If we take the home–school relationship, children's interstitial role between parents and teachers generates more opportunities for children to interact together with parents and teachers. There is evidence of this in analyses of written communication between home and school in relation to classroom-based activities and more formal reports that encourage contributions from children as well as parents (Beveridge, 2004). There is little consensus among teachers, parents or children on children's presence at routine meetings between parents and teachers at the end of a term or semester. Nevertheless, all parties use these meetings to develop more accurate and more effective channels of communication between home and school. Despite these aims, a tripartite relationship creates more complex dynamics that are sometimes exploited by one party or another. Children on occasion use these meetings to strengthen their points of view, particularly when they are at odds with either parents' or teachers' accounts. In Beveridge's (2004) research in England some secondary age students (age 11–18) felt in a stronger position to challenge what is sometimes said to them in class by teachers at these meetings when their parents were present.

Interdependent relations at a global level

In this section I want to emphasise the interdependent nature of children's participation when the latter is located at a broader global level. To globalise participation is to extend and complicate the meaning of participation. In the first section of the article I argued that a dominant understanding of children's participation derives from the CRC, which although global in scope is skewed towards more individualised, western conceptions of childhood and children's participation. Arguably, children's participation means something else in less affluent 'Southern' contexts. In many cultures participation has a much broader meaning with children's access to decision-making one among a number of forms of children's participation. Berman (2011), for example, in her ethnographic study of the K'iche children in Guatemala highlights children's important social role in mediating between adults from different families. Children run errands, convey messages and provide an important buffer between groups of disputing adults.

More commonly children participate through economic activities within their families and communities. There is an issue here about the extent to which working children have access to decision-making processes. Some argue that the same children who are expected to assume significant material responsibilities within their communities and families have little means of voicing their opinions (Banks, 2007). In part this is due to cultural notions of obligations and age-related deference as well as more exploitative relations between employers and child workers. At the same time there have also been attempts to provide children with voiced-based structures at local, national and international levels (Liebel, 2003). For example, the International Movement of Working Children was set up in 1996, composed of child representatives from Asia, Latin America and Africa (Liebel, 2003). The aim here is to improve the working environment for children and their families. Thus children, international organisations and local professionals work together to provide more 'dignified' work for children as well as ensuring that working children have access to free education.

It is also clear that the material responsibilities many children take on in childcare and work conflict with globally dominant voice-based forms of participation. 'Material' forms of children's participation are excluded from the CRC and their exclusion is the focus of campaigns to eliminate 'child labour' (ILO, 2011; UNICEF, 2011). Nevertheless, despite the reasons for children's material participation and international pressure to marginalise these forms of participation, there is a much stronger emphasis on adults and children working together. We can potentially identify a rich variety of intergenerational dialogue and collaboration between children and adults from within their families and communities.

One important implication of refocusing on interdependent relations is to rebalance the levels of influence that either party has on each other. The conventional view is that adults set the agenda, and gradually provide more autonomous space through which children can participate in order to create more authentic forms of participation. While there is no denying that this takes place given the regulatory roles adults play in children's welfare, there is also a sense in which children's participation offers adults opportunities to reflect on their own social and political participation. Hart (2009) views the possible remaking of civil society through the development of participatory

opportunities for children. There is some recognition now that children are different from adults in terms of their interests and commitments and in terms of the ways that they prefer to communicate within the public realm. Children and young people eschew less formal political structures in favour of more networked associational approaches (Cockburn and Cleaver, 2009; Wyness, 2009). At the same time children's scepticism of conventional politics converges with adult rejection of representative democratic approaches and a growing interest in extra-political issue-oriented forms of political action. Cockburn and Cleaver (2009) through their work with the Carnegie Young People's Initiative argue that children in the UK have a preference for less hierarchical and more informal ways of exercising voice. This not only challenges the conventional representative models that dominate most institutional contexts but also offers adults opportunities to rethink the way that politics is conducted at local and national levels (West, 2004).

In this article I have argued that the exploration of children's participation in a range of globally diverse contexts shifts the focus towards interdependent relations between adults and children. Here too we can identify a number of ways in which children's community or political involvement have had important effects on adults. One example of this is the introduction of Children's Clubs in Sri Lanka during the civil war (Hart, 2003). The clubs were set up by the local children along with support from an NGO. Children ran these clubs but in the process helped to mobilise adult involvement in and commitment to changing things across their communities. Roger Hart provides another example, the Escuelas Nuevas in Colombia; schools run on more democratic principles that had a positive effect on the social and political capacities of adults within the surrounding communities (Hart, 2009). Here we can see children motivating adults, with the latter becoming more networked within their local communities. While these are localised examples and there is little strong evidence to support more national or global trends, they do stress the importance of adult–child relations in terms of how children's participation can often benefit adults. Thus by focusing on interdependent relations we can see how changes to children as a consequence of their participation can also have significant positive effects on adults.

Conclusion

Mannion (2007) refers to the ways that childhood researchers can marginalise the position of adults in the promotion of children's status as participants. Given the status of children as incompetents and dependents in earlier social scientific research and practice, this is an understandable and inadvertent consequence of the need to recentre the position of children as individual rights-bearing agents. The area of children's participation has been a particularly crucial force here as participation is often equated with agency: more authentic modes of participation are inextricably linked with more autonomy for children and relatively less involvement of and regulation from adults. The agentic child is the participating child. It is important to assess children's participation in terms of the extent to which participatory initiatives make a material difference to children's lives, not least because children themselves are committed to seeing participation in this way (Hill, 2006). But it is also crucial to bring adults back into any

analysis of children's participation. In this article I have argued for a more interdependent and intergenerational approach. Again with reference to children's perspectives, participation and voice cannot be fully understood in all its complexities unless we tease out the nature of relations between children and adults.

In this article I have argued that a range of different forms of intergenerational dialogue can be identified on at least at two levels of analysis. First, the child has become a centripetal force within the public realm, at least in more affluent countries. Within the policy and professional domains children have acquired a more independent status as rights-bearing individuals generating more complex relations between children and adults, rather than a simple 'separation' of children from their 'natural' adult reference points (Lee, 2005). Second, the global dimension broadens this realm of complexity and interconnectedness. On the one hand, the CRC offers a powerful image of the individual child taking up his or her discursive rights in and against more conventional adult structures. Childhood scholars have often used this as a basis for creating greater distance between the child participant and adult conventions on the basis of the search for more authentic forms of children's participation. On the other hand, globalisation can also be equated with diversity: children here have a range of economic and social responsibilities, participating alongside adults and other children within their families and their communities. This generates a more variegated picture of participation with a much stronger emphasis on adult–child interdependencies. Thus an analysis of children's participation is not just about exploring the nature of adult–child relations in terms of a zero-sum conflict of power; it is about how children's voices can be heard and acknowledged through more interconnected relations between children and adults (Bjerke, 2011).

Acknowledgements

Funding

Note

1. See for example, Christensen and Mikkelsen's (2011) work on Danish girls' collective strategies for creating their own spaces away from adult surveillance.

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