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Dilemmas and Opportunities: what we can learn from contrasting contexts of children and young people's participation in Tamil Nadu, India and Scotland, UK

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"IF THOSE KIDS WOULD SHUT UP, WE'D LISTEN TO THEM!"

.. the proper objective of participation is to ensure 'transformation' of existing development practice and, more radically, the social relations, institutional practices and capacity gaps which cause social exclusion. (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 13)

Interests of participation

Form	Top-down	Bottom-up	Function
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action	Empowerment to be able to decide and act for themselves	Means/end both as means and an end, a continuing dynamic

(White 1996: 7; Cornwall 2008: 273)

What can we learn about transformative participation by having conversations between Tamil Nadu, India and Scotland, UK?

1. The governance framework for participation
2. How we 'do' participation
3. Child-adult relations in cultural contexts

The governance framework for participation

Tamil Nadu, India

- no strong commitment from the central state
- strong civil society
- progressive approach to children and young people

Scotland, UK

- strong commitment from the Scottish Government
- active voluntary sector promoting children and young people's participation; voluntary organisations tend to be for not of children
- rhetoric of children and young people's participation but apolitical

How we 'do' participation

Tamil Nadu, India (example)

- Children sangam organise a Convention day
- cultural programme (rally, drama, puppet show)
- limitation of the process: space for children, young people and adults but no intergenerational **dialogue**

Scotland, UK (example)

- adult invitation into invited 'spaces'
- core work with children and young people arms length.
- focus groups, 'participatory' methods
- a move away solely from the written word
- some dialogue directly between children and young people and the powers that be, feedback

Child-adult relations in cultural contexts

Tamil Nadu, India (example)

Parent's meetings

- Understand the functioning of children sangams
- Receive trainings
- Change vision on their children

Positive changes in behaviours and attitudes of mothers:

- Reduce domestic violence
- Respect gender equality
- Increase parental support

Scotland, UK (example)

- Groups solely of children and young people, except adult supporters aid communication
- Parents separately consulted
- Children and young people as 'autonomous agents', in their own civic participation 'trajectory'?

Concluding thoughts – concepts/ theory

- Thinking about ‘spaces’ of participation, combining ideas of physical and geographical with time and change, social relations
- Is transformative participation more than empowerment? If so ...
- More ‘testing’ ideas – conflict; ‘negative’ participation; control

Concluding thoughts – practice(s)

- Strategies in context – mapping out governance, relations, networks
- Looking critically at how we ‘do’ participation – e.g. claims for participatory methods
- Long-term intergenerational dialogue

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If you want more information ...

Theorising Children's Participation: learning across countries and across disciplines (2008-2011)

The Leverhulme Trust International Academic Network

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/researchprojects/rp_theorising.html

Tisdall, E.K.M., Gadda, A.M., Butler, U. (eds) (2013)
Children's and Young People's Participation: Challenging Cross-Country Perspectives. London: Palgrave.

Children and Young People's Participation: From fashion accessory to part of the fabric (2011-12)

ESRC Follow on Fund

Briefing Paper 1

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/reports/Participation%20briefing.pdf>

Related publications

- Tisdall, E.K.M. and Punch, S. (2012) 'Not so 'new'? Looking critically at Childhood Studies', *Children's Geographies*. Accepted. Due out August issue.
- Tisdall, E.K.M. (2012) 'Taking forward children and young people's participation', in Hill, M., Head, G., Lockyer, A., Reid, B. and Taylor, R. (eds) *Children's Services: working together*, Harlow: Pearson, pp. 151-162.
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