Pathways to Participation: Children's Rights in practice

As children and young people, we want to live without violence

Harry Shier

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Overview

1. The origins of "Pathways to Participation"

2. The Pathways to Participation model, 2001

3. Nicaragua: "Pathways to participation" revisited: *Protagonismo infantil,* Empowerment, and participatory research

4. "Pathways to Participation" and children participating in social research

Photos by PLAY-TRAIN (UK 1998-2000, slides 9-13) and CESESMA (Nicaragua 2007-2015, all other slides), featuring children and young people as active citizens, consultants, researchers, campaigners and human rights defenders, taken with informed consent of the young people featured, and reproduced here with their permission.

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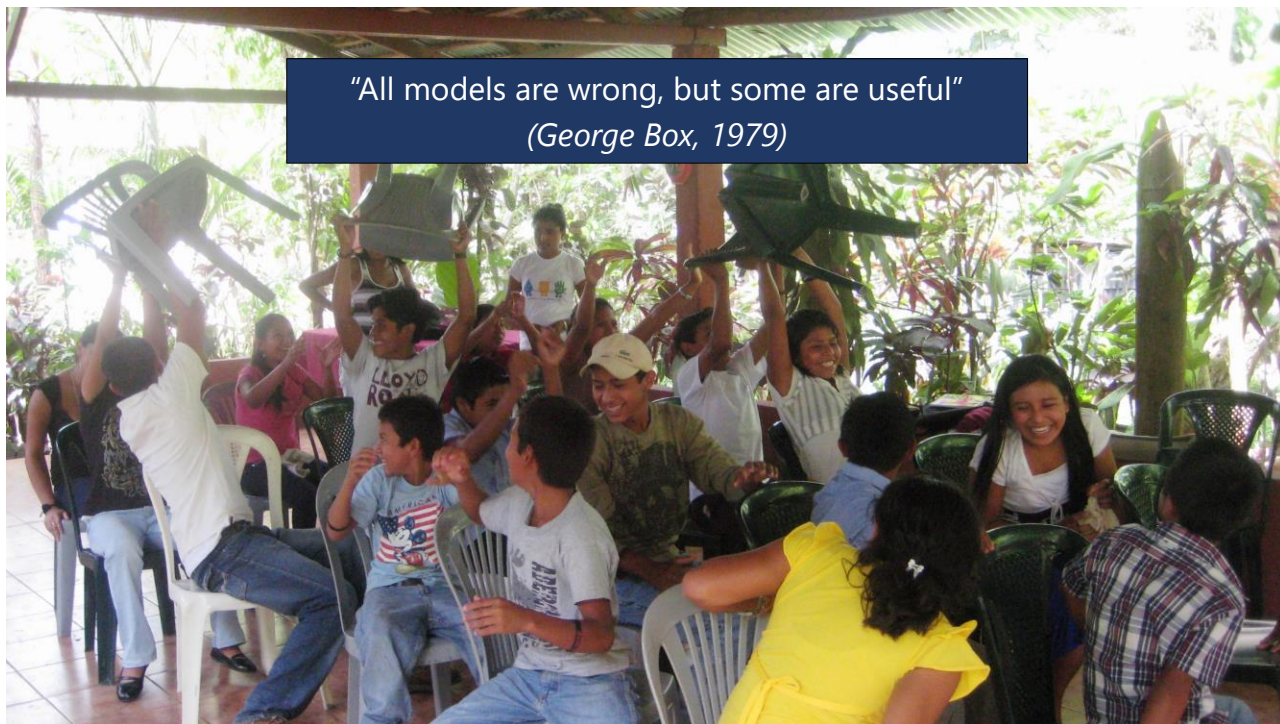
"All models are wrong, but some are useful"
(George Box, 1979)

# 1. The origins of the "Pathways to Participation" model

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

Then I 'discovered' children's rights at the 'World Play Summit' in Melbourne in 1993

My first publication: *"Adventure Playgrounds, an Introduction". 1984.*

This experience changed the course of my life...

I discovered that, whatever social issue you want to tackle, children's rights provides both an underpinning framework and an overarching approach – which I have been committed to ever since.
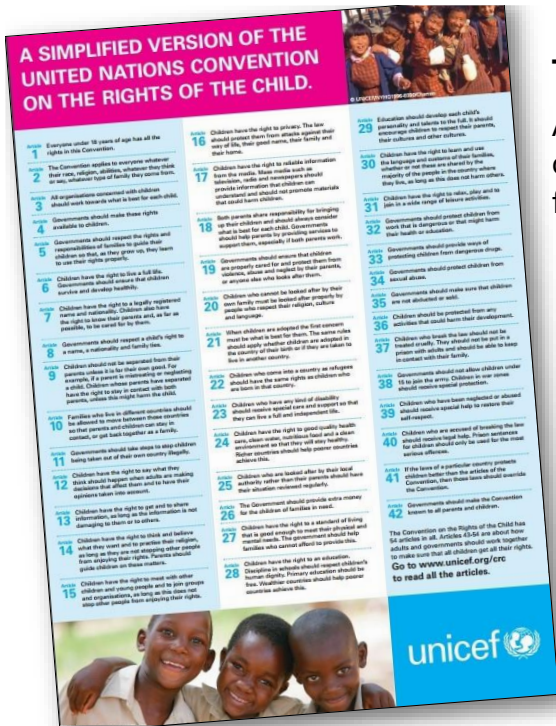
The child's right to be heard

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the fundamental right of the child to be heard:

> *Article 12*
>
> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

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But rights do not stand alone. Article 12 is backed up by:

Article 13:   Freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, through any media of the child's choice.

Article 14:   Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Article 15:   Freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Article 17:   Safe access to the mass media.

...all underpinned by **Article 2**: **Enjoyment of all rights without discrimination of any kind.**

For convenience, this bundle of rights is often referred to as **children's participation rights**, or just **"the right to participate".**
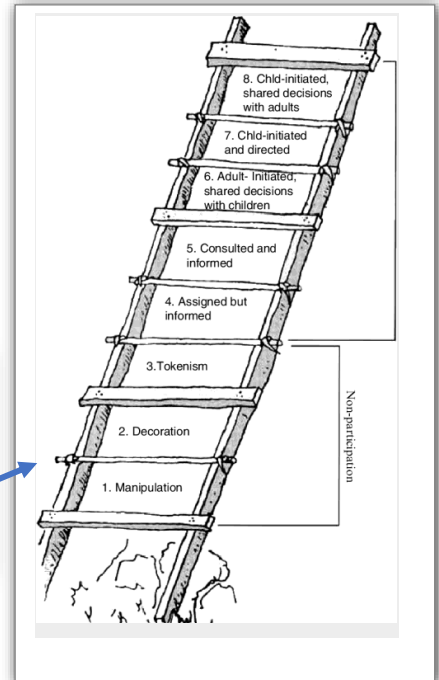
On my return to the UK I formed an action committee to organise the first Article 31 Conference

Roger Hart came and introduced us to his "Ladder of children's participation"

HART'S LADDER

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

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

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

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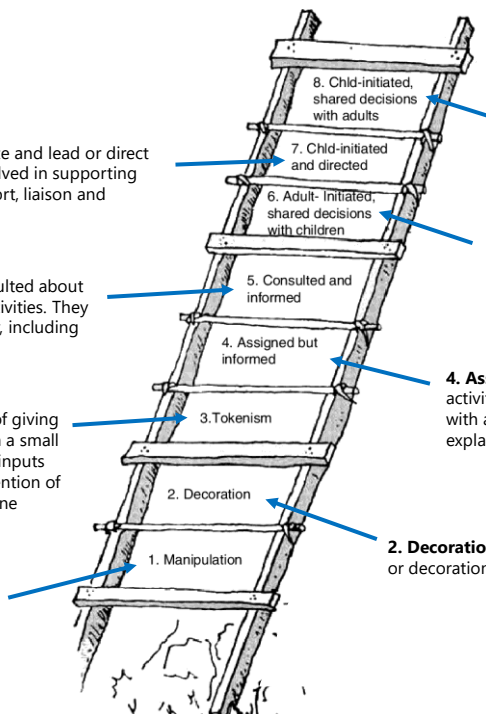
8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults: Children initiate and lead projects, but invite selected adults to share decision-making, usually as equal partners, with shared responsibility.

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

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

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

8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults

7. Child-initiated and directed

6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration
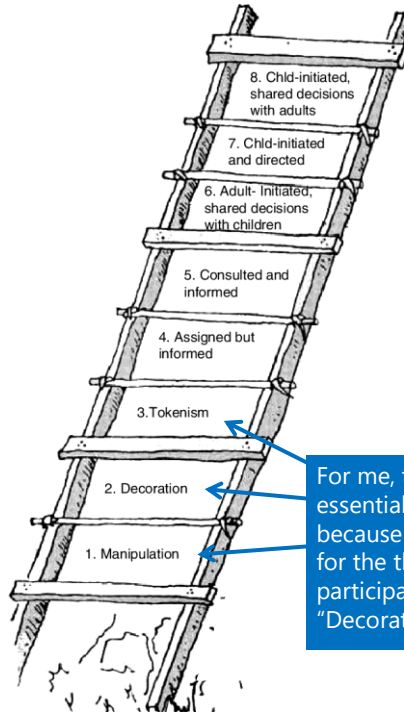
1. Manipulation

For me, the ladder model is still an essential part of our tool-kit because Hart taught us to look out for the three types of false participation: "Manipulation", "Decoration" and "Tokenism".

The Article 31 Conference led to the **Article 31 Action Pack**
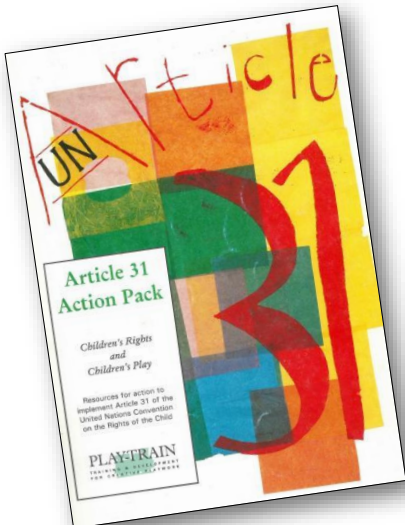
[Shier (ed) 1995]

Then the launch of the **Article 31 Action Network**

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

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

So where do we find the experts?

Children are experts on what is child-friendly and what isn't, what works for children and what doesn't, what's fun and what's boring, what makes them feel included and what makes them feel excluded. *(Shier,1999)*

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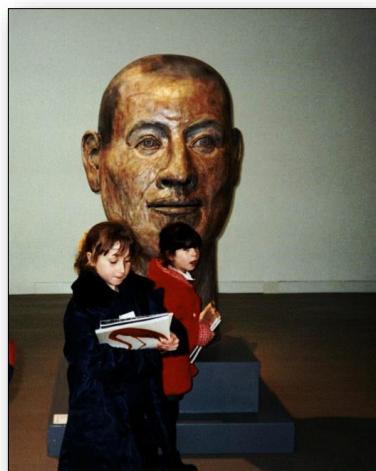
Child consultants advising the management of the new Manchester City Art Gallery on how to create a child-friendly gallery.

1999

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

2000

Child Consultants advise managers at the Tower of London on how to make it less boring.

2. The "Pathways to Participation" model
2000: Emergence of a new analysis
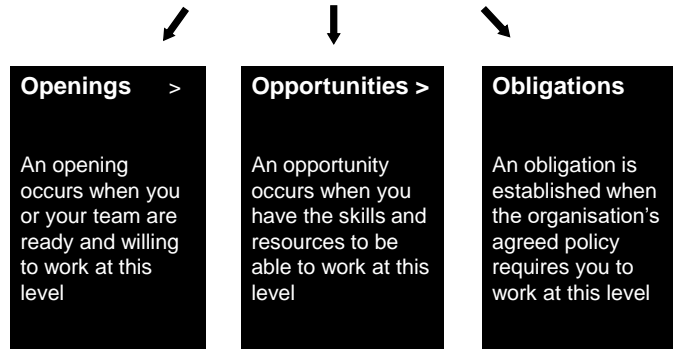
Five levels of participation

⬇

1. Children are listened to.

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

3. Children's views are taken into account.

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.

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

As the work progressed, I sought to understand how adults interact with child citizens in these situations.

At the turn of the Millennium, my new model emerged

Three stages of commitment at each level

↙   ⬇   ↘

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

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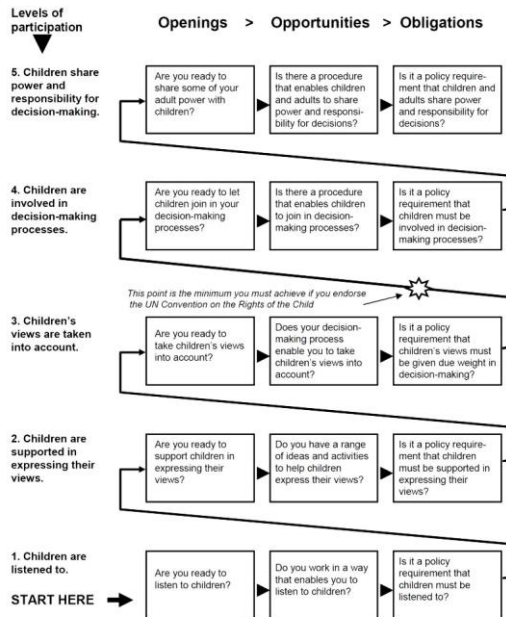
Openings > Opportunities > Obligations

Levels of participation
▼

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

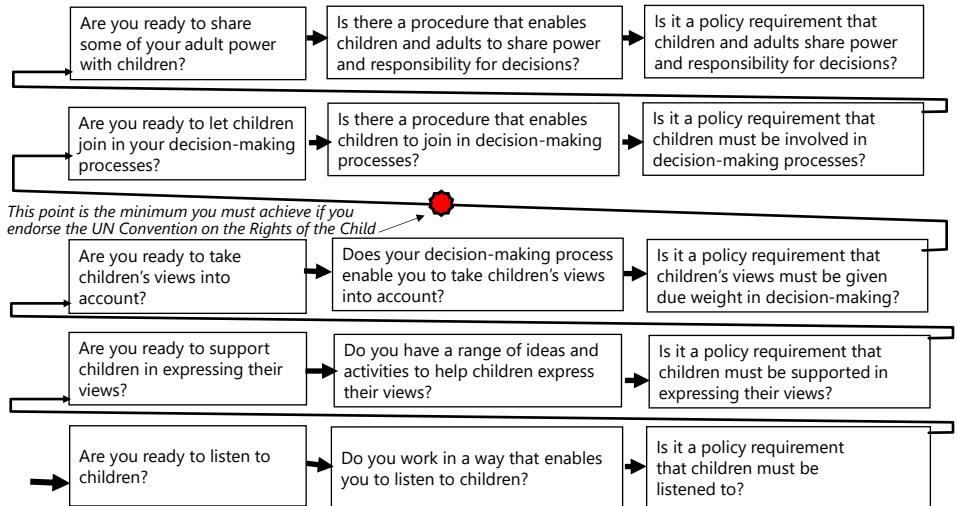| Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children? | Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions? | Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions? |

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.

| Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes? | Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes? |

This point is the minimum you must achieve if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

3. Children's views are taken into account.

| Are you ready to take children's views into account? | Does your decision-making process enable you to take children's views into account? | Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making? |

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

| Are you ready to support children in expressing their views? | Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views? |

START HERE
1. Children are listened to.

| Are you ready to listen to children? | Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to? |

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

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

3. Nicaragua: "Pathways to Participation" revisited

In 2001, the same year that "Pathways to Participation" was published in the UK, I moved to Nicaragua, Central America

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Child labour on coffee plantations
(Shier 2017)

The struggle for the right to education
(Shier et al, 2013)

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From 2001 to 2011 I worked with a local children's rights organisation CESESMA, supporting child workers on the coffee plantations in claiming and defending their rights. *(Shier 2010)*

This was an opportunity to review and reflect on the original "Pathways to Participation" model. *(Shier, 2006)*

The model still works, and continues to be widely used around the world, but there are some new things we have learnt:

1. Why do we use ladders?

- Both Hart's and Shier's models involve "levels".

- Some have complained that this pushes us to climb ever upwards, striving for higher levels of participation. This might not be in children and young people's best interests.

- But there's another way to look at it: How do people use ladders in real life?

The purpose of a ladder is not to climb to the top. We use a ladder to help us work at the correct height for the task in hand (and without the ladder, we cannot do this).

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2. A new approach to participation: "Protagonismo Infantil"

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

(Shier 2019a; Taft 2019)

Youth theatre against violence in the home

Young people ran a weekly local radio show "Children and Adolescents' Voices Heard", including peer-to-peer messages about preventing, recognising and reporting violence.

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The Dragon of Violence took part in marches and protests, to awaken people to the reality of violence in rural communities, and the need to face it without fear.

Public forum on reducing child labour and violence against children, Matagalpa, 2009

National Festival Against Violence towards Children, La Dalia, 2011

National forum on children and young people as active citizens influencing public policy, Managua, 2012

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Through these and many other actions, children and young people, exercise their *protagonismo,* establishing their identity as rights-holders and rights defenders, deserving and, if necessary, demanding, that their citizenship be recognised and respected.

(Shier et al, 2014; Shier et al, 2023; Shier 2023)

If burning and logging increase, the water disappears.

3. Empowerment

When I first created the "Pathways to Participation" model, I didn't understand "empowerment".

"*Pathways to Participation"* supposes that I can empower you by making you a gift of some of my power...

... and that power is a "zero-sum game": I have more – you have less.

But that's not how it is. My work in CESESMA, based on Paolo Freire's ideas, taught me that I cannot empower anyone. *(Freire, 1968)*
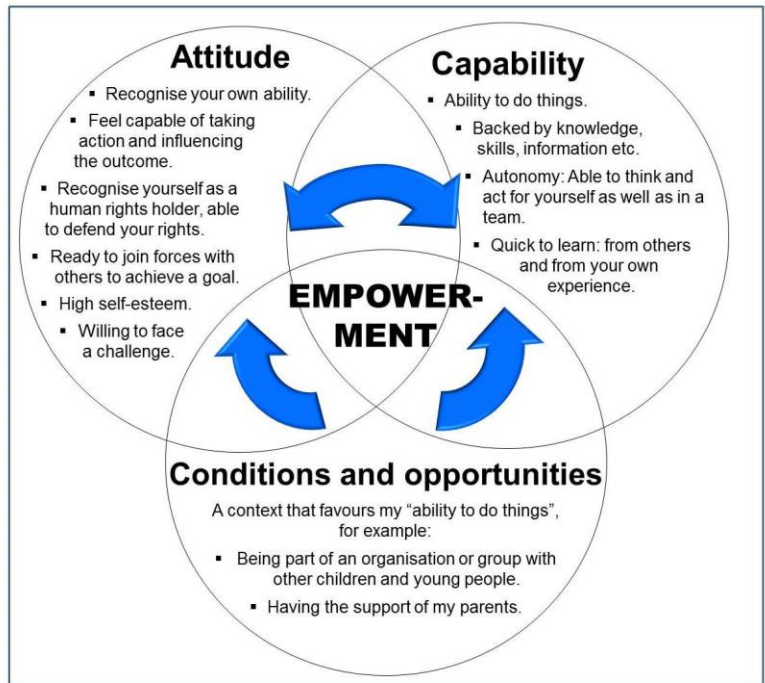
Now I understand empowerment very differently.
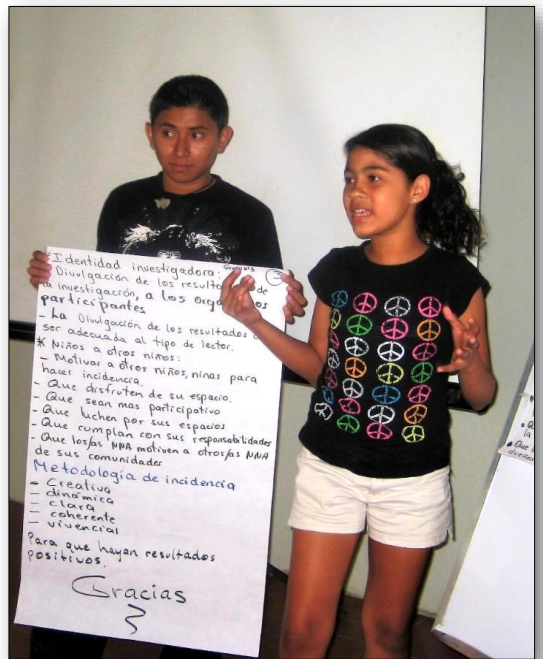
Here is CESESMA's model of Empowerment

(first appeared in Spanish, CESESMA-UNN, 2010). English version in Shier, 2019b).

Attitude
- Recognise your own ability.
- Feel capable of taking action and influencing the outcome.
- Recognise yourself as a human rights holder, able to defend your rights.
- Ready to join forces with others to achieve a goal.
- High self-esteem.
- Willing to face a challenge.

Capability
- Ability to do things.
- Backed by knowledge, skills, information etc.
- Autonomy: Able to think and act for yourself as well as in a team.
- Quick to learn: from others and from your own experience.

EMPOWER-MENT

Conditions and opportunities
A context that favours my "ability to do things", for example:
- Being part of an organisation or group with other children and young people.
- Having the support of my parents.

3. Sometimes it is good to have a solid structure, and a clear pathway to follow.

But other times, it is better to have a more organic process of growth and evolution...
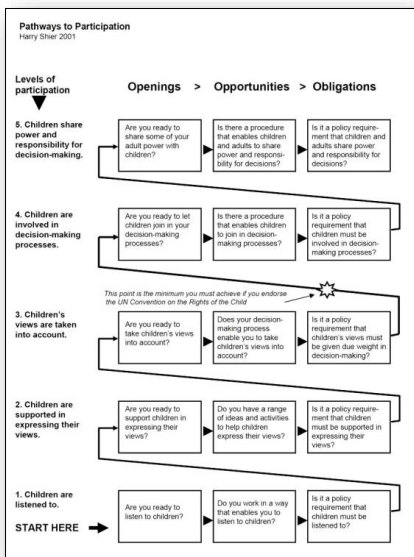
The participation model I developed in the UK in 2000.

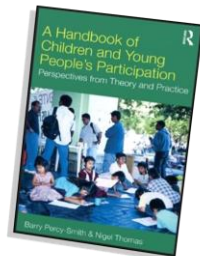The model I developed with young people working on the Nicaraguan coffee plantations in 2007.
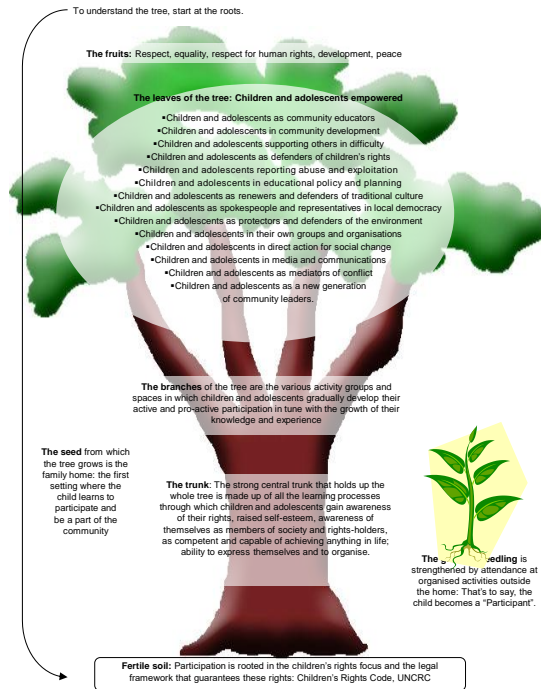
(Shier, 2010)

The Participation Tree from Nicaragua

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

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

To understand the tree, start at the roots.

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

The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

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

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

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

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

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

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

CLOSE-UP ON…
The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

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

4. Children as researchers

"We want to live without violence"

Children from Yúcul formed a research team and chose an issue affecting their families and their community that they wanted to find out more about.

The topic they chose to investigate was how alcohol is related to violence in their community.

Planning

Interviewing

Analysing data

Preparing the report and recommendations

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Follow-up and impact...

- ❑ The Young Researchers presented their findings to the government's 'Family Life and Security Commission', which decided to make the alcohol problem a top priority.

- ❑ Local government and party officials admitted they had been aware of the issue for years, but it wasn't till the children came forward with their research that they felt forced to act on it.
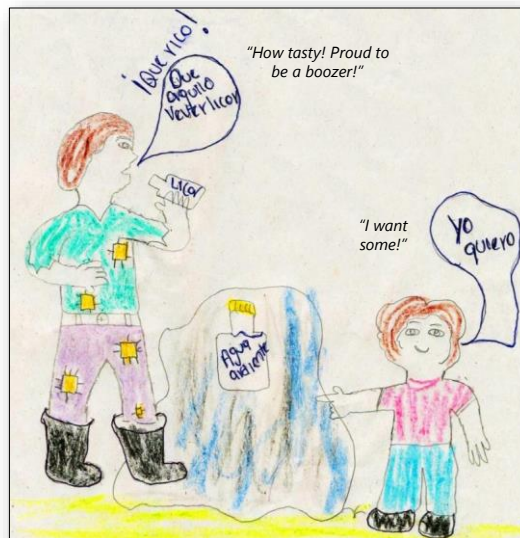
- ❑ The local police also took action; confiscating illegal liquor and closing at least two unlicensed cantinas.

- ❑ A national broadcaster heard about the children's work, and the team was featured on the national TV news.

- ❑ Following the news broadcast, the local authority and police have ensured no new liquor licenses are granted in the Yúcul area.

(Shier, 2015)

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The Young Researchers' report was in this book published by CESESMA in Nicaragua in March 2012 *(CESESMA 2012a).*

An English translation produced jointly by CESESMA and the University of Central Lancashire was launched in September 2012 *(CESESMA 2012b).*
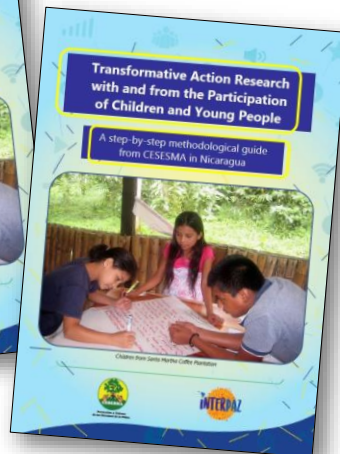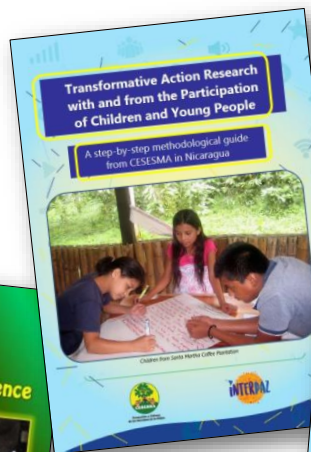
Finally, last year we published a step-by-step methodological guide to using CESESMA's Transformative Action Research approach – in both Spanish and English. *(Shier and Hernández Méndez, 2021a; 2021b)*

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4. "Pathways to Participation" and Children participating in social research

Over the past 20 years, researchers around the world in many disciplines, including education, health, social care, recreation and public policy, have made use of the "Pathways to Participation" model in different ways.

Many have used it to assess, evaluate or re-think the reality of child participation in different service areas and settings. *(Tregeagle and Mason, 2008; Schalkers et al, 2016; Gilljam et al, 2019; Hultman et al, 2020; Nordlind et al, 2021; Shaik, 2021; Cheeseman et al, 2022)*
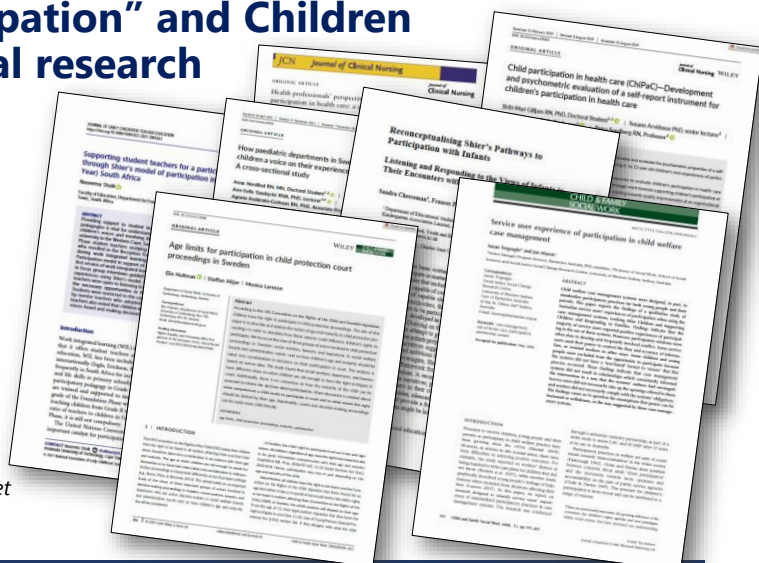
N.B. There is no standardised questionnaire or data-gathering tool for "Pathways to Participation". Every researcher who avails of it, uses it as a framework to create new research tools tailor-made to their context and target group.

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It has also been adapted to study the participation of other disadvantaged or unheard groups:

Adults with Profound and Multiple Disabilities (Talman et al, 2019)

People With Dementia (Ingard et al, 2023)

Refugees (UNHCR, 2023). 39

My own research interest is in children and young people, not so much as the <u>subjects</u> of research, but as <u>active participants</u>, whether as advisers, collaborators, co-researchers, or lead researchers *(Shier 2021)*.

To support researchers in developing effective and ethical research partnerships with children, we need a more specialised tool, that can work alongside the original "Pathways to Participation".

After 11 years in Nicaragua I was offered the opportunity to do a PhD at the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast (supervised by Prof. Laura Lundy).

For my PhD fieldwork I returned to the coffee plantations of Nicaragua, and the new tool I created to help build research partnerships with children was a byproduct of this research.

(Shier, 2016)

Children's Rights in School
The perception of children in Nicaragua

Harry Shier

Protagonismo

Building a matrix

◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have?►

Continuum of power and influence as a horizontal axis

Timeline of the research process as a vertical axis
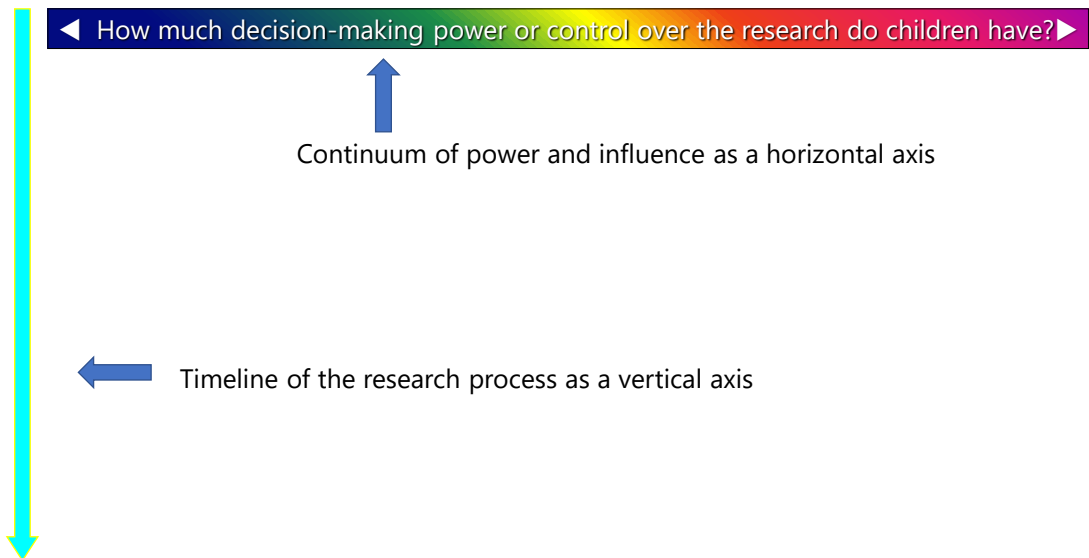
For the horizontal axis: Lansdown's simplified typology of participation

Consultation:

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

Collaboration:

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

Pro-activism (child-led):

Activities initiated, organised or run by children and young people themselves (adults may still provide support, though not always necessary).

Taken from "*Every child's right to be heard*" (Lansdown 2010): A user guide to UN CRC General Comment 12

The vertical axis: Phases of the research process as a timeline

1. Identify a research question: problem analysis, consultation.
   ▼
2. Develop research design, select (or develop) methodology, draw up a plan (find funding, resources)
   ▼
3. Design instruments, seek ethical approval.
   ▼
4. Identify and recruit participants, obtain consent.
   ▼
5. Generate data
   ▼
6. Data analysis: findings, conclusions, recommendations.
   ▼
7. Produce a report
   ▼
8. Dissemination of findings: formal publication, wider publicity, media engagement.
   ▼
9. Advocacy, public mobilisation, campaigning, policy impact, action for social change.

(Based on Kumar, 2014)

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

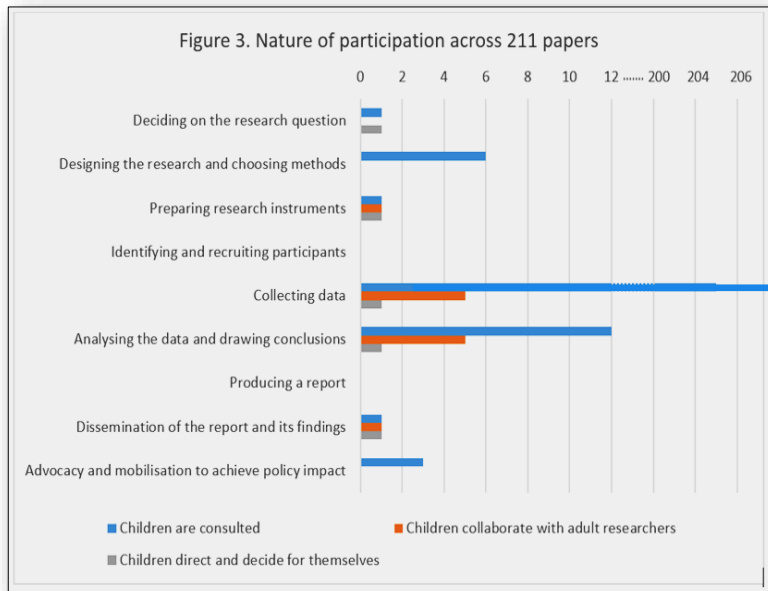| ◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►					**Who is involved and who is excluded?**
	Children are not involved	**Consulted**	**Collaborate with adult researchers**	**Child initiated or directed** / Led by us...	
Deciding on the research question		Children asked about problems that concern them.	Children and adults jointly define research question.	Children choose their own research question.	Who has a say in the research question?
Designing the research and choosing methods		Children consulted on what research methodology to use.	Children and adults deliberate and jointly decide on the methodology to use.	Children decide what methodology they want to use.	Who is invited to get involved in the research design?
Preparing research instruments		Children consulted on (and perhaps test) research instruments before use.	Children and adults work together on design of research instruments.	Children create their own research instruments.	Who gets to work on the research instruments?
Identifying and recruiting participants		Children asked to advise on recruiting participants.	Children and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	Children identify and recruit research participants.	Who has a say in choosing participants?
Collecting the data		Research involves adults interviewing children or surveying their opinions.	Children and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	Children organise and carry out data collection activities.	Who gets involved in data collection?
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show prelim-inary findings to children and ask for feedback.	Children and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	Children analyse data and draw their own conclusions.	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?
Producing a report		Adults consult children on aspects of the final report.	Children and adults work together to produce a report.	Children produce their own report in their own words.	Who gets credit for the report?
Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact		Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.	Who is active in follow-up campaigning and advocacy?

Phases of research process

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

● Applying the matrix to the Yucul children's research project

Phases of research process

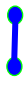| ◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►					Who is involved and who is excluded?
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Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate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

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

Figure 3. Nature of participation across 211 papers

- Children are consulted
- Children collaborate with adult researchers
- Children direct and decide for themselves

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

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

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

- Applying the matrix to the children's research project

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

Phases of research process

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

The matrix tool is available in...

Berson, Berson and Gray (2019) *"Participatory Methodologies to Elevate Children's Voice and Agency"*.
Also at **www.harryshier.net**

(Shier 2019a)
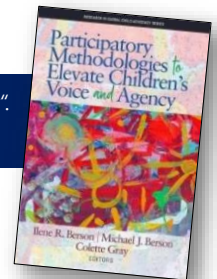
- ❑ DO use it as a tool for planning research projects involving children.

- ❑ DO use it as a tool for reviewing and evaluating research projects involving children.

- ❑ DO use it as a check-list to be sure you are not excluding children through narrow thinking.

- ❑ DON'T use it to make judgments about whether any particular approach is right or wrong; it just helps you ask good questions, and so make wise decisions about what might work well in a particular situation.

Remember…

> "All models are wrong, but some are useful"
> *(George Box, 1979)*

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THE END

Thanks for listening

www.harryshier.net

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

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