Children and Participation in South Africa: An Overview

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Abstract

This paper examines the current policy and practice around children's participation in South Africa. By situating the analysis from the perspective of the socio-economic and normative context within South Africa the paper critiques current typologies of children's participation for focusing too narrowly on processes internal to participatory processes. The paper argues that theorisations of children's participation need to take account of the range of activities which are labelled as children's participation and interrogate issues around who gets to participate and why, what the purposes of the participation are and under what conditions it is possible. This requires examining participatory processes and the children involved in them in relation to adult actors within and beyond the process as well as in relation to broader socio-political and economic environments.

Introduction

The concept and practice of children's participation has garnered increased attention and support internationally since the adoption of the UNCRC, which outlines children's right to participation in articles 12 and 13. The concept as captured by the Convention however is very broad and as such has come to refer to a range of different practices. It is variously used to refer to children[1] taking part in adult-initiated and facilitated, formal and structured 'programmes' and interventions; adults consulting children; children's civic participation; children self-organising around informal activities; and children's independent and facilitated decision-making amongst others. These processes all have different goals, may take place in different contexts with different implications for the nature of activities pursued and for the adult-child relationships that populate them. Children's civic participation for example is based on notions of citizenship as active, critical

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[1] Following the definition in the UNCRC, children in this paper refers to people under the age of 18. As will become evident however, very few opportunities for public participation are available to children below the age of 8 or 10.

engagement, which when applied to children necessarily recognises their agency and competence to engage in this way (Cahill & Hart, 2007). Given its breadth, any attempt at theorising the concept of children's participation needs to grapple with questions such as participation by whom? In what? For what purpose? And, under what conditions?

Broadly speaking children's participation (however defined) can be seen to occur within two domains: the private or personal domain, such as the household and family, and the social or public domain, such as the community, school, and government. The practice and study of children's participation in these two domains are usually approached separately, although as demonstrated in this paper they are in fact intricately linked.

The brief for this paper was to provide an overview of current policy and practice around children's participation in South Africa, in order to highlight themes and issues from this context which can help to advance the theorisation of children's participation more generally. It is however difficult to provide a summary of the current practice of children's participation in South Africa as it has been implemented in a limited and sporadic way. There has also been no attempt to synthesise current knowledge or practice around the way in which children's participation is happening in the South African context. Indeed, the lack of research around children's right to participation, and the need to better understand the various roles that children play in South African society, has been noted by other researchers (see Berry and Guthrie, 2003; Bray, 2002).

Currently, South Africa seems to lag behind other regions in terms of debating different forms of participation or interpretations of the term, and there is no evidence of discussion around the particular considerations of a participatory approach within the context of historical and contemporary social and economic inequalities. This paper cannot hope to fill this gap in our knowledge, but rather examines some of the key ways in which children are participating in various public arenas, highlighting some of the limits and tensions within these processes in order to raise questions for theoretical debate.

The paucity of scholarly literature on the topic of children's participation in South Africa means that this paper has had to draw on grey literature, working papers, organisations' websites, newspaper articles and unpublished work. It also draws on primary research conducted by the author and colleagues from the Centre for Social Science Research into children's lives in Cape Town (Bray *et al*, 2008).

The paper begins by outlining the legislative, socio-economic and normative context in which the participation of children takes place. It then describes some of the ways in which children can be seen to be participating in the public domain, highlighting the opportunities and limitations therein. Some key issues arising from the South African context are then discussed, and ideas for broadening current theoretical frameworks are proposed.

Policy and Legislative Provisions for Children's Participation in South Africa

Against a legislative landscape during apartheid that was inimical to basic human rights, the majority of children and adults were denied spaces to participate legally in public life, with a result that these spaces had to be claimed in confrontational ways. Historically, children in South African have played important roles as political and public actors: they are recognised as having contributed in critical ways to the country's social transformation to democracy through their involvement in student uprisings, school boycotts and the armed struggle. However, despite this, a traditionally welfarist approach to children's service delivery means that children tend in practice not to be viewed as stakeholders who are important to consult when developing programmes and policies.

The first 14 years of South Africa's democracy have seen significant legislative developments with major implications for children's public participation. The South African Constitution adopted in 1996 gives full recognition of children's rights[2] at the very highest level. In this sense, children – in theory at least – are treated as full participants in society and as legitimate rights-bearers. The Constitution however, despite according children a range of special rights, does not specifically refer to the right of children to participate in matters and decisions affecting their lives. The rights that the Constitution prioritises for children are more protection-oriented rights, which conceive of children as vulnerable citizens rather than as citizens with agency. The State's obligations in terms of children's right to participate therefore reside in the government's ratification of the UNCRC in 1995 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2000. According to these international agreements, the State must ensure that children have the opportunity to be heard in matters that affect their lives.

Legislative reforms have attempted to ensure these opportunities for children in certain settings. The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 has made provisions for secondary school children's involvement in school governing processes. Other laws enable children to participate and make decisions in matters affecting their individual lives. For example, children have the right to have their views heard and considered in legal proceedings which involve them, such as custody cases. The Children's Act no 38 of 2005 and its Amendment Bill of 2006 (yet to be promulgated) also contain some participation provisions, such as that children

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[2] Apart from the rights applicable to all people in South Africa, section 28 of the Constitution lists additional rights pertaining specifically to children. These include the right to: a name and nationality; family or alternative care; basic nutrition, shelter, health and social services; protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, degradation and exploitative labour; to be detained only as a last resort and then with special rights; and to legal representation. In addition, the child's best interests are to prevail in every matter concerning the child.

over the age of 12 have the right to make their own decisions regarding medical treatment and that children over the age of 16 heading households can directly access state grants for their siblings and themselves and make all day-to-day decisions for the family.

It is important to note that these policy provisions are in most cases limited to older children and adolescents. There are very few provisions which create spaces for children in their pre-teenage years to participate in decisions which affect them.[3] Also, despite the gains made by these policy changes, their impact on children's actual and meaningful participation in the different spheres is limited at the level of implementation. Perceptions of children's (in)competence, concerns about protecting children from being burdened with too great responsibility, non-child-friendly institutional cultures, procedures and structures as well as a lack of adult skills for engaging children, all continue to limit children's meaningful participation in court proceedings and schools (see Barratt, 2003; Zaal, 2003; Sloth-Nielsen, 2002; Heystek, 2001). It remains to be seen what the impact of the new Children's Act will be. Furthermore, the provisions for children's public participation are very limited.

The Socio-Economic Context

Childhood and the living conditions of children are fundamentally influenced by the economic, social and political conditions that constitute the context in which they live (Qvortrup, 1990). Current analysis shows that sections of the population differentiated by the apartheid regime according to racial classifications continue to be divided along class lines. Thus, the vast majority of those who were impoverished under the previous regime remain so, with the gap between rich and poor increasing since 1994 (Seekings, 2006), and the proportion of those living in conditions of debilitating poverty having risen (Liebbrandt, 2004 in Wilson, 2006). Child poverty in South Africa remains very high, with two-thirds of children living in households with an income of R1200 or less per month in 2005 (Meintjes *et al* in Monson *et al*, 2006). Unemployment has also increased, peaking at 42.5%[4] in 2003 and currently sitting at about 40% (Seekings, 2006). Furthermore, a major weakness of the current government has been spending on and delivering effective social, health and education services at national, provincial and district levels. 42% of children live in households which rely on distant

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[3] Exceptions to this are the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act no 92 of 1996 which allows girls of any age to access termination of pregnancy without parental consent, and the Children's Act no 38 of 2005 which provides for children under the age of 12 and who are deemed to be of sufficient maturity to consent for their own HIV testing without parental consent.
[4] These unemployment figures use the broad definition of unemployment. Using the narrow definition, unemployment was 31.2% in 2003 and about 28% in 2005 (Seekings, 2006: 15).

or unsafe water sources, and 46% in households without access to adequate sanitation (Leatt and Berry in Monson *et al*, 2006). Overcrowding is a problem for 27% of children (Hall and Berry in Monson *et al*, 2006). The majority of children are being schooled in a language other than their mother-tongue, and low levels of literacy result (Heugh, 2000). Furthermore, the demography and socio-economic effects of HIV/AIDS have increased the vulnerability of very poor families and children (Wilson, 2006; Giese and Meintjes, 2005).

The impact of these conditions on the nature of children's lives calls for theorisations of children's participation to grapple with the way in which socio-economic conditions shape and constrain how, in what, and to what effect, children are able to participate. The socio-economic context described above raises some particular questions regarding children's participation. Research with children in South Africa has raised the issue of the inter-dependence of children's rights (Ewing, 2004). For example, the right to education may be dependent on accessing the right to food and transport (Ewing, 2004). In the context of poverty described above, the same tension is likely to exist when it comes to the right to participate. Children may be unable to take opportunities to participate in processes that affect them because other basic rights are not met. Furthermore tensions exists in a developing country context such as South Africa between budgeting for participation (which can be costly) versus addressing basic needs and the lack of essential services as described above. As yet, there does not seem to be recognition of the fact that consultation with children at the design stage is likely to produce a more effective service, and therefore may be a more efficient use of funds.

Conceptualisations of Childhood in South Africa

The way in which childhood is conceptualised has an impact on the way in which power functions in adult-child interactions and therefore on the spaces that are opened up for children to participate in public decision-making (at a local community, school or national level) whether that be through having the opportunity to articulate their opinions, have their input and opinions taken seriously or actually being enabled to make decisions. It is important therefore when thinking about what opportunities there are for different kinds of children's participation to examine adults' conceptions of childhood and the power dynamics inherent therein.

Cultural diversity within South Africa contributes to a situation where adults hold a variety of views on the place of childhood and suitable roles for children within the home, community and beyond. One commonality across social and cultural settings however, is a marked disparity in power and status between children and adults (Clacherty and Donald, 2007). Recent qualitative work with children from three culturally and economically diverse communities in Cape Town revealed that adults from a predominantly 'white' middle-class area feel

that it is their role to provide for children and to guide and socialise them into being good citizens (Shelmerdine, 2006). Children in this setting are thus afforded little room as independent actors as autonomy is seen as an end goal of childhood development (Shelmerdine, 2006). In neighbouring poor and predominantly 'coloured' and 'black' townships, clear lines of authority between adults and children also prevail. Shelmerdine (2006) describes how children's obedience and adults' control are valued in both the 'coloured' and 'black' townships, with the former drawing on moral and religious values to justify adult authority, and the latter drawing on cultural values. Other researchers have written about how in urbanising and rural 'black' communities in general, the cultural norms that enshrine the power disparity of adults over children are powerful and pervasive, and children are seldom if ever asked their opinions or involved in decision-making (Mukasa and Van Der Grift-Wanyoto, 1998 in Clacherty and Donald, 2007). Values of obedience and respect for adults are emphasised with the result that children seldom speak up or voice their opinions to adults (LeVine *et al*, 1994 in Clacherty and Donald, 2007).

Despite different discourses prevailing in different settings, children from a variety of backgrounds confirm the power disparity, saying that they are often not listened to, respected or taken seriously by adults within the home and beyond (Clacherty and Associates and Donald, 2002; Moses, 2006; Bray *et al*, 2008). Children implicate the power dynamics between children and adults as undermining their ability to be involved in decision-making, as "adults make the decisions because they have the power" (boy quoted in Clacherty and Associates and Donald, 2002: 10).

In contrast to the normative conceptions of childhood and children's place in society, children across the economic spectrum (and in particular poor children) contribute in significant ways to their households and those of extended family members - sometimes from as young as 4 or 5 years old. Children care for young and ill family members; cook; clean; tend crops; gather wood, water and food; earn money and support peers through neighbourly and friendship networks (Bray and Brandt, 2007; Bray *et al*, 2008; Bray, 2003; Giese *et al*, 2003; Donald and Clacherty, 2005; McGarry, 2008; Moses, 2006; Levine, 1999). However, there tends to be little acknowledgement made of these contributions by adults in both the private and public domains, and hence little attention paid to the competence displayed therein and the relevance of this for children's ability to contribute to other processes such as decision-making.

Ideas of what is possible and desirable in terms of girls' and boys' behaviour differ, with girls being more confined to the domestic sphere. Girls and boys are thus provided with different opportunities for participation within the domestic and public spheres (see for example, Bray 2003; Swart-Kruger, 2000 and 2001; Salo, 2004; Salo, 2003; Moses, 2005). However gender roles are differentially informed by cultural practice in South Africa, and so the nature and degree of gendered participation varies across communities.

As noted earlier, normative conceptions of children as dependent and passive are also present in both State and non-profit children's services provision in South Africa (Patel, 2005). The widespread poverty and levels of HIV/AIDS characteristic of South African communities have embedded these notions of children as 'innocent victims'. This is compounded by the fact that major international development actors and donors support and fund projects and programmes aimed at categories of children such as 'AIDS orphans'. Furthermore, previously legitimised notions of racial hierarchy continue to play a role in people's sense of 'us' and 'other'. These perceptions determine not only who accesses what services and where and therefore who gets to participate and who does not, but also fuel paternalistic approaches to welfare interventions that generally do not allow space for more consultative or empowering approaches. Thus conceptions of children underlying service delivery belie perceptions of children as active, meaning-makers, employing a range of coping strategies. Ironically, labels, such as 'AIDS orphans' not only undermines the likelihood of children's participation within the services but may in fact undermine children's abilities to participate in society more broadly, as the labelling itself has been found to undermine their survival and coping strategies (Meintjes and Giese, 2005).

However, alongside the general trend of adult-child hierarchy and a devaluing of children's inputs, there is evidence that community awareness about children's rights is increasing (Bray *et al*, 2008). Some parents, teachers and other community adults clearly recognise and value children's perspectives, and actively nurture meaningful communication with the young people in their care (Bray *et al.*, 2008).

Forms of Children's Public Participation in South Africa

This section turns to examine some of the ways in which children can be seen to participate in the more public spheres of South African society. In some cases this participation is facilitated by adults, in other cases it is not. In some cases children are merely being consulted, in others they are involved in decision-making and in other cases they self-advocate on their own behalf. What is evident throughout, however, is the importance of the relationships between the participatory process and the broader environment as well as between the children and other adult actors involved in the process and in their lives more generally.

Participation in School Governance, Community Services for Children and Research Initiatives

At this level, children (in theory) have opportunities for participation through School Governing Bodies (SGBs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and

research initiatives. In practice, children's participation in the governance of both their schools and community organisations that serve them is limited. Children are seldom involved in decisions regarding service delivery or design. Ethnographic evidence suggests that some adults do not think it appropriate to involve children in the planning stages of NGOs' service delivery to children; they assume they know what children want and need and undervalue children's competences (Moses, 2006). Similarly, adults on SGBs do not generally hold children's suggestions in high esteem and report seeing learners as being too young and not having the necessary knowledge and skills to make a meaningful contribution (Heystek, 2001). Adults remain in charge of the process and meetings are structured to suit them, with the result that children are sometimes unable to attend (Heystek, 2001).

Some NGOs and research initiatives are starting to adopt explicitly participatory approaches with children. This however is not documented, therefore it is difficult to determine the nature and extent of this trend. Some examples are given here. Participatory methods are used to gather information from children for short-term studies of particular issues (for example, Bray, 2003; Clacherty 2001a, b and c; Save the Children, 2000). Some longer-term consultative projects aim to give children a voice through conveying the details of their everyday lives (for example, Bray *et al*, 2008; Abaqophi bas Okhayeni Abaqinile, 2007; Meintjes, 2006; Clacherty, 2006; Swart-Kruger, 2000; Swart-Kruger and Chawla, 2002; Ramphele, 2002; Clacherty and Kistner, 2001; Henderson, 1999; Jones, 1993; Reynolds, 1989, 1995). Some of these projects have sought to involve children more fully in the research through shaping the research questions and conducting research themselves (Bray *et al*, 2008; Abaqophi bas Okhayeni Abaqinile, 2007; Clacherty, 2006; Clacherty and Kistner, 2001).

Longer-term consultative processes, some using media, are also used by some NGOs working with children aged 8 upwards to provide children with a platform to articulate their needs, views and experiences (Children's Rights Centre, 2006; Media Monitoring Project, 2003; www.bushradio.co.za; Children's Resource Centre, 2003; www.soulcity.org.za). A few of these organisations also use this process to build the foundation for another more autonomous process, namely self-advocacy – much along the lines of the model outlined by Lansdown (2001) (see Children's Resource Centre, 2003; www.soulcity.org.za).

Children's Self-Organising

Children, mostly adolescents, actively claim spaces for their voices to be heard and protest when their grievances are not listened to or addressed by adults, particularly in relation to irregularities and corruption within their schools and the education system. This protest action takes place in the context of the failure of the school governance policy described above and a history of children's protest

within the school system. Over the last few years, the media have reported several instances of school learners protesting publicly over school governance issues (for example see *Cape Argus*, 18 February 2005; *Cape Times*, 5 October 2006; *Mercury*, 11 August 2006; *Cape Argus*, 31 January 2007; *Cape Times*, 26 February 2007; *Cape Argus*, 15 August 2007). Young people have also been involved in protesting around housing issues (see for example *Cape Argus*, 29 September 2007). Unfortunately, these protests often perpetuate a history of violent protest, fuelling adult ideas of an 'out-of-control' youth whose autonomous behaviour should be controlled. Media reports of the incidents quote parents as describing the children's behaviour as "disturbing" and as saying that "children should not take matters into their own hands" (*Cape Argus*, 18 February 2005). Government officials in turn are quoted as saying the children's actions are "appalling" (*Cape Times*, 5 October 2006). The schools' reactions in these reports have generally been to engage with children in a top-down authoritarian manner by calling in the police who in turn resort to apartheid-era tactics, such as the firing of rubber bullets and tear gas. The self-organising of adolescents must be seen as the result of children being unable to access official channels to air their grievances and influence decisions. It also occurs in an environment that is hostile to children taking on a decision-making role. We must also ask how empowering participation in protests ultimately is for children.

Children's Participation in Law Reform and Policy Development

Although no formal mechanisms are in place for children's involvement in policy and law reform, directives from the State as well as initiatives from research and voluntary child rights sectors have attempted to involve children in child-specific law reform processes (see Community Law Centre, 2001; Clacherty, 2001d, 2003a; Giese *et al*, 2002; Mniki and Rosa, 2007). The nature of children's involvement in these policy processes differs widely and questions remain as to how seriously their input is taken by policy makers. There are however indications that adult mediators may be important if children's involvement is to have an impact on policy decision-making.

Early initiatives did not give children the opportunity to voice their opinions directly to decision-makers, but instead relied on the adults who led the consultation processes to ensure that children's ideas were communicated to decision-makers (see Community Law Centre, 2001 and Clacherty, 2001d, 2003a).

In contrast, some recent research and civil-society led processes have attempted to move beyond consultation and engage children directly in advocating with decision-makers. Children reported that participation in these activities helped them to grow as individuals. The processes developed by two of these projects also resulted in child-led advocacy at the local level. This type of activity, although

limited, was child-led and supported by adults (Giese *et al*, 2002; Mukoma, 2007)[5]. Thus adult-initiated processes of consultation, information sharing and skills development led to more autonomous advocacy activities initiated by children just as the children's rights organisations described above aim to achieve with their activities. Unfortunately detailed analysis of the impacts of children's advocacy activities at the policy and community-levels is not available.

   Researchers have reflected on the difficulties of involving children in law reform processes and important structural and attitudinal obstacles have been identified. These include adult-dominated environments and procedures that exclude children on practical grounds[6] as well as through the traditional power hierarchies they sustain (Mniki and Rosa, 2007). Furthermore a lack of buy-in from politicians into the concept and value of genuine children's participation and conservative notions of children's abilities and rightful place in society, means that adults fail to take children's views seriously, thus trivialising their contribution (Clacherty, 2001d; Mniki and Rosa, 2007). This is not surprising given the broader population's attitudes towards children discussed above. Issues of adult-child power disparities and adult perceptions of children must therefore be engaged with by adult facilitators so that they can prepare children to adjust their expectations and can carefully consider the appropriateness of exposing children to environments such as Parliament which are not structured to facilitate children's involvement (Mniki and Rosa, 2007). Researchers argue that the types and nature of participation may shift as different activities are implemented, and the project moves through different phases (Mniki and Rosa, 2007). In other words, they highlight - as do Fajerman and Treseder (1997) - that there may be instances where adult-led consultation is most appropriate and others where children's own initiatives should be pursued and supported.

A Bottom-Up Approach to Children's Public Participation

The South African context raises a number of key questions and ideas which should be further investigated and debated. Clear gaps exist between South Africa's international commitment to children participating in matters affecting

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[5] For example, children from the 2001 *National Children's Forum on HIV/AIDS* co-ordinated meetings at the local level to raise awareness around the issues that children had presented to members of parliament (Giese *et al*, 2002). Likewise some members of *Dikwankwetla: Children in Action*, a group of children whose involvement in the debates, deliberations and advocacy around the Children's Act and its Amendment Bill was facilitated by the Children's Institute of the University of Cape Town, have been active in their local communities, starting support groups for vulnerable children amongst other activities (Mukoma, 2007).
[6] For example, the fact that short notice is given for public hearings once a Bill has been tabled in parliament makes it almost impossible for children, who are attending school and have to travel from distant provinces, to participate (Meintjes, pers comm).

their lives and actual opportunities for this. At a policy level there is a bias towards providing opportunities for (mostly older) children to impact on decisions affecting their personal lives, with the only policy provision for public participation being around school governance.

Perhaps more importantly however, are the normative conceptions adults have of children. In all the spheres of children's lives discussed above, it is clear that children's right to protection and their right to participation (for example as school decision-makers, activists or workers) are often treated as oppositional, thus limiting the scope and depth of opportunities for them to be heard in matters affecting their lives. The bias towards protection is underpinned by the clear hierarchies separating adults from children in South African society. These hierarchies shape adult attitudes towards children and lead to a general devaluing of children's inputs from the home environment to State structures.

There appears in South Africa to be a lack of knowledge, experience and debate around how to afford children both protection and participation. Reflections on the ethics of involving teenagers' in conducting research provide a starting point. The authors suggest that as adults we need to acknowledge the way in which children make decisions to protect areas of their selves that they do not wish to be made available to others, and call for recognising children as "active moral agents" who "have an acute sense of how to negotiate relationships, to frame experience, and to manage difficulties that arise in relationships" (Bray and Gooskens, 2006). Likewise, Mniki and Rosa (2007) reflecting on children's involvement in advocacy argue for respecting children's agency and the competence they demonstrate in dealing with the various challenges of their lives. They suggest that cultivating a critical awareness among children of the potential obstacles they will face in their advocacy journey, coupled with awareness raising with key adults about children's agency could be a way forward (Mniki and Rosa, 2007).

These insights suggest that there may be value in a bottom-up approach, which looks at the possibility of advocating for greater recognition and legitimisation of children's informal participation in the everyday spheres of home, community and school as a pre-requisite platform for extending and enhancing children's participation in more formal arenas. In other words, start where some progress has been made or there is the potential to progress and be broadly inclusive of all children. This may also help to bring younger children into participatory processes. Early evidence from a participatory radio making project, suggests this may be sensible. The project has found that as the children engage their adult caregivers and other adults in their lives in the processes of making the documentaries and through their subsequent broadcast, opportunities for increased participation within their local communities have emerged as adult perceptions of children have shifted (Meintjes, 2006).

Interventions seeking to involve children in adult-dominated processes, such as school governance and law-making, should take care to raise awareness with

key adult decision-makers about children's rights and evolving capacity to partici-
pate, as well as to advocate for decision-making structures to be more accessible
to children. Again, there is some evidence that this would be a valuable approach.
A project which aimed to facilitate children's involvement in local government
budgeting processes, found that having an adult within the local government
decision-making structures who believes in and understands the value of children
participating in the decision-making process plays an essential and positive role
in creating spaces for children to actually influence this level of decision-making
(Idasa, no date). Interventions at this level however, still need to take cognisance
of the role of the domestic sphere. In South Africa, most adults have limited if
any experience of participating in public planning and decision-making processes.[7]
It may be difficult for adults to understand and support processes to empower
children when they are not empowered to participate themselves (Clacherty and
Donald, 2007). Raising awareness among the adults with whom the children live
may therefore be both practically and ethically important (Mniki and Rosa, 2007;
Clacherty and Donald, 2007).

From Global to Local: The Relationships between Children's Participation and Broader Societal Forces

Socio-economic conditions and the interconnection of children's rights in South
Africa raise particular issues regarding who gets to participate and in what.
As children experience deprivation in a range of ways besides lack of income, such
as through poor educational opportunities, notions of multiple exclusions should
be brought into the debate around the links between poverty and participation.
Children may not be literate or may not be able to access services serving as gate-
ways to participatory research or advocacy projects. When creating spaces for
participation, specific efforts should therefore be made to identify and include
children who are excluded because of gender, or because they are poor, illiterate,
disabled or uninformed about local opportunities.

The historically influenced current dynamics of economic, political and social
inequality in South Africa mean that when we think about spaces for children's
public participation we must grapple not only with the need for a redistribution
of resources but also with the impact of the previously legitimised (and now dis-
credited) notions of racial hierarchy which continue to influence how need is
perceived and approached amongst different population groups.

Prout and Tisdall highlight that "children's participation cannot be understood
outside of the set of relationships that constitute all the actors" and thus call for a shift

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[7] In South Africa civil society participation in law-making, for example, is generally the domain of
the affluent and organised groups (Mniki and Rosa, 2007).

in attention "from children *per se* to children in relation to others" (2006: 243). Analysis of the South African context suggests that children need to be thought of not only in relation to other actors but also in relation to the socio-political and economic environments in which those children and others are situated. This is the case even where the form of participation under discussion is led by children independently of adults, such as the protest action described above. This example demonstrates how the children's actions and goals impinge on adults in the broader environment, and how those adults' reactions - influenced by ideologies of childhood as well as historical factors – affect the impact of the children's activities. It is at this juncture that the impact of the children's actions is either hindered or facilitated.

While the models outlined by Hart (1992), Shier (2001), Fajerman and Treseder (1997) and Lansdown (2001) are all useful in highlighting that not all participatory processes involve the same power shifts, activities and goals, they are limited in that they focus on the processes internal to an intervention. As such, they are strikingly apolitical and ahistorical. Theorisations need to capture the range of environments relevant to different participatory processes, including for example the children's family environments, the local community environment, and even the national and global environments. The two-way interactions between the interventions and these environments as well as between these environments themselves are key to understanding how to overcome barriers to participation. Just as children should not be examined within a vacuum which ignores their relationships with others, neither should participation be examined in isolation of other societal forces.

In general there is a lack of documented impact assessment around participatory processes in South Africa – both in terms of benefits to individual children in terms of enjoyment, learning and personal development, and resulting impact on the intended processes and outcomes. More research is required in order to understand better the nature of the two-way interaction between interventions and the broader environments in which they are situated. The South African context suggests that amongst others this interaction is influenced by prevailing socio-economic conditions, conceptions of childhood (and gender) roles and competencies, power dynamics between adults and children, race and class relations, and international development models. These factors affect not only who gets to participate in what, but also how children's contributions are received.

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