



Play Your Part

Conceptual Framework

Facilitator's Guide





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Introduction

Play Your Part was a one-year pilot project led by PlayBoard NI and funded by the Education Authority (EA). The project aimed to support youth settings to embed a culture of effective participation and practice with children aged four to eight years. The project goal was to develop a training framework alongside a set of participatory tools to support youth workers to create an environment that ensures the views, opinions and the voices of children aged four to eight years are heard within youth settings.

This Conceptual Framework has been written alongside the Participation Toolkit, seeking to further strengthen knowledge and understanding of children and young people's participation to support practice within youth settings. All the information compiled in this guide has emerged from an in-depth analysis of existing literature around methodologies that enable children's participation in decision-making, as well as the conceptual underpinnings surrounding participation and children's participation in youth settings.

What is the purpose of this resource?

Play Your Part has been developed based on the existing guidelines of youth work, namely Priorities for Youth, Engagement Framework (EA), and the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for the youth work sector in Northern Ireland.

This Conceptual Framework, together with the Participation Toolkit, is designed to support youth workers to enhance their understanding of the needs of the youngest children attending their settings, alongside effectively demonstrating the contribution to the engagement outcomes of youth work. In particular, it addresses the Active Participation indicators of the Engagement Framework.

As described in the framework, active participation involves assessing needs of children and young people; involving them in decision-making, and 'planning and problem solving either around a single activity or within the club, unit or project generally' (Engagement Framework Guidance note, p. 2). The rationale of Play Your Part is that youth workers will gain an enhanced knowledge of how to embed young children's views, opinions and participation in planned, long term and group activities. Implementing the ideas and ethos of Play Your Part should also enhance children and young people's capabilities; developing their interpersonal skills and personal relations, as well as helping improve their overall health and well-being.

Who is this resource for?

This framework is directed at youth workers across Northern Ireland to help them understand the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of children and young people's participation, to promote and implement meaningful participation amongst young children through play.

Using this resource

This guide contains a conceptual framework on the building blocks of participation within the youth settings in Northern Ireland. With a focus on the four to eight-year-old age group within youth settings, this guide explores different participation approaches ([consultation](#); [collaboration](#); [child-led](#)); as well as different participation levels (day-to-day decisions; organisational decision-making; or consultations).

Youth work – an overview

Youth work seeks to widen children and young people’s horizons through the promotion of participation and social commitment, encouraging them to be critical and creative in the way they relate to the world around them. Youth work recognises that children and young people are ‘part of a wider community and society including family, school, peers and community’ (3 Core Principles 2014, p. 5).

The purpose of youth work is to empower children and young people to grow in their personal, social and educational level, to ‘enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential’ (National Occupation Standards Curriculum Development Unit 2014, p.5). It has its foundations working in association with children and young people, recognising them as partners. Therefore, children and young people occupy a central role on the planning and delivery of youth work and their needs become the essence of youth work.

In order to support and promote personal and social development of children and young people, youth work is built around the three core principles (3 Core Principles 2014, p.9):

- Preparing young people for participation
- Promoting acceptance and understanding of others
- Testing values and beliefs

Which are, in turn, underpinned by the overarching values of equity, diversity, interdependence.

Value	Explanation
Equity	Equity means that everyone is treated fairly and justly according to their need.
Diversity	Respecting the differences in our communities and seeing difference as something which benefits everyone.
Interdependence	Interdependence focuses on how different lives interlink. It involves working together for a common good and acknowledging that we are connected and rely on one another.

Adapted from 3 Core Principles 2014, p.11

Children and young people within a youth organisation

Children and young people should have a say in what happens in their youth organisation. Involving children and young people in the design and delivery of youth work should be an every day consideration for the youth worker, and they should be able to make choices and decisions that affect their youth work experience.

The activities and experiences offered at the youth setting should enable young people to (3 Core Principles 2014, p.12):

- 'Become involved in the life and work of a group'.
- 'Work as members of a group, building meaningful and appropriate relationships with their peers and others'.
- 'Explore, clarify and test their values and beliefs as well as examine moral and spiritual issues in an accepting and non-threatening environment'.

What do we mean by participation?

Participation...

- ... is a right.
- ... applies to all children without discrimination of any kind.
- ... is both an end and a means.
- ... can be at an individual level or as a group or collective.
- ... is regarded to all matters within children and young people's lives.
- ... requires different methods for different contexts/environments.
- ... can take place online or offline, directly and indirectly.
- ... empowers children and young people.

Children and young people's participation is a core principle in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which declares that all children who are capable of forming their own views have the right to express them freely in all matters affecting their lives (Art. 12). The CRC General Comment further clarifies that simply listening to the child is insufficient, stating that those need to be taken into consideration seriously. It is important to acknowledge that participation is a right not an obligation. Children are entitled to choose 'whether or not to express their views or participate in decision-making on issues that affect them or their communities' (Crowley et al. 2020, p.15).

Participation refers to the range of opportunities available for children and young people to express their views and be involved in decision-making with peers and with adults. There are many different ways children and young people can be involved in influencing thinking. This may include initiating their own ideas and projects; being consulted on for policy or service development; contributing to specific projects; and evaluating and sharing ideas about their own experiences. In seeing participation as a way of supporting children in communicating their views we will be encouraging them to understand their wants, needs, and emotions, as well as giving them a space to express them.

Benefits of participation

As a result of the process, children and young people can potentially develop new skills (Clark 2011; Davies and Hamblin 2016). For example, communicative skills (including both child-to-child and child-to-adult); or practical skills (if the participatory process involves the use of props and technologies). Moreover, it gives children the time and space to reflect on their experiences encouraging a process of inquiry and understanding of their environment, and potentially, 'enables them to make positive contributions to their communities' (Davies and Hamblin 2016, p.6). Finally, respectfully listening to young children and valuing their views and experiences, can have a 'positive effect on their self-confidence' (Clark 2011, p. 2).

Meaningful Participation - Positive Impact	
Build confidence	Participation boosts their confidence by being respectfully listened to as children.
	Participation contributes to developing new skills, that, in turn, contributes to boosting their confidence in themselves and their capacities.
Talk about their feelings	Participation encourages children to explore and communicate how they feel about themselves, about others and about the environment.
	Meaningful participation leads to the positive acknowledgement and recognition of children's feelings, helping them to find the most suitable platform to express them (e.g. conversation, drawing, pictures or role play).
	By establishing respectful relationships, participation can make children feel comfortable to express their priorities, interests and concerns.
Feeling of belonging	Loneliness and social isolation adversely affect children's short and long-term mental health. Participatory methods foster inclusion and a feeling of belonging.
Healthy coping mechanisms	We can use participation methodologies to create healthy ways to cope with unsettling situations. Working together with children will help to identify what works best for them, and how they would like to do it (e.g. yoga, breathing exercises or mindfulness).
Agency and ownership	Children's participation in decision-making is seen to be beneficial in terms of increasing sense of ownership and responsibility.

Within the youth work practice, participation is recognised as taking part in different levels of decision-making, creating opportunities for children and young people to be more involved in their organisation. This represents a shift from a situation where children and young people are 'recipients of services towards a situation where they can (if they wish) express their views, make a meaningful contribution to activities

and decisions and exert power in a democratic and responsible way' (3 Core Principles 2014, p.18). Every opportunity should be given to young people to participate in all aspects of the youth service and in a range of different ways.

Participation may range from taking part in an activity to being involved in the decision-making of the youth setting or an external process of consultation. How children and young people are involved can depend on many factors, such as the nature and the stage of a project in which they are taking part; the children and young people's ability to take part; and the organisation or adult's ability to involve children and young people.

Youth workers have 'the flexibility to adopt the most suitable approach to enhancing participation within their setting, reflecting the needs of the young people at each age and stage of their development and supporting young people to participate across a range of formal participative structures where they wish to' (Priorities for Youth 2013, p. 23). Some examples of participation in the context of youth settings can be found in involving children and young people in organising and running day-to-day activities, programmes, etc. in their own youth setting; and/or in the design and delivery of programmes, events and other opportunities in their youth work setting. It can be found in children and young people engaged as members of committees and the management groups.

The youth workers role is to build positive relationships with children and young people to advocate for their participation. That is, to value 'the role and contribution that young people make to the design, delivery and evaluation of the youth work'; whilst challenging those 'views and behaviours which undermine young people's participation' (3 Core Principles 2014, p.16).



Approaches to participation

Participation is embedded in the culture of youth settings where children and young people spend much of their time. Involving young children in decision-making can be challenging as participation may require more creative approaches than with older age groups.

There are different levels of participation that may take place in a youth setting. These are, namely, day-to-day decisions at the club and project level, organisational matters or external consultations (Child Participation Framework - Hub na nÓg: Young Voices in Decision-making 2020).

Club and project level

These are day-to-day decision-making within youth settings. Children and young people are involved in the day-to-day activities and methods of engagement in the club or project.

Youth Setting

These are organisational decisions. Children and young people participate in the decision-making in organisational programmes, plans, policies and events as well as in the governance of the organisation.

External Consultations

These are often one-time participation efforts in which government departments, civil society organisations or research institutions, for example, ask children and young people in youth settings for their views and experiences to inform specific policies, research, etc.

Decision-making involves effective engagement with children and young people at appropriate stages and therefore, different stages (and contexts) require different participatory approaches. These are **consultative participation**; **collaborative participation** and **child-led participation** (Crowley et al. 2020). The selection of one of these approaches over another will depend on (1) the level of participation (day-to-day decision-making; organisational decision; community/local/national decision); and (2) the age group, abilities and interests of children and young people.

Child-led participation

Children are provided with the opportunities and space to bring up ideas and initiate their own activities.

Collaborative participation

Adults and children and young people work together in partnership. It usually occurs when adults identify an issue that needs to be addressed and involve children in helping decide what needs to be done and how.

Consultative participation

Youth workers seek the views of children and young people. The results of the consultation are used to feed into the decision-making, project or policy.

It is important to note that these three approaches should not be seen as a hierarchy. Often participation projects or programmes use all three modes of participation. Different stages of the project may require different models. A participation process may move between different approaches or degrees of engagement depending on the activities that have been chosen or the required/expected outcomes.

Some aspects may need to be handled by adults and therefore require a **consultative** approach; others may require a **collaborative** approach in which youth workers and children and young people work together in partnership; or there may be some aspects that can be **fully led and developed by children** and young people on their own. Youth workers and children and young people should not feel that they are in some way failing when they work in ways that require lesser degrees of engagement; or that every situation should aim to achieve the highest possible level of children and young people's participation. Equally, a participation process may start off as a **consultation** but also include **collaboration** and **child-led** aspects throughout. For example, the youth worker may be carrying out a consultation, but in the process, they may collaborate with children and young people on how to best address it. Throughout the activities children and young people may present with an idea that they would like to develop to complement the initial consultation (see case study).

Youth workers must be able to identify what approach suits best to each stage and to each age group involved - it should be rights-based and comply with Lundy's elements of **space**, **voice**, **audience** and **influence** (see Toolkit page 14). Equally, it is possible that a participation process that started as **consultative** may become more **collaborative** as both children and adults become more confident and gain deeper understanding.



Case Study – PlayBoard Young Researchers Project

The following case study has been selected to illustrate how different participation categories and approaches can look in practice; and how participatory methods are fluid and may move from one category to another - that is from **consultation**, to **collaborative** and to **child-led** - depending on the task that is being carried out.



Introduction

PlayBoard’s Young Researchers emerged from PlayBoard’s commitment to supporting children and young people to being able to express their views, participate in the decisions that affect them and to having their voices heard, valued and respected.

A reminder...

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment 17 on Article 31 is a promise made by government to children and young people that they will have the right to play, to recreation, to rest and to take part in cultural and artistic activities.

General Comment 17 was released in February 2013 in order to provide governments with guidance on how they could fulfil Article 31 rights, enabling children to exercise choice and autonomy in their play and recreation activities.

The case study is divided into subsections that reflect on the various participatory activities of the project. This will showcase the different participatory stages of the Young Researcher project, and how these link to the conceptual approach presented to you in the Facilitator’s Guide and Participation Toolkit. The conclusion brings together the key points of each stage and the summary table reflects the type of participation; the benefits of that particular process and the participation activities undertaken.

Background

The launch of General Comment 17 on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on Article 31 in February 2013, emphasised the importance of play to the health and well-being of children and young people. In this framework, PlayBoard NI explored children’s views on the Right to Play and what it meant for them.

PlayBoard decided to undertake collaborative participation (that is, children, young people and adults worked together) and brought together a group of ten children and young people aged from eight to 12 years old – this group became known as the Young Research Team.

Between May and October 2013, the Young Researchers came together on Saturday mornings in the PlayBoard office to explore children’s attitudes to play and potential challenges they faced in enjoying their ‘Right to Play’. Through ongoing mentoring, the Young Research team members soon became Peer Researchers and they collected the views of young people across Northern Ireland. This helped to find out what and how children and young people played and what could help make the right to play a reality for children and young people.

The Young Researchers Team - what did they do?

- Created an easy-to-read version of the General Comment 17
- Developed a questionnaire to interview children and young people
- Created a poster highlighting the challenges of making the right to play a reality for children in Northern Ireland

The Young Researchers Team - how did they do it?

First of all, it was important to get to know each other. At the first meeting children, young people and PlayBoard staff made name badges and played ice breaker games which helped everyone get to know each other a little bit better.

From the onset it was key that the children and young people understood what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child meant and what it means to have a right that defends children’s play, and an understanding of the General Comment 17. This was done through drawing and talking, quizzes, and fun outdoor games. Through the use of these methods, children and young people were able to get a deeper understanding about issues as complex as human rights, laws and policies in a fun and engaging way.

Type of participation

- **Collaborative participation** - an adult idea which was shared with the children and young people.
- **Meaningful participation** -
 - By allowing time for children, young people and the PlayBoard staff to meet each other, adults ensured that they created a safe space where everyone felt comfortable and included.
 - Having a session to learn about the UN Convention on the Right to Play and General Comment 17 was a key step for meaningful participation. To “inform” children is not just about telling them about the participatory project/activity, but also to give them the necessary knowledge to understand what is that they are being asked about.

Benefits of that participation activity

Children gain knowledge about the participation process; increased confidence; communication skills; and a feeling of belonging.

Activities undertaken

Name badges, talking and listening, quizzes, fun activities and parachute games.

To find out more about the General Comment on the Right to Play, PlayBoard staff organised a treasure hunt, where children followed clues around the PlayBoard building. This fun, interactive activity helped the Young Researchers to understand and subsequently re-write their own General Comment leaflet in a child-friendly, easy-to-read format.

The leaflet served as a basis to creating a poster highlighting the challenges of making the right to play a reality for children in Northern Ireland. The poster was taken to the official launch of the General Comment at the United Nations in Geneva.



Type of participation

- **Child-led** - initiated and led by children and young people.
- **Meaningful participation** - children and young people took an active part in transforming existing documents to a child-friendly version.

Benefits of that participation activity

Building confidence through communication and negotiation skills. Sense of agency and ownership.

Activities

Treasure hunt, discussion and poster making.

The resources produced (namely the easy-to-read version of the General Comment 17 and the poster) were shared with Government, local councils, teachers and parents across Northern Ireland to help them understand what they should do to make the Right to Play a reality for children in Northern Ireland. As outlined above, these resources were also presented at the United Nations in Geneva.

#Peer research

Once the team of Young Researchers discussed what it was that they needed and wanted to find out within their research about the Right to Play, they agreed on 12 questions that would be used in the format of a questionnaire. These included a favourite thing to play, where and when children play; what happens when children and young people can't play; what stops children and young people from playing; playing outside and safe places to play outside; and changes that children would like to see to allow them to play more outside.

During the school summer holidays, the Young Researchers carried out field research through face-to-face interviews with 111 children aged four to 17 (76 girls and 35 boys). Although this was a **child-led** activity, it had elements of **collaborative** participation as PlayBoard helped the Young Researchers to get information from children at after-school clubs in rural areas.

In addition to the interviews, children and young people created drawings of what an ideal playground would look like. This activity was designed, on the one hand, to find out what children and young people like to play with in their playgrounds; and on the other, to help them to get a clearer idea of what the barriers to play are.

Once the field research was completed, the Young Researchers discussed the findings of the interviews and drew some conclusions for recommendations - these would be included in a final report. Additionally, they prepared a presentation for PlayBoard's annual stakeholder conference (which led to them being invited to Parliament Buildings, Stormont by Ministers).

For further information on the findings go to <https://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Young-Researchers-Right-To-Play-2016.pdf>

Type of participation

- **Collaborative participation** - children and young people shared decision-making with adults.
- **Child-led** - the children and young people carried out peer research.
- **Meaningful participation** - children and young people decided what would be in the questionnaire increasing the sense of ownership of the process.

Benefits of that participation activity

The group learnt new research skills; communication and negotiation skills which contributes to building confidence; agency and ownership of the participation process as well as being empowered to advocate for change; feeling of belonging; and talking about their experiences, opinions, views, and feelings.

Activities

Discussion (children to children); peer research (questionnaires and interviews); recording; presentations; and drawing.

The Young Researchers report to the *Children and Young People as Researchers (CYPAR) Network.*

On 8 November 2014, PlayBoard's Young Researchers helped to facilitate an event which showcased the work of Young Researchers in Northern Ireland. The event took place through the CYPAR Network as part of the Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science 2014 programme.

The event brought together young researchers from a range of organisations across Northern Ireland, all of whom had an opportunity to showcase their work. PlayBoard's Young Researchers took the opportunity to outline their work on the Right to Play and showcased their research into Article 31 using creative dissemination methods and a poster presentation. Showcases were also delivered by young researchers from the National Children's Bureau, the Children's Law Centre, Youth Action and Queen's University, Belfast.

The aim of the event was to improve awareness and knowledge about the process of involving children and young people in research, particularly as peer researchers. Interactive workshops were hosted where young people and adult representatives from the third, statutory and academic sectors participated in a range of activities designed to improve the practice of involving young people in the research process.

The overall aim of the CYPAR event was to raise the profile of social science research that actively involves children and young people as researchers and to share good practice which supports this methodology across organisations.

The event brought groups together from across the academic and voluntary sectors, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and good practice and providing others with an opportunity to increase their awareness of research led by, or conducted with the help of children and young researchers in Northern Ireland.

From the perspective of PlayBoard's Young Researchers, the event provided an opportunity to highlight not only the research they carried out but to showcase the work that the team had on Government since publication of their findings.

Type of participation

- Collaborative participation - adults shared decision-making with the children and young people.
- Meaningful participation - children and young people were informed about what was required of them. They designed the presentation and its content.

Benefits of that participation activity

Build confidence through strengthening their communication and negotiation skills; increased ownership of the participation process as well as being empowered to advocate for change; talk about their experiences, opinions, views, and feelings.

Activities

Creating and delivering presentations.

The Young Researchers challenging negative media representation of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The focus for this report was on the work of the Young Researchers as part of a Queen's University and Include Youth led focus on identifying and challenging negative media representation of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Negative media representation

The research project arose as a result of concern that children and young people in Northern Ireland were increasingly being represented negatively in the media. For example, through negative photos, video clips or words used on television, radio or in newspapers.

The aim of the research was to:

- Look at media stories about children and young people
- Research good examples of what works to challenge negative media stories
- Design a way to ask children and young people for their opinion on the media.

As part of the research, Queen's University and Include Youth held a series of workshops with children and young people to:

- Share and explore experiences of media representation and portrayal
- Learn about rights
- Express their views on what should be included in resources to guide the media, raise public awareness and lobby government on the issues.

#Focus groups

In November 2014, PlayBoard's Young Researchers participated in one of these focus groups. They discussed a range of issues including how they feel children and young people are represented in the media and talked about messages for journalists and the media who are reporting about children and young people.

Suggestions were made as to how other children and young people could engage more positively with the media to challenge the negative narrative. The views of the Young Researchers are included in a summary of the research findings, alongside the voices and experiences of children and young people across Northern Ireland.

An initial report showing how children and young people assess the impact of negative media coverage on their lives was published in April 2015 entitled "Behind the Headlines' - Media Representation of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland: The voices and experiences of children and young people" (Faith Gordon, Siobhán McAlister and Phil Scraton, Childhood, Transition and Social Justice Initiative, Queen's University Belfast, April 2015). See the full report at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281236722_Behind_the_Headlines_Media_Representation_of_Children_and_Young_People_in_Northern_Ireland_Research_Summary

In addition to the research, Include Youth produced a new resource providing advice for children and young people and those that work with them about talking to the media.

Type of participation

- Meaningful participation - the children and young people were given the necessary information to understand the content of the focus group.
- **Consultative participation** - children and young people were consulted upon.

Benefits of that participation activity

Building confidence through strengthening communication skills; talking about their experiences and feelings; and a feeling of belonging.

Activities

Focus group discussion (adult to children and children to children).

The Kids Life and Times Survey

PlayBoard, working in partnership with the Centre for Children's Rights, Queen's University, Belfast commissioned and funded a module in the 2014 Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey to ascertain the extent to which children felt they had their opportunities to play in school and outside of school.

The questions for the module were developed in collaboration with PlayBoard's Young Researchers and two Children's Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs). PlayBoard's Young Researchers previous experience as peer researchers gave them the capacity and ability to provide specific insights to the development of the KLT module's statements.

The children in the two CRAGs were aged between 10 and 11 years and were pupils at St. Ita's Primary School, Belfast and Christ the Redeemer Primary School, Belfast. All P7 children in Northern Ireland were invited to take part in the KLT survey. Of the 4,757 children who logged on to complete the survey, 2,420 completed the play module. The fieldwork was undertaken between November 2014 and January 2015.

Overall, the data indicated that children are generally positive about their right to play, with the majority of children either 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' with all of the statements. However, given that Article 31 is a right and state parties are obligated to guarantee that this right is respected, protected and fulfilled, the level of disagreement and strong disagreement within the statements was striking and required exploration.

Type of participation

- **Consultative** - participation through the survey.
- Meaningful participation - children and young people were given the necessary information to understand the content of the survey.

Benefits of that participation activity

Talking about their experiences and feelings.

Activities

Survey participation.

Conclusions

While it is encouraging that many children feel they can play in their school and community settings, it is also evident there is further scope to ensure that every child's right to play is respected in all aspects of their lives. It is somewhat concerning that children report greater levels of disagreement with the statement 'I have enough time to play' in both their school and the community contexts. Further, the responses highlight that children have a number of specific but basic requirements to enable them to play.

For example, having a choice of things to play with scored low in schools and the condition of play park equipment was highlighted as a particular concern within the community. The findings clearly show that schools need to pay attention to creating the conditions to play and better enabling the child's right to provision for play.

Similarly, there is an onus on local authorities to ensure that the type and quality of fixed play equipment being installed is fit for purpose and kept in good condition. A minority of children report that they cannot play freely with their friends in their community. This finding may suggest that they are not participating in their communities, are possibly displaced and to an extent isolated in their homes. Again, this highlights the obligation on local authorities to ensure that environments are free from traffic, litter and other physical hazards and to allow children to circulate freely and feel safer within their local neighbourhoods.

Given that Article 31 rights are so critical to the development of every child, it is clear that a range of decision-makers are responsible for ensuring Article 31 rights are enjoyed by all children.

See the full report at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update98.pdf>

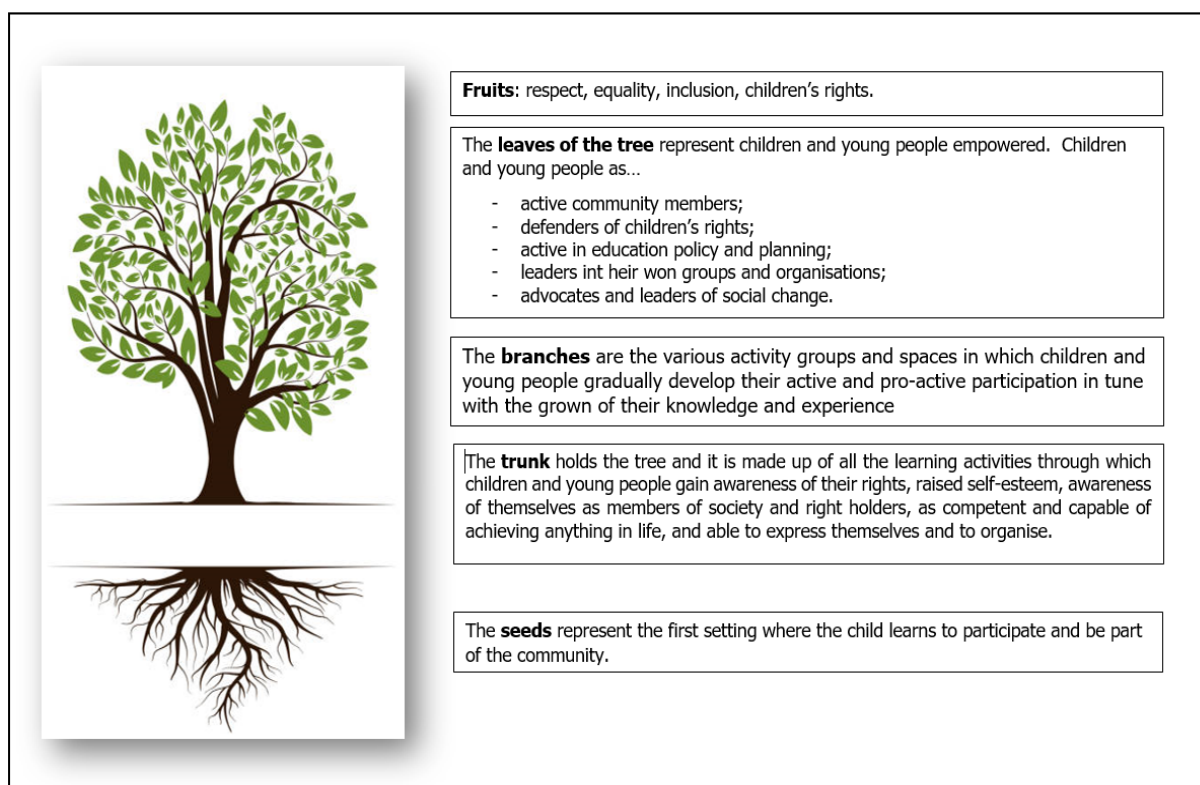


Participation Overview				
	Type of participation	Benefits	Activities	Output
Learning about Article 31 (the Right to Play) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the General Comment 17	Collaborative participation	Gain knowledge about the participation process; increased confidence; communication skills; feeling of belonging; sense of agency and ownership.	Name badges, talking and listening, quiz (Article 31), parachute games Treasure hunt, peer research, poster making.	Easy-to-read leaflet. Poster on challenges to Play in NI.
Conducting focused peer research on Article 31 (the Right to Play) and the General Comment 17	Collaborative and Child-led participation	The group learnt new research skills; communication and negotiation skills which contributes to build confidence; agency and ownership of the participation process as well as being empowered to advocate for change; feeling of belonging; talk about their experiences, opinions, views, and feelings.	Discussion (children to children), peer research (questionnaires and interviews), recordings (child-led), presentations, drawing.	Report and presentation.
Inputting to the Children and Young People as Researchers (CYPAR) Network	Collaborative participation (adults shared decision-making with children)	Build confidence through strengthening communication and negotiation skills; increased ownership of the participation process as well as being empowered to advocate for change; talk about their experiences, opinions, views, and feelings.	Creating and delivering presentations.	Deliver presentation.
Negative media representation of children and young people in Northern Ireland	Consultative participation (focus group)	Build confidence through strengthening communication skills; talk about their experiences and feelings; feeling of belonging.	Focus group discussion (adult to children and children to children).	Findings included in the report.
Kids Life and Times Survey	Consultative participation (survey)	Talking about their experiences and feelings.	Discussion, survey participation.	Findings included in the overall annual report.

Concluding remarks

Youth work and youth settings offer children and young people the necessary personal skills to develop their voice, understand how they can advocate for change and reach their full potential within society. Children and young people occupy a central role in the planning and delivery of youth work and their needs become the essence of youth work.

By enabling processes of meaningful participation in which children and young people feel respectfully listened to and empowered to advocate for change in issues that concern their lives; we will be striving for a deep cultural change in which children and young people are widely recognised as public actors, capable of influencing development. The tree below represents this cultural change (adapted from Harry Shier [2010]. "Pathways to Participation Revisited: learning from Nicaragua's child coffee-workers").



With this conceptual framework we have brought to you the theoretical building blocks of how participation can be developed within your youth setting. The Participation Toolkit will give you a very practical approach on how to address participation with the four to eight age group.

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