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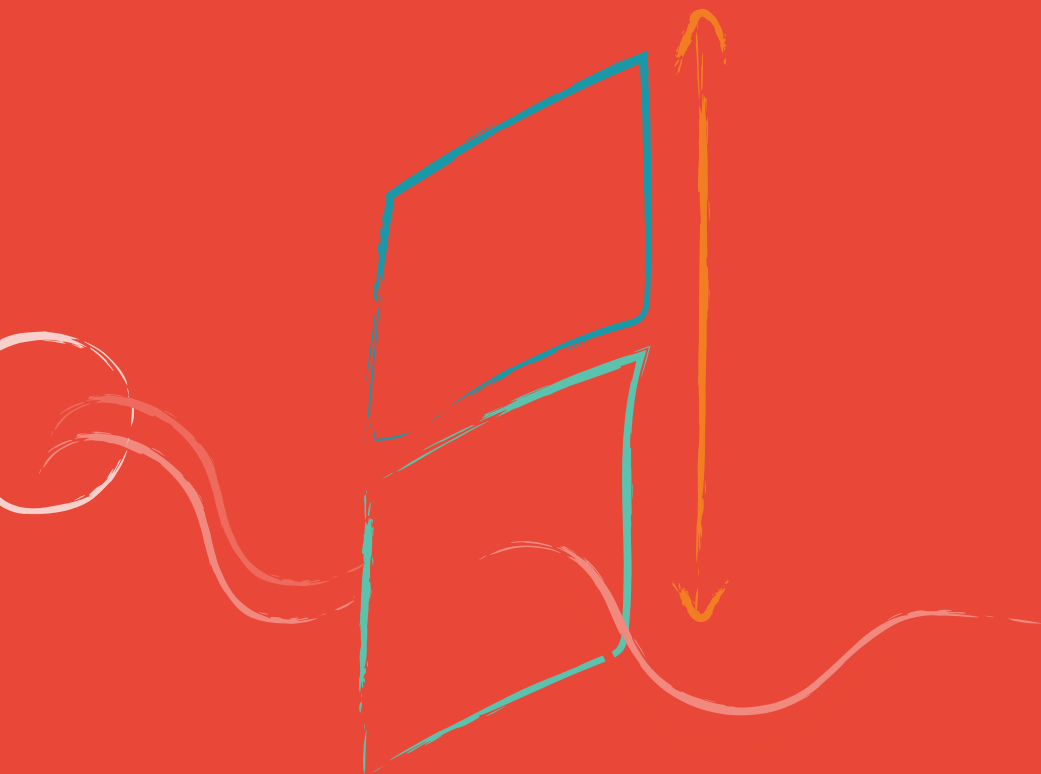
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Youth participation:

models used to understand young people's participation in school and community programmes

Evidence briefing #14: August 2022



Written by:

Sarah Dolaty

Nick Tait

Hannah Brunskill

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About HeadStart

HeadStart is a six-year, £67.4 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10–16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

Six local authority led HeadStart partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to make young people's mental health and wellbeing everybody's business. The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) at the Anna Freud Centre and University College London (UCL) is working with The National Lottery Community Fund and the HeadStart partnerships to collect and evaluate evidence about what does and does not work locally to benefit young people, now and in the future. Partners working with EBPU on this evaluation include the University of Manchester and the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), a project of the Anna Freud Centre. This collaboration is called the HeadStart Learning Team. Previous partners in the HeadStart Learning Team include the London School of Economics (LSE) and Common Room.

About this briefing

This briefing forms part of a series of publications on youth participation in HeadStart. HeadStart recognises young people as competent citizens within society and believes that their opinions and views should hold value and influence the systems that they are a part. As such, involving young people in interventions and services has been central to local strategy development, delivery and programme legacy.

In this briefing, we introduce and review models of youth participation from the wider literature, which help to illustrate the numerous ways young people can be involved in programmes in schools and communities. This briefing will direct attention to different models of participation that currently exist within various systems of care and support. It is important to note that while many more participation models exist, the focus of this briefing is on those that make a clear distinction between categories of involvement and differentiate between the roles of providers (e.g., programme staff) and service users (e.g., young people) within their models.

The models we review demonstrate that participation can take many different forms and can be implemented in various ways. Each model of participation has strengths and drawbacks. Depending on the local context, programme aims, or the resources available, one model of participation may be more appropriate than others. For school and community programmes working with young people, models of participation can be a useful way of understanding the influence that young people can have on mental health interventions and supports.

We hope that by learning about the different models of participation possible, professionals will feel more empowered to share leadership of activities with young people, where this is feasible. We hope that this briefing will facilitate further thinking about which settings or activities lend themselves to various kinds of participation. Additionally, models of participation may help professionals within these spaces to assess and plan for youth involvement in service development, delivery, and evaluation. It may be appropriate to do this alongside young people, enabling them to select and use models and give feedback on their preferences.

Introduction

Youth participation is the active involvement and real influence of young people in the decisions that affect them.¹ The concept is based on Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states that every child has the right to express their views, feelings, and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.² In the field of mental health intervention and delivery, youth participation refers to young people's right to be involved in decisions regarding the design and delivery of mental health programmes.³

Participation models reviewed in this briefing:^a

- ladder of participation
- degrees of participation
- spectrum model
- matrix model
- non-categorisation models

a. The language used (to reference children and young people, for instance) varies within this briefing. This is because we have used the wording from the original models.

Review of models of participation:

Ladder of participation:

Many models conceptualise participation as a ladder of engagement from lower to higher levels of involvement.^{4,5} Lower rungs or stages of participation are associated with limited stakeholder voice or agency. Each rung up the ladder increases stakeholder's involvement and power to shape outcomes of services or programming.

Rung 5:

Young people are consulted and informed. Young people give advice on services, are informed of both how their input will be used, and outcomes of the decisions made by adult stakeholders involved in the programme.

Rung 6:

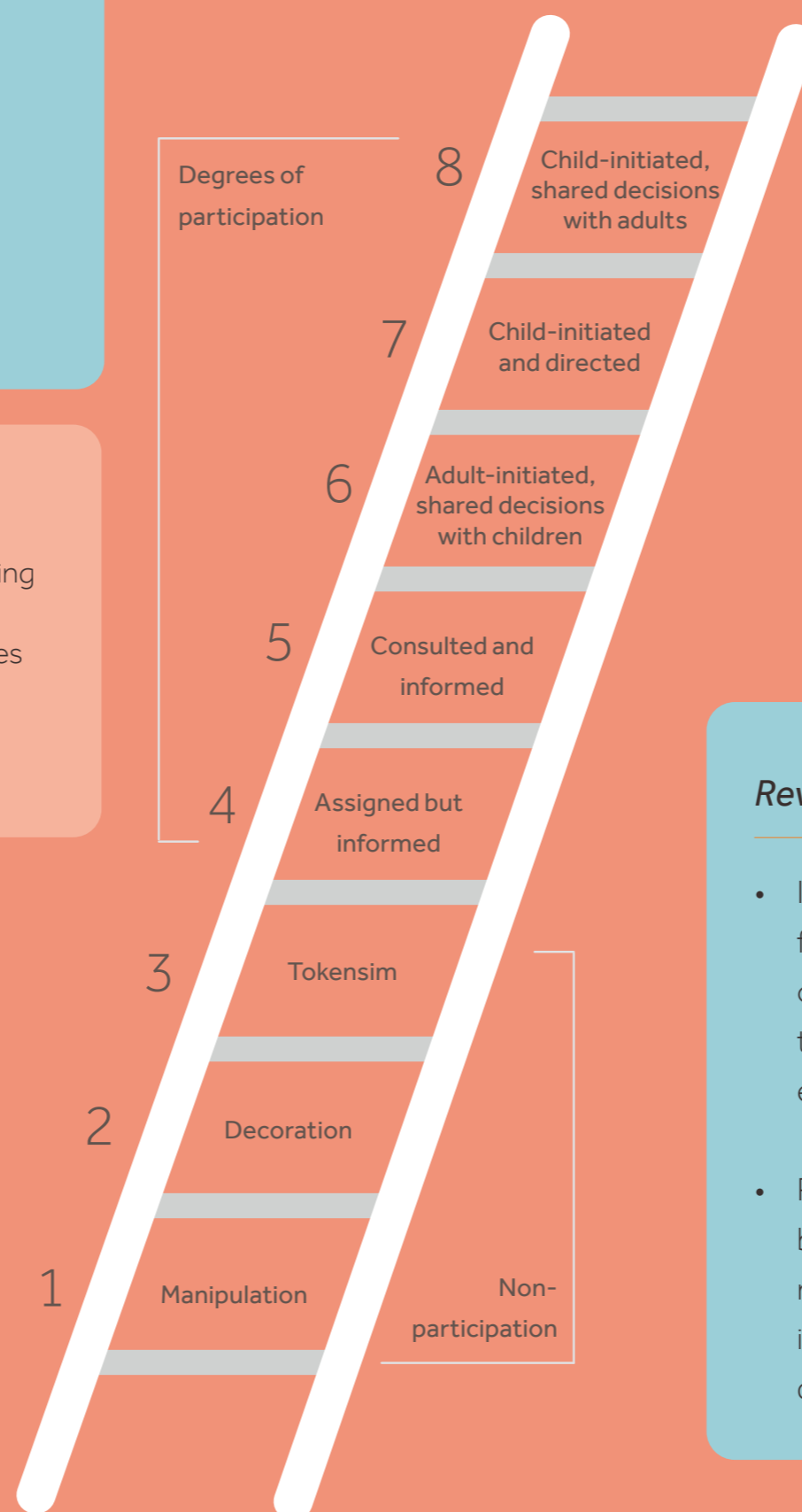
Adults initiate programming but decision making regarding the programmes are shared with young people.

Rung 4:

The lowest level of participation, assigns young people to specific roles and informs these stakeholders of the importance of the assigned role. Power and influence at this stage are limited, and young people must accept the roles they are given.

Rungs 1-3:

Considered 'non-participation' stages of programming.



Rung 8:

Young people initiate programmes, but decision making is shared between adults and youth. young people are seen as experts of their own experience, while accessing and learning from the expertise of adults.

Rung 7:

Young people both initiate and direct the nature of services, adults are only involved as supports for young people.

Review of the ladder model:

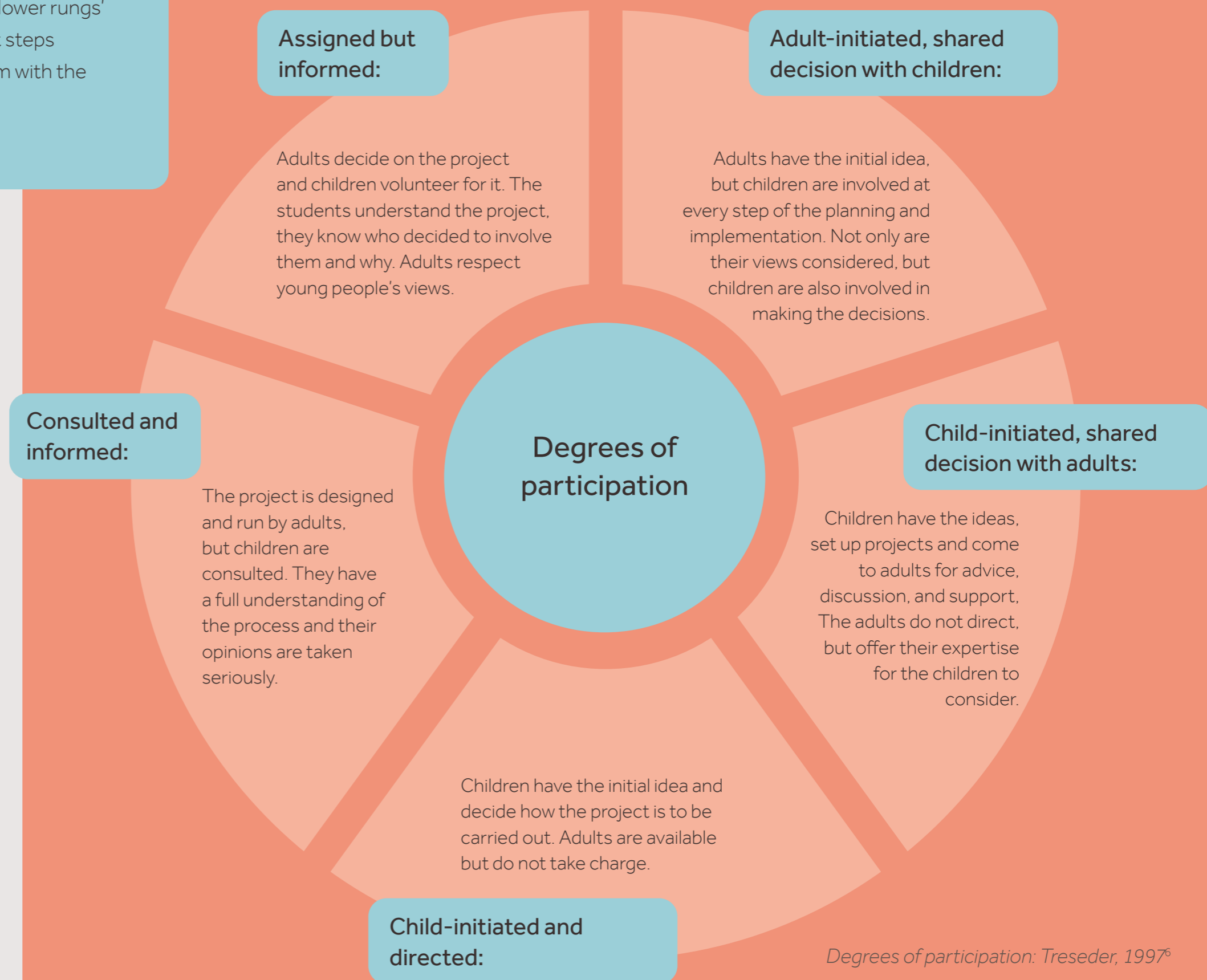
- It assumes that the higher up a programme or activity falls on the ladder, the better it is. In fact, different levels of participation may be appropriate depending on the tasks of that programme or service and the population it engages.
- Participation occurs as a progressive sequence. This may be limiting to service providers and could result in them missing opportunities to represent people's ideas and influence in varying sequences and stages of programme development.

Degrees of participation:

This model preserves categories delineated within the ladder but does not attach value to them.⁶ This model views the 'lower rungs' of engagement on the ladder model as necessary first steps towards empowering young people and providing them with the resources needed to fully participate.

Review of degrees of participation model:

- There is no hierarchy or particular sequence in which participation must occur.
- There is no limit to youth involvement, but young people who participate in youth-initiated and youth-directed projects may need skills and support to do so at the beginning of their involvement.



Spectrum model of participation:

In this model, participation is viewed on a spectrum. The further a programme moves on the spectrum, the higher the level of impact participants have on the programme and interventions.⁷

This model identifies five levels of participation that can be utilised as a planning and evaluation tool in programmes where adults work with young people.

This model focuses more on adult roles than children's status within programmes, as each of the five categories frames questions for adults to consider when planning or evaluating programmes.

The model has a 'flow-chart' structure to it and identifies three stages of adult-commitment (openings, opportunities, and obligations) in each of the five categories.

Review of the spectrum model:

- Similar to the ladder model, higher levels indicate increased empowerment of stakeholders.
- Unlike the ladder model and in common with the degrees of participation model, all levels of participation are seen as legitimate, with each organisation's level depending on the goals of the programme, the timeframe for delivery, and the levels of concern in the decisions to be made.

Levels of participation

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

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.

3. Children's views are taken into account.

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

1. Children are listened to.

Start here

Openings >

Opportunities >

Obligations

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 must share power and responsibility for decisions?

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?

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 processes?

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?

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?

This point is the minimum you must achieve to endorse the UNCRC

Matrix model of participation:

This model consists of the original categories from the ladder model (on the vertical axis) and identifies different participation approaches (on the horizontal axis).⁸ Unique to the matrix model is its inclusion of both the types of participation and degree of involvement.

Different participation approaches

Categories from ladder of youth participation

Ladder of participation

	A Individual complaint and feedback	B Surveys and one-off events and consultations	C Practice initiatives: time limited, focussed activity	D Peer activity: training, research, evaluation	E Young representatives on advisory groups and shadow boards	F Young people involved in governance - with or without adults
8. Youth initiated - shared decisions with adults						
7. Youth initiated and directed						
6. Adult initiated and shared decisions with CYP						
5. Consulted and informed						
4. Assigned and informed						
3. Tokenism						
2. Decoration						
1. Manipulation						

Review of the matrix model:

- It differentiates between types of stakeholder involvement.
- It encourages those carrying out participation activities to consider the range of engagement opportunities they provide to young people.

Non-categorisation models of participation:

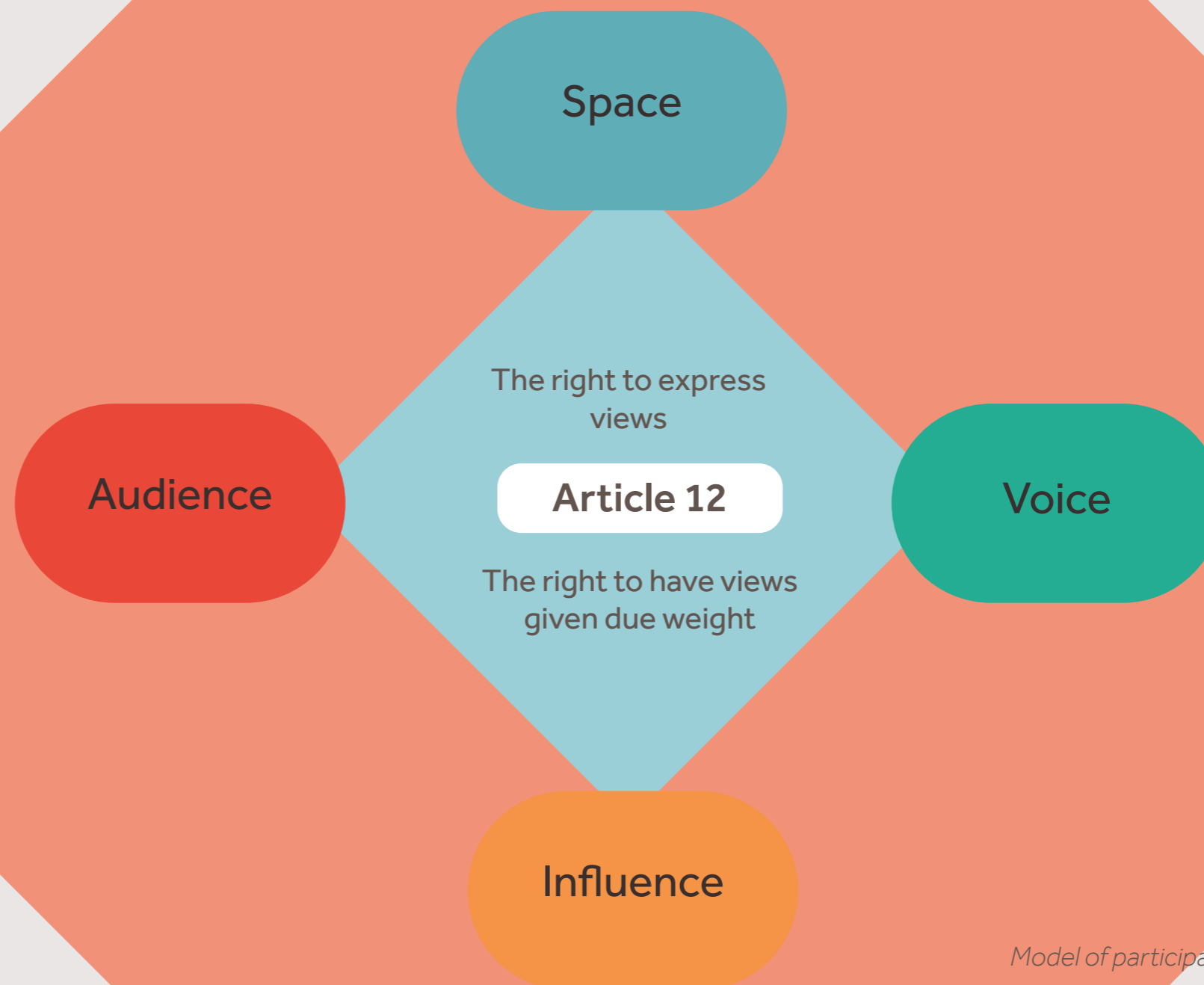
These models do not categorise levels of involvement. However, they bring attention to the roles, power dynamics, and motives for stakeholder involvement that should be explored when developing and maintaining authentic youth participation. Examples of non-categorisation models include White's typology of participation, Jan's de Backer's triangle of youth participation and the three-lens approach of participation.^{9,10,11}

A popular non-categorisation model is Lundy's model of participation.¹² Adults collaborating with young people must ensure that young people are given the right to express their views and that those views are given due weight in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC. This can be accomplished by bringing attention to the space of collaboration, the support adults provide, the influence young people can have and the audience that may be impacted by this collaboration.

Those involved are asked to continuously reflect on these four key elements by asking themselves questions such as "How do adults create spaces where young people feel safe to express their views?" "How do adults support young people to feel heard and seen?" "How will young people know how much influence they have on a decision?" "Were the young people given feedback, explaining the reasons for a decision that was made?" By engaging in these discussions, the aim is to ensure that young people are involved in authentic and impactful ways throughout the collaboration process.

Review of non-categorisation models:

- These models do not provide categorisations or levels associated with participation. It may, at times, be difficult to assess the degree of youth involvement.
- They bring attention to underlying factors including the sharing of power, the voice or role of young people, the aims of initiatives, and the context in which young people are involved in participation efforts.



How to use models when designing and delivering support with young people

It is important to recognise, when working with young people, the diversity within the group and consider differing identities and needs when planning your approach. It may be appropriate to adjust the language or format of the models to ensure accessibility and maximise engagement.

- Explore the various models with young people who are interested in engaging with youth participation. This will help encourage their involvement from the beginning and give you an insight into their ideas on what participation should look like for your specific organisation and project. For example, you could use this briefing in a workshop with young people to explore different models, looking at suitable approaches moving forward.
- When planning the participation activity for your programme, use a model to help ensure a range and balance of activity types. For example, you could use the matrix of participation⁸ to map out and consider different approaches to participation strategies from start to finish.
- Consider several models before you choose one to run with; you can then specify your organisation's or project's approach. For instance, you could read through this report, comparing each model, and decide on the most appropriate one based on your project aims and desired outcomes. Remember, participation is an approach to hold in mind at all times, rather than an activity to do on occasion.
- Utilise the models to identify multiple levels of participation in your project and distinguish roles for professionals and young people. This will ensure you keep a clear understanding of who can do what and any gaps that may arise. For example, you could use the spectrum model of participation⁷ to start creating your plan of action. Use the spectrum as steps to consider before deciding on actions moving forward.
- Continuously evaluate and reflect on outcomes from using the models; this can determine any improvements needed next time or throughout a project. How empowered did your young people feel? Measure the impact participation has had on young people and projects – the spectrum model,⁷ for example, can also work as an evaluation tool.

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Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU), Anna Freud Centre,
4-8 Rodney Street, London N1 9JH

Tel: 020 7794 2313
www.ucl.ac.uk/ebpu

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