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Listen – Act – Change

Council of Europe Handbook on Children's Participation

For professionals
working *with* and *for* children



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Why a handbook?

- Assessment reports frequently highlight an **implementation gap**
- The **knowledge and capacity of adults** to respect and promote children's rights to have their views taken into account **matters**
- **Imperative** to build capacity of professionals
- Overcome recurrent **barriers**:
 - Education and training systems fragmented
 - Curricula are already overcrowded

Aim 1: Encourage professionals everywhere to facilitate meaningful children's participation



Courts

Play and
recreation

Culture and
the arts

At
home

Alternative
care

Day care

Hospitals

International
forums

Conferences

School

Government
policy

Municipalities

Local
communities



Aim 2: Shifting the paradigm from structures to (also) processes

- Dialogue and learning loops: Listen – Act – Change
- Inclusion: of all children (including amongst others young children, children with disabilities, young Roma and migrant children)
- Impact: on personal and public decision-making
- Children's growing leadership

Contents

Sections

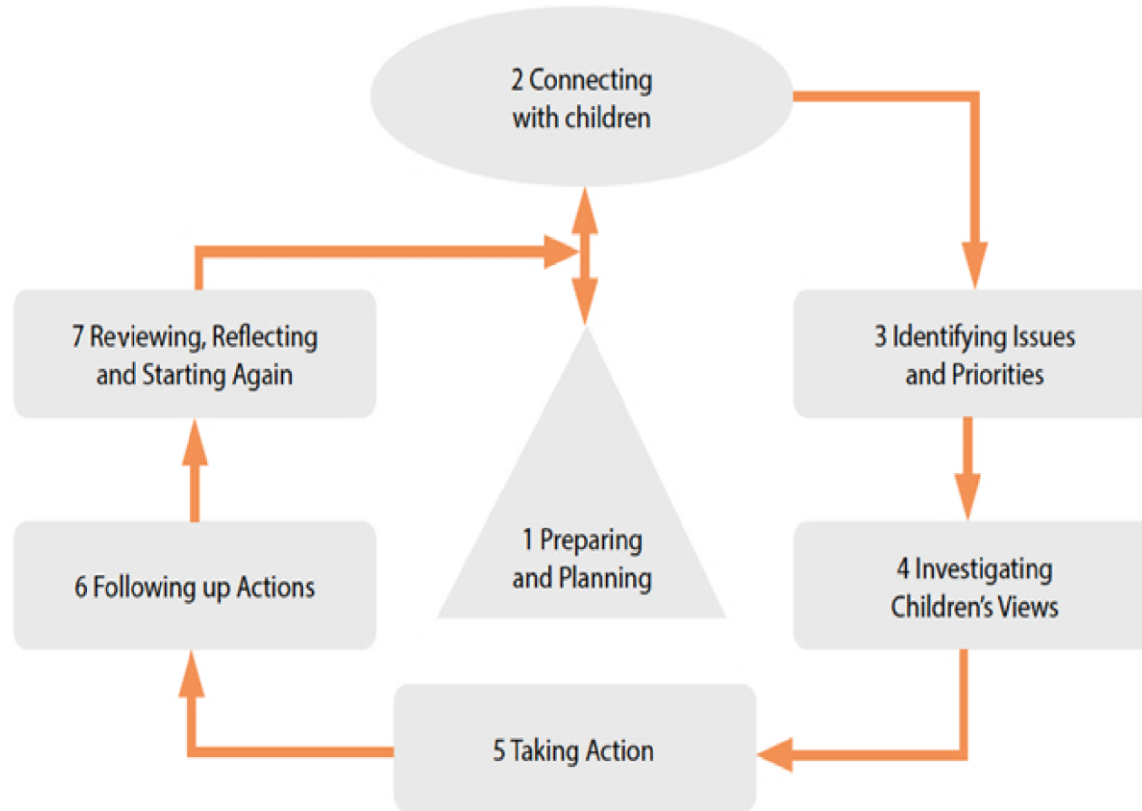
1. Understanding Children's Participation in Theory and Practice
 2. Developing Participatory Organisations and Environments
 3. Supporting **Individual** Children's Participation
 4. Supporting Children's **Collective** Participation
 5. Resources
 6. Annexes
- Advice
 - Standards
 - Examples
 - Notes
 - Checklists
 - Hints and Tips



1 Understanding children's participation theory and practice

- Rights Frameworks
- Importance of children's participation
- Space, Voice, Audience, Influence
- Child-led, Collaborative, Consultative
- Doing it well: safe, ethical, inclusive and impactful participation
- Enabling environments

Shifting Paradigm: from structures to (also) processes



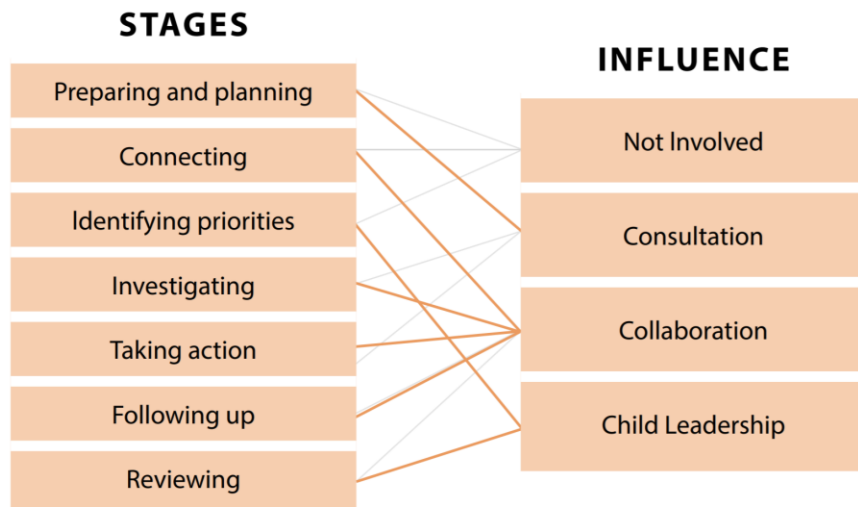
Larkins C. (2019) Excursions as Corporate Agents: A Critical Realist Account of Children's Agency. *Childhood* 26(4) 414–429.

Larkins et al (2016) *The Magic 6: Participatory action and learning experiences with Roma Youth*

Supporting growing leadership

Figure 3: A first Lattice of Children's Participation

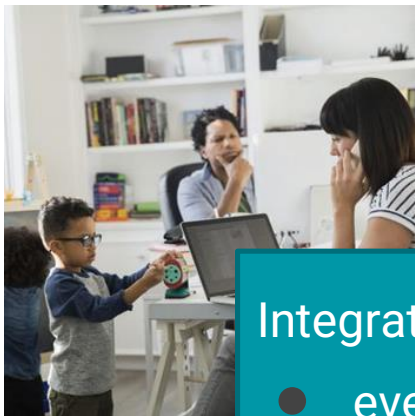
Figure 4: A second phase Lattice of Children's Participation



Larkins, C., Kiili, J., & Palsanen, K. (2014). A lattice of participation: reflecting on examples of children's and young people's collective engagement in influencing social welfare policies and practices. *European Journal of Social Work*, 17(5), 718-736.

2 Developing participatory organizations and environments

Any system can be adapted or changed to create more respectful spaces for children to be able to express their views



Integrate children's participation into

- everyday decision-making
- the functioning and management of organisations

Organisations

Families

Some suggestions for how

1. Ownership at highest levels
2. Assessment of current situation
3. Organisational policy and procedures
4. Recruit and build staff capacity
5. Establish safe and accessible complaints mechanisms
6. Monitor and reviewing implementation

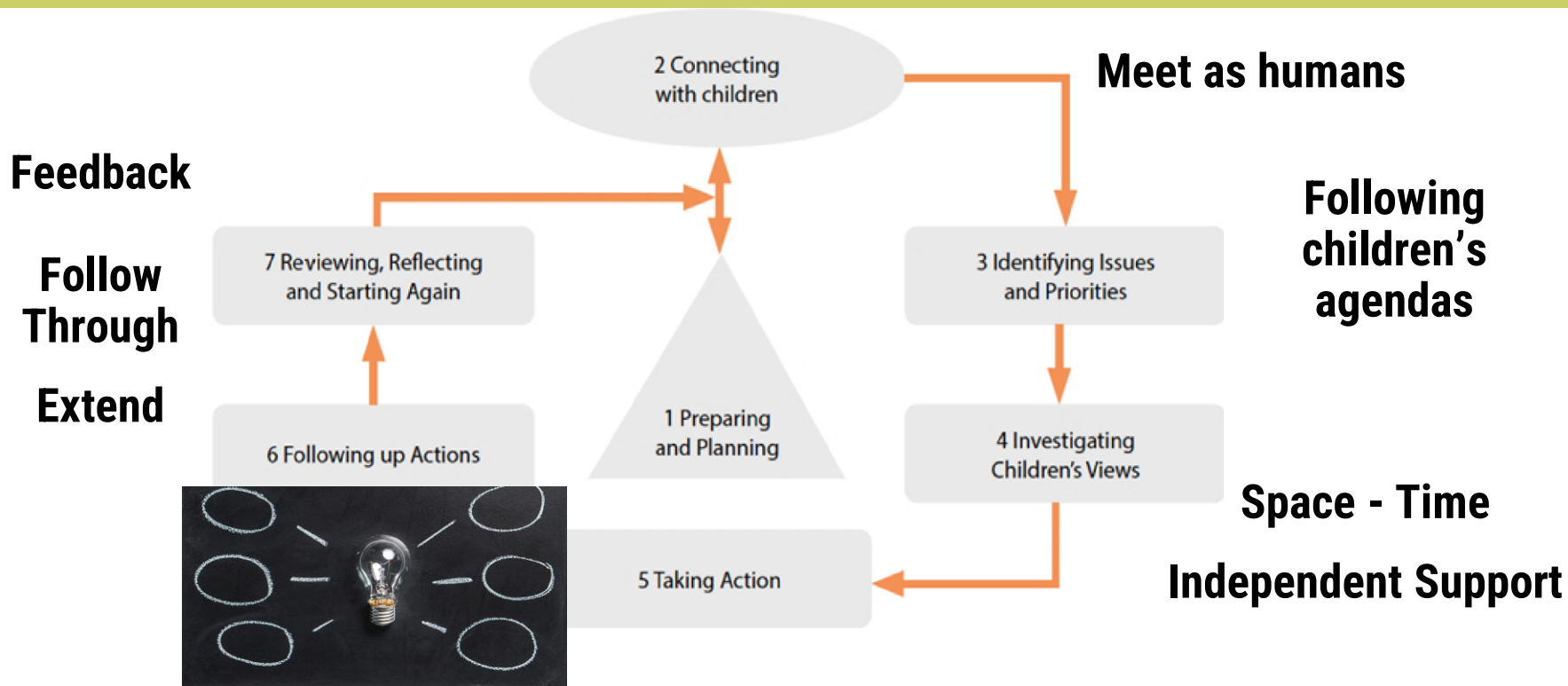
**Key
Actors**

**Champions
& Allies**

=

**Children
Partners**

3.4 Individual and collective participation



3

Children's Individual Participation

"If you do not take a decision in the best interests of the child, then you are taking a decision against us."



PRACTICE NOTE

Best interests of the child

When determining decisions in proceedings affecting children, a number of factors must be taken into account in addition to the child's wishes and feelings. The best interests of the child are paramount. The state has to do whatever they think is best for the children's protection, development and well-being. The child's views on what is 'best' is also very important and their views must be taken seriously. Professionals cannot assess the child's best interests without taking their views into account. In any decision made by adults as to the best interests of the child, the weight given to children's expressed wishes increases with their age and maturity. The best interests' principle does not override other rights in the UNCRC and so should not be used to dismiss a child's views. Judgements have to be made, for example, about whether to exclude a child from a court hearing that they wish to participate in because of concerns about possible harm. Rather, the decision as to whether to grant the child's wish to attend court should be considered and weighed up in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

4

Children's collective participation

"When I am empowered, if there is an issue, I should take the lead in addressing it."



EXAMPLE

Intergenerational support for activism

In France, in late 2018, some students opposed the government's recent education reforms of the upper secondary school which orientated students toward specific degrees sooner, and therefore removed the three broad subject choices of science, literature or social sciences. Students also opposed tightening of university entrance procedures which they considered too selective. In response, children, teachers and parents became engaged in activism. A high school [student's union](#) has been in place in France since 1994. This has supported students to demonstrate and stand up for their rights. Alliances of teachers' unions, parents and lawyers have also organised to show their support for demonstrating students by publishing letters in papers, asking for children to be given the right to strike and demanding protection from retribution, in support of children's rights to freedom of expression. The French Ministry of Education [website](#) provides guidance on high school students' rights to put up posters, set up groups, meet and publish.

5 Resources (freely downloadable)

- Legal standards
- Theory
- Guidance on different settings or with different groups
- Activities
- Advocacy and child activism
- Participatory institutions
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Training
- Other

6 Annexes (Summaries - train and plan)

**ANNEX 1: THE NINE BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL PARTICIPATION:
THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

ANNEX 2: PRODUCING ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION: GUIDANCE

ANNEX 3: ENSURING SAFETY AND WELL-BEING: A CHECKLIST

ANNEX 4: CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

ANNEX 5 EXPLAINING CHILDREN'S ROLE IN MEETINGS AND PROCEEDINGS: A CHECKLIST

ANNEX 6: COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN: A CHECKLIST

ANNEX 7: PREPARING FOR COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION: KEY QUESTIONS CONSIDER

ANNEX 8: SUPPORTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION: A CHECKLIST

How to read it

Dip in to the section that is most important to you as a professional

Realize that **it all fits together** – collective participation to improve environments can create more inclusive and impactful processes for individual children's participation





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