

Institution: University of Central Lancashire		
Unit of Assessment: 20 - Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: <i>Participation of marginalised children and young people in social action and public decision-making</i>		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Sept 2009-Dec 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Cath Larkins Nigel Patrick Thomas	Professor (Director) Professor (Director)	1.9.11 – present 1.9.07 - 31.8.17
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2014-present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>In the United Kingdom, Europe and Japan, Larkins and Thomas' research with children and young people, including disabled children and young Roma, has informed public policy, enabled scrutiny of governments by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and shaped new commitments to children's participation. Furthermore, through advisory roles to the European Union, Council of Europe, UK Government and International NGOs, our research has guided the development of participation processes for marginalised children. Marginalised children and young people across Europe have also reported the personal impacts of their involvement in our research, building confidence and gaining skills in participatory research and activism.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Our research develops foundational theoretical conceptions of children's participation, citizenship and agency [1,2,3], methodological innovations in child-led research [2,3,4,5] and empirical insights into the experiences of marginalised children and young people and professionals working with them [4,5,6]. Since 2014, the international reach of this research has spread across the UK, Europe, Australia and Japan through 18 externally funded projects attracting more than GBP2,000,000.</p> <p>Theoretical foundations: Thomas' understanding of child participation demonstrates how child participation is not simply a right: it is woven into the fabric of intergenerational relations founded on recognition [1]. Larkins' four-fold model provides a theoretical regrounding of children's citizenship, demonstrating how the term is used to encompass neo-liberal demands for children to provide their own self-care as well as more established notions of participation in decision-making and contribution to social life. She argues that children's citizenship can also be seen in their acts of resistance and demands recognition for the politics of children's misbehaviour [2]. Larkins' model of children's agency revolutionises conceptions of this core concept in childhood studies and challenges dominant conceptions of childhood. She argues that children can maximise influence on policy and practice where they have influence over resources, set agendas for action, occupy recognised positions as 'representatives of children' and link their experiences to global political and economic dynamics.</p> <p>Methodological Innovations: Larkins and Thomas have authored world-leading models of participatory research and practice [2,3,4,5]. The Centre established a young researcher group, UCan, in 2012. This enables children and young people to lead their own rights-based research [3]. Together, UCan, The Centre's EU Funded projects (PEER: Participation and Empowerment Experiences for Roma youth and Partispace), and UK based child and youth led studies have developed participatory methodologies, involving cycles of identifying concerns, investigation, action and reflection [4]. These models have enabled national and European policy making to be made relevant and accessible to marginalised children.</p> <p>Empirical Insights: AHRC funded Stories2Connect (participatory research with 70 children) has provided youth-led definitions of capability and resilience. Youth-led research with children and parents showed connections between poverty and rights violations in all areas of disabled children's lives [3]. Findings from research with Gypsy Roma and Traveller (GRT) young people in the UK [4] show how educational opportunities for GRT community members can be improved through targeted allocation of funds, monitoring of inclusion and attainment and delivery of peer-led cultural awareness. Youth-led research with young people in contact with youth justice services revealed how relationship-based working and addressing issues of ethnic identity can enable desistance. UCan-initiated research on children's rights in the UK and Japan (JUK) has</p>		

provided insights into the impact of neo-liberalism on disabled children's experience of education and leisure [5]. Research on children's participation in shaping responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in 20 European countries provided rapid evidence of effective practice, but also, compounded exclusion of marginalised children and the lack of dialogue between children and policy makers [6]. An Australian Research Council study shows the relationship between participation and wellbeing in schools. Co-produced evaluations funded by the Cabinet Office and UK NGOs have generated understandings of risk management within looked after children services and demonstrated how to co-produce services for children in and leaving care. Natural England funded research with disadvantaged young people showed how to overcome barriers to young people's access to outdoor environments. Our peer-led research is informing NICE Guidelines on working with looked after children.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] *Thomas, N. (2012) 'Love, rights and solidarity: studying children's participation using Honneth's theory of recognition', *Childhood* 19(4), 453-466. PI Thomas, (unfunded theoretical work) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568211434604>
- [2] *Larkins, C. (2014) 'Enacting children's citizenship: developing understandings of how children enact themselves as citizens through actions and Acts of citizenship', *Childhood* 21(1) 7-21 PI Larkins: *Children, Citizenship and the European Union (UCLan funded PhD)* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568213481815>
- [3] *Larkins, C., Thomas, N., Carter, B., Farrelly, N., Judd, D. and Lloyd, J. (2015) 'Intergenerational support for children's protagonism: methodological moves towards critical children rights research framed from below' *International Journal of Children's Rights* Spring PI Larkins: *The Impact of Poverty on Disabled Children's Rights (Children's Commissioner for England, 2012-2013 GBP50,000)* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-02302009>
- [4] Larkins, C. and Bilson, A. (2016) *The Magic 6: Participatory Action and Learning Experiences with Roma Youth Training Manual*, Cluj-Napocca, Romania: Babes-Boylai University [available in 8 languages] PI Larkins: PEER: Participation and Empowerment Experiences for Roma Youth (EU Action Grant 2013-2015 EUR809,000)
- [5] Larkins, C., Koizumi, H., Martin, K., Finch, W. and Winstanley, R. with UCan and J-UK young researchers (2018) 'Is it a right?': Disabled children and young people's rights to education, leisure, mobility and travel, and work in Japan. *Preston: University of Central Lancashire* PI Larkins: *J-UK Disabled children's rights and participation in Japan and the UK (Daiwa and institutional funding 2017-2019 GBP39,000)*
- [6] Larkins, C. et al (2020) *Building on Rainbows Supporting Children's Participation in Shaping Responses to COVID-19 Rapid Evidence Report* PI Larkins: *Marginalised Children's Participation in Europe (Open Society Foundations 2018-2024 USD170,000)*

*Peer-reviewed journal articles

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Scrutiny of Disabled Children's Rights in UK, Europe, Japan by United Nations Committee

Evidence from The Centre's research [3] was cited in the UK Children's Commissioners' report to the UN and in the *Review of Evidence* for the 2016 Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child [A1]. Our evidence about the impact of poverty on the rights of disabled children and the need to include disabled children in policy making were subsequently highlighted by a UN Committee as rights violations, leading them to call on the UK Government to review and mitigate the impact of welfare reform on disabled children [A2]. This demand was echoed in the Council of Europe Strategy for Children's Rights 2016-2021 [A3]. Subsequently, disabled children were involved in participatory activities to review this policy and to inform new recommendations [F2].

The theoretical framework and methodology developed from this research was presented to the Japanese Citizen and NGO Committee, who also report to the UN. They supported young researchers to implement the methodology in Japan. The theoretical insights informed the alternative committee's 2018 report to the UN which challenged dominant Japanese perspectives on childhood and highlighted children's agency [B]. The empirical finding, developed by the University of Central Lancashire-led young researchers and Oberlin University in Japan [5], were sent to a UN Committee scrutinising the Japanese government.

Subsequently, the Committee picked up on concerns about special education within Japan and recommended changes in line with our report [F4].

Children's Participation in Europe

Larkins' insights into impactful and inclusive participatory processes drawn from analysis of practice in the UK, Finland and France [1,2,3,4,5,6] have informed the 2019 EU presidency's declaration on new participatory mechanisms for children in EU decision making. This was achieved through advising on mechanisms for strengthening EU participation structures; through citation of her work in EU and Eurochild papers on strengthening participation structures; and her role as the only academic expert advisor to the 2019 EU presidency for the *Bucharest Declaration* on child participation [C1]. Paragraph 47 of the *EU Parliament Resolution 2876* subsequently called on the Commission and the Member States for full implementation of this Declaration. Her approach has also been used to guide the 2017-18 EU programme of youth structured dialogue (facilitated by one of her doctoral students) and a unique event in the European parliament in which children aged 13-15 lobbied the EU Brexit negotiating team. She is now advising the Council of Europe on strategies for children's participation in their parliamentary processes. [F2]

In the context of Covid-19 the European NGO network for children (Eurochild) has used evidence from The Centre's research [6] in contributions to the Council of Europe steering committee on children's rights (CDENF) and to the EU post Covid-19 policy and budget decision-making [F2]. Larkins also spoke at a Council of Europe Committee on the impact of Covid-19 on educational exclusion. The CDNEF subsequently references The Centre's Research in its call for greater commitment to digital inclusion and children's participation in Covid-19 related policy making [C3].

Scrutinising and shaping policy affecting marginalised children in the UK and beyond

Following recommendations from young researchers in *PEER*, for the first time, Roma are included in advocacy services for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities in Wales. The service was allocated funding by the Welsh Government and continues to implement some of the learning developed from *PEER* [F3]. In Wales, empirical evidence of violations of care leavers rights, and guidance on developing participatory responses to Covid-19 was fed into a Welsh Government Committee and helped shape a service providing digital access to care leavers in Wales. In the UK, children will receive increased opportunities to become involved in the work of DEFRA and Natural England. For example: leading to the establishment of a youth element in the Government's 25-year Environment Plan and establishing youth perspectives as evidence and input into decision-making about policy areas, such as nature recovery [F5]. Advising the Home Office on methodologies for including children in information design, Larkins, with colleagues at Liverpool University, has helped shape the information supplied to children about how to apply for the Brexit EU Settlement Scheme. Through an EU ambassador mission to Mongolia, Larkins presented her participatory approach [4] to child protection to Ministers and made recommendations for increasing the budget for child protection alongside stressing the importance of child participation. A year later the Mongolian President stated that, as a result of the meetings of the previous 12 months, a year of Children's Development and Protection was declared, involving stressing the value of child participation and allocating further budget [D1, D2]. Evidence from The Centre's rapid study on children's participation in the context of Covid-19 (April 2019) contributed to NGO challenging government practice in EU member states.

Eurochild Participation Strategy

Since 2013, Larkins' and Thomas' publications and advisory work has steered the development and piloted an improvement of the Participation Strategy of Eurochild [C2, F2], a European NGO network representing 185 organisations working with children in 35 European countries. This has produced structures enabling marginalised children to represent their views to the European Union. The first Eurochild Children's Council was established in 2017, with eleven 12–16-year-olds (from 10 countries) representing the views of marginalised children and meeting with MEPs. Pilot 'feeder' structures were also established in Estonia, Malta and Bulgaria using participatory action research to enable representation of more excluded children. The model is now

embedded in the work of Eurochild and many of their member organisation. It has enabled children to create spaces in which to have direct dialogue with EU and national officials and to initiate consultations with other children [F1, F2].

Advocacy with and by Roma youth and marginalised children

The *PEER* study [4] provided unique guidance on engagement with one of the most marginalised communities in Europe (PI Larkins, with 13 universities and NGOs). We trained over 400 professionals and young Roma leaders across nine countries to develop capacity for participatory action inquiry. In total, 550 Roma youth used this methodology to inform changes in practice within schools, communities and relationships with local authority services. For example, the training in Cyprus, was attended by a representative from the Ministry for Education who committed to taking a participatory approach to policy making regarding school bullying. Furthermore, the subsequent National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Violence in School 2018-2022 places a strong emphasis on children's participation. In France, in 2016 Roma children were able to influence a municipality so that a cycle path was built. In Lithuania, in 2015, Roma children highlighted antiGypsyism and held the first ever child-led Roma Holocaust conference. In Ireland children set up a diversity and inclusion committee and campaign, educating schools about how to be inclusive. [F3]

This methodology is continuing to inform practice by professionals across Europe. For example, in Bulgaria, Larkins delivers training and consultancy on the *PEER* model. Also, with the European Federation *Missing Children Europe* (representing a network of 30 NGOs in 26 European countries), Larkins delivers training and consultancy on methodologies for participation. Further impact derives from Larkins' methodologies and theoretical insights having been included in three European training materials [F1, F2].

Lives of children and young people and their communities

Across Europe, marginalised children, as our fellow co-researchers, have reported the personal impacts of participation in these activities; helping them build confidence, gain skills in research and activism and enabling some of them to access mainstream education, university courses, work experience with politicians and employment in research and youth work.

Through leading and taking part in participatory research [3,4,5,6], the 80 young people who have worked most closely with The Centre in the current REF period have brought about enormous personal change, including for young Roma in other EU countries [E1] and disabled young researchers in the UK and Japan [F4, E3]. Young people have experienced travel to Switzerland, Ireland, Japan, Belgium, Croatia and Canada to present their findings to professionals and other young people [E2]. In the UK, children, who were attending special educational provision and who felt unable to speak in class, are now confident conducting research and addressing public meetings [E3]. One of the young people who have moved from educational disengagement to attending University summed up the benefits for him and other disabled group members:

“I've learnt how to talk to people and I've learnt how to talk in front of people ... I'm proud of this [research], helping me from when I was in my dark days ... I think I'm just a better person because of it ... before, I had nothing to think positive about, nothing to aim for.”

The views of over 1,100 children and young people have been fed into local, national and international policy processes, meeting with local, national and European politicians, children's ombudsmen and government officials, through policy papers distributed internationally and through travelling exhibitions [2,3,4,5,6 and other studies not listed in section 3]. This work has had a wide impact on the well-being of children and families [E3, F2]. For example, after presenting findings of the Covid-19 research [3] and direct email correspondence with an NGO network member who attended that presentation, the NGO's advocacy work, attempting to reduce the confinement of children, was intensified. Within one week their government reduced the restrictions placed on children's access to outdoor environments, replicating the exemplar practice that had been reported in the research.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[A] Impact on UN Committee and Council of Europe Scrutiny of Child Rights Violations (through Research for Children's Commissioner for England and Council of Europe).

- A1 UK Children's Commissioners Report to the UN Committee;
- A2 UN Committee on the Rights of Child Recommendations to UK government;
- A3 Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child

[B] UN Committee Recommendations to Japan;

[C] Impact on European Policy-Making on Child Participation and Eurochild Practice on Child Participation and the Lives of Marginalised Children including response to Covid-19 (direct advising roles to EU Presidency, CoE Parliamentarians and Eurochild).

- C1 Bucharest Declaration and Supporting Document
- C2 Eurochild Participation Strategy
- C3 The COVID-19 Pandemic and Children: Challenges, responses and policy implications.

[D] Impact on Mongolian national policy making and lives of children in Mongolia. (Through Eu diplomatic mission) –

- D1 Mongolia Year of Child Development and Protection Announcement
- D2 EU Ambassador Mission Report

[E] Impact on the lives of children and young people and their communities (through collaborative and peer led research and associated participation opportunities).

- E1 Roma youth on Romanian television talking about benefits of PEER
- E2 young person's blog about benefits <https://stories2connect.org/about/proud-moments-from-across-the-globe/>
- E3 Parent and youth testimonial. *Available on request.*

[F] Corroborating Contacts

- F1 Baroness Doreen Massey of Darwen, House of Lords
- F2 Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General, Eurochild
- F3 Trudy Aspinwall, Manager, Travelling Ahead
- F4 Professor Yosuke Yotoriyama, Chair, Citizens' committee reporting on the rights of children in Japan
- F5 Rachel Cook, Senior Advisor, Natural England