

Institution: University of Stirling		
Unit of Assessment: 23. Education		
Title of case study: Improving Children and Young People's Rights-based Participation in Decision Making in Scotland and Internationally		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Greg Mannion John l'Anson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed: 2000 - present 2000 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>University of Stirling's research has underpinned the realisation of children's participation rights for all children in Scotland and shaped participation strategies globally. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees children's participation rights, however, actualization is often tokenistic, with limited consultation with select young people only. Our research showed such rights are better realised by supporting meaningful dialogue between adults and children.</p> <p>Because our research is now embedded into policies, guidelines, toolkits, and professional training, children in Scotland now work in partnership with parents and teachers in evaluation, quality assurance and monitoring of educational provision, and evidence of intergenerational dialogues is now sought during Scottish education settings inspections. Internationally, World Vision and several European Union nations have used our research to inform participation strategies, helping to make the goals of the UNCRC a reality for many.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
Introduction		
<p>In March 2021, the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill was passed, which will fully incorporate the UNCRC into law in Scotland. Our research (R1-6) advances the translation of the UNCRC into practice, enabling the realization of children's rights. Through our research, rights-based participation is now better recognised and supported in the form of on-going intergenerational dialogue, particularly in educational contexts.</p> <p>Previous research on rights-based participation in education has tended to focus on the formal work of pupil councils and 'listening to children's voices'. In general, pupil councils were shown to function tokenistically sometimes only involving more vocal, able, or middle-class pupils. Similarly, through failing to inclusively involve the young or act on decisions, and through addressing issues of low importance or failing to report back, pupil councils often struggled to realise young people's right to participate. Our research has reoriented this field, showing that worthwhile participation is firstly, more than eliciting views and is better understood as an on-going, inclusive, intergenerational dialogue between young people and adults. Secondly, we showed that participation occurs in many informal ways, both in and outside of pupil councils. Thirdly, our research in schools uncovered how child-adult dialogue across four identified arenas of participation (see fig 1) can lead to improved achievement and attainment, better professional conduct, and improved school culture. Through our rights-based research involving young people and statutory bodies, we have directly embedded these findings and understandings into policy (R2) and guidance (R4). Overall, the research has repositioned young people's participation, ensuring it is better recognised and supported as a necessary and on-going intergenerational dialogue occurring in diverse settings.</p>		
Research Contributions		
<p>Seminal theoretical educational research (for example, R6, R5) shifted the focus from a concern with 'listening to' and 'consulting' young people (for example, in school councils) towards a view of the importance of shared decision making and dialogue with young people. In tandem, our</p>		

empirical research (**R3**) distinctively explored young people's lived experiences of participation in school demonstrating clear impacts on achievement and attainment. Funded by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS; GBP6,360), we researched participation in schools with deprived catchment areas where achievement and attainment was above average. We showed young people valued decision making in four setting types which we theorized and defined as 'Arenas of Participation' (fig 1). These were: in the formal curriculum (for example, in class), in the wider curriculum (for example, in clubs and societies), in many kinds of decision-making or governance groups (for example, EcoSchool committees), and in community linking (for example, guest speakers). Evidence indicated participation was needed in all arenas for a positive school ethos and achievement and attainment. In **R1**, we summarise the analysis and the theorization of the arena-based approach from which we derived the heuristic (fig 1) now central to guidance in Scotland (**S6**).



Fig 1. The Four Arenas of Participation provides a heuristic for an expanded view of the interlinked ways in which participation occurs and is consequential.

Contributions to Policy and Professional Guidance

Funded again by CYPCS (GBP21,968) – whose statutory duty is to promote children's rights – in **R2**, we gathered evidence from expert informants to derive the current national standards on children's participation. CYPCS uses our research (**R2**) as its framework to clearly call on professionals to address young people's participation as an intergenerational dialogue across all children's services.

In **R4**, Education Scotland (the curriculum making body) funded (GBP21,364) impact-oriented research where findings from **R1** were used as the basis for new guidance for practitioners in all educational settings. In a pilot study, researchers collaborated with schools, teachers, and young people to co-produce and trial the new support materials and these are now published on the 'National Improvement Hub' (**S6**). This partnership approach means there is now a new, evidence-based, definition of 'learner participation' as intergenerational dialogue, as well as self-evaluation tools, and practitioner videos. Stirling's research-informed resources now provide practical advice on how to embed effective participation into educational practice.

Summary

Across the theoretical, empirical and impact-oriented research (**R1-6**), our contributions have problematised the previous focus on listening to children's voices, and inaugurated a more dialogical, and contextualised framing in theory, empirical research, policy and guidance. This new approach is shown through our evaluative and applied research to have impacts on achievement and attainment outcomes for young people, professional practice, staff-pupil relations, and school-community linking.

3. References to the research (Stirling authors in **bold** text)

- R1. Mannion, G.**, Sowerby, M., **I'Anson, J.** (2020) Four Arenas of School-based Participation: Towards a heuristic for children's rights-informed educational practice. *Discourse*. DOI: [10.1080/01596306.2020.1795623](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1795623)
- R2. Mannion, G.** (2012) *Children and Young People's Participation in Scotland: Frameworks, standards and principles for practice*. Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland. <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/9153>
- R3. Mannion, G.**, Sowerby, M. and **I'Anson, J.** (2015) *How Young People's Participation in School Supports Achievement and Attainment*. Funder: Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland. Available from <http://stir.ac.uk/49f>
- R4. Mannion, G.** & Sowerby, M. with Education Scotland (2018) *Learner Participation in Educational Settings (3-18)*. Edinburgh: Education Scotland. Available at: <http://stir.ac.uk/49i>
- R5. Mannion, G.** (2007) Going Spatial, Going Relational: Why 'listening to children' and children's participation needs reframing. In *Discourse*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 405 – 420. DOI: [10.1080/01596300701458970](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300701458970)
- R6. Mannion, G.** (2010) After participation: the socio-spatial performance of intergenerational becoming. In: Percy-Smith, B. & Thomas, N. (eds.) *A Handbook of Children's Participation: perspectives from theory and practice*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, pp. 330-342.

4. Details of the impact

Our research has supported services to change as Scotland incorporates the UNCRC into law. In support of this change, the research has directly impacted on policies, guidance, and training for professionals leading to improved service provision and educational outcomes for young people in Scotland and internationally. These impacts reach across all children's services in Scotland (in childcare, in 5,000 schools - 180,000 pupils), and greater numbers internationally. Inspections, testimonials, pilot studies, and independent evaluation all confirm conceptual impacts on policy, societal impacts on professional practice, and on outcomes for children's lives especially in educational settings. Pathways to impact included validation and engagement events (for example, **S8**) for adults and young people, direct advice to Government via the 'Children's Participation Strategic Research Group' and the 'Empowered Education System' initiative (**S5**).

Impacts on Policy and Practice

R1, 2, 3, 4 & 9 directly informed new key resources in the Scottish Government's national children's participation website *Decision-making: children and young people's participation* (**S10**). Our definition of participation (from **R4**) is re-adopted there and **S1** and **R4** are cited as key resources. Dr Mannion's invited advice in the formation of the government website (**S10**) has ensured new emphasis on intergenerational dialogue and "improved child-adult relations".

R2 impacted the work of the *Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland* (CYPCS) shifting policy towards intergenerational and dialogical approaches:

"This research catalysed a step-change in policy for us, providing evidence to inform how we promoted a distinctively intergenerational approach to rights-based practice. The research, for example, informed the 7 Golden Rules which have been taken up and used widely." (Ms Cathy Begley, Participation and Education Officer, CYPCS) (**S1b**)

CYPCS's *7 Golden Rules of Participation* (in multiple languages, downloaded 2,000 to 3,000 times annually from 2014 onwards, and also available as a hard copy) were derived from **R2**. For example, 'Rule 6' is that adults and children should 'Work together' and participation should not be 'once-off'. Independent evaluation (**S2**) shows the resource is used extensively across Scotland, bringing adults and children into new dialogues advancing participation rights with considerable reach and impact:

[It has] "proven to be a popular method of opening up discussion on children's participation and rights. [...] [and has] been effective in reaching sectors which were previously untouched. [The Rules] have motivated professionals." (**S2**, p 36)

Many stakeholders have used **R2**, **R3** and **R4** as core sources for new resources, toolkits, and training. For example, Scottish Childminders (**S3**), Education Scotland, Care and Learning Alliance, and YouthLink Scotland, have all directly engaged with the new rights-based approach, impacting thousands of professionals annually within and outside of formal education.

Societal & Practice Impacts

In government policy, **R2**, **R3**, and **R4** have helped reposition young people as rights-holders who work in partnership with parents and teachers in evaluation, quality assurance and monitoring of educational provision. **R3** informed a draft Government Bill (**S5b**), *Empowering Schools* which led to a new government initiative (**S5a**), 'Empowering the System', for which Dr Mannion provided consultancy.

R4 is itself a direct policy impact. Here, our team, funded by Education Scotland, authored new children's participation guidance for all professionals in education. We co-designed learning resources, self-evaluation tools, and practice videos published online (**S6**) (with more than 14,000 page views since April 2018). A government evaluation (**S9**, p.42) showed that **R4** has been a key mechanism in progressing child rights through adopting more dialogical approaches.

In the pilot study (**S6**) of the guidance and resources, teachers said it was improving rights-based provision, school-community links, child-adult relations, and outcomes for children:

"Previously, we had just Pupil Council. After introducing the new arenas-based approach, the pupils are now constantly coming with ideas. It's giving the children a say. They are talking and reflecting on what they are learning a lot more". (Head Teacher, St John the Baptist) (**S6b**)

Another teacher noted improvement in engagement in learning:

"Before we introduced the participatory approach across arenas [R4], pupils were somewhat disengaged and lacked motivation. Now, pupils are more enthusiastic showing independent ownership of learning. There is more parental involvement and more mutual respect." (Class teacher, Blackburn Primary) (**S6b**)

R3 and **R4** have reshaped self-evaluation and improvement processes in education. In **S7**, *How Good is OUR School*, Education Scotland drew on **R4** to require involvement of young people in school improvement processes. As a result, education settings are, for the first time, inspected for evidence of 'intergenerational dialogues' across all arenas of school life (fig 1). Visiting 45 schools, HM Inspectorate noted there was "now a much broader range of approaches beyond the pupil council" including intergenerational projects (**S7b** p.12-14). There are now regular training events for teachers using the research (**S3b**).

International Impacts

Through our research, the concept of intergenerational dialogue and advocacy for rights-based monitoring is also spreading in global children's rights policy and practice. In the EU, the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers has identified **R2** and **R5** as highly significant in supporting the step change towards participation as an intergenerational dialogue (**S4c**, section 4.5); the report provides examples of intergenerational meetings and dialogues in Croatia, Greece, the Netherlands, and Malta. The research is cited as informing rights-based approaches in other countries too, such as Ireland (**S4d**).

World Vision, who improve the lives of millions of children across 70+ countries predominantly in the Global South, cite **R6** as key in shaping their strategy (**S4a**), which "encourages intergenerational dialogue and promotes the notion that child and youth participation is everyone's responsibility" (p.21). Evidence shows intergenerational dialogue has prevented hundreds of forced child marriages enabling children to attend school for longer. "Drawing on research by Dr Mannion, we now place intergenerational dialogue as a core value in World Vision. (...) In Niger, where 76% of girls are married before their 18th birthday, children now have rights-based dialogues with significant adults about arranged marriages" (Dr C. LeBorgne, World Vision, **S4b**).

“For World Vision, Dr Mannion's research has been instrumental in implementing a dialogical intergenerational approach. Before, adults sometimes diminished children's activism and input, but through these improved dialogues, child rights are better realised bringing more mutual respect and collaboration between generations.” (Director for Child Rights and Participation, World Vision, **S4b**)

Stirling's impactful research on intergenerational dialogue builds now on a successful feasibility study (**S4e**) in 2019 and follow-on funding in 2020 from the Medical Research Council (Stirling-led, GBP730,000, Dr Mannion as co-investigator). Drawing on R1-6, the intergenerational approach empowers young people to create powerful murals catalysing community-based dialogue, local action, and the reduction of road deaths and injuries. Due to Covid-19, that project is set to commence in 2021 extending the reach of the impacts across Malawi and sub-Saharan Africa.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. a.** *7 Golden Rules of Participation*. <http://www.cypcs.org.uk/education/golden-rules>
b. Testimonial from C Begley, Participation and Education Officer, CYPCS.
- S2.** Duff, C. (2015) *Evaluation of the '7 Golden Rules of Participation'*. This independent evaluation of the resource cites the work of Dr Mannion in steering the work of the office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (see page 26) <http://stir.ac.uk/489>
- S3. a.** *Child-Led Participation Guide*. The advice to practitioners from the Scottish Childminding Association available on-line. Stirling's research is a key source: <http://stir.ac.uk/48c>
b. *Recognising and Realising Children's Rights*. Training ppt, *Education Scotland*. See pp 69-76. <http://stir.ac.uk/48f>
- S4. a.** World Vision's strategy on participation rights: *Children and Young People's Participation*. See p 21. <http://stir.ac.uk/48i>
b. Testimonials from key staff from World Vision: Director for Child Rights and Participation & Dr C. LeBorgne, World Vision.
c. Day, L., Percy-Smith, B., Ruxton, S., McKenna, K., Redgrave, K., Ronicle, J., & Young, T. (2015) *Evaluation of legislation, policy and practice on child participation in the European Union*. Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. (See p.100: <https://op.europa.eu/s/oOvi> and examples throughout from different countries.)
d. Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Rep of Ireland) *Children and Young People's Experiences of Participation*. See pp 17, 44, 45. Available at: <http://stir.ac.uk/48o>
e. Stirling's [feasibility study](#) on arts-based youth participation showing impacts on road safety. <https://saferoadsafrica.com/chitetezo-preventing-young-people-dying-and-being-injured-through-road-traffic-collisions/>
- S5. a.** *Empowered System* – Scottish Government initiative: See under 'Learners': resources listed include outputs from Stirling. Available at <http://stir.ac.uk/48r>
b. *Empowering Schools: a consultation on the provisions of the Education Scotland Bill*. <http://stir.ac.uk/48u> See 'Pupil participation' and reference to "create impactful outcomes for themselves and others as a result of intergenerational dialogue".
- S6. a.** *Developing Learner Participation: Understanding Practice in a Pilot Phase*. See also: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/learner-participation-in-educational-settings-3-18> and R4's linked resources including videos at: <http://stir.ac.uk/48x>
b. Full testimonials from a teacher and a head teacher who have used the R4 research, guidance and materials and explain their impacts on school life and on children.
- S7. a.** *How Good is OUR School* - <http://stir.ac.uk/490> See page 7 for Stirling's research (R4) as source for definition, use of term dialogue throughout, and reference to R4 in 'Resources'.
b. *Education Scotland's Thematic Inspection of Participation*. <http://stir.ac.uk/493> See 'key strengths' and 'key messages' sections.
- S8.** Engagement Event November 2018, *Participation in Decision Making in Educational Settings: beyond learner voice and pupil councils* <http://stir.ac.uk/496>
- S9.** *Progressing the Human Rights of Children in Scotland: A Report 2015-2018*. <http://stir.ac.uk/499> See section 7 'Rights education' and use of R4 in training materials.
- S10.** Scottish Government Website on Children's Participation provides resources on participation for policy makers, service designers, practitioners. <http://stir.ac.uk/41h>