

Co-Productions Ways of Working

Overview description

“Co-production is a way of working that builds on the strengths of families, communities and services, and involves everyone from the beginning as equal partners.

Embedding co-production means we all need to be confident enough to push the boundaries of traditional ways of working. It means developing trust through listening to, working with and valuing each other, taking time to listen, as well as understanding and developing services that work for those who use them”.

Manchester’s SEND Co-Production Charter

Co-production has historical roots in civil rights and social care in the USA. In the UK, use of the term in healthcare and social services has come to indicate a model of service where user consultation facilitates effective delivery.

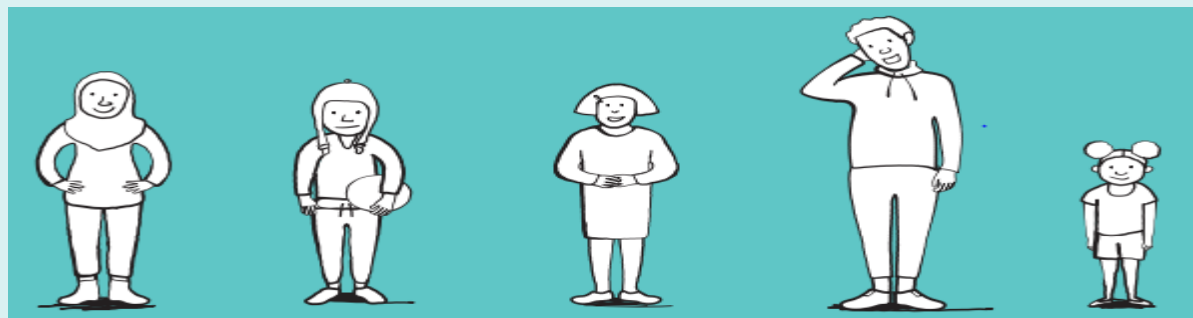
The term co-production in education has been used interchangeably with terms such as ‘pupil voice’ and ‘pupil participation’. However effective co-production in practice is when it becomes the ‘golden thread’ running throughout whole school practice.

Collaborative co-production requires that users are experts in their own circumstances (which families often are) and capable of making decisions. Professionals need to move away from being fixers to being facilitators.

(Morewood, 2019) For example, in primary schools, this involves working with teachers to improve the educational development of their children. (Honigh, Bondarouk and Brandsen, 2020).

Children’s participation is more than just asking them for their ideas and views. It’s about listening to them, taking them seriously and turning their ideas and suggestions into reality. It is also about providing them with the ability to influence some of the things that affect them and at the same time helping adults understand children’s issues through their lens.

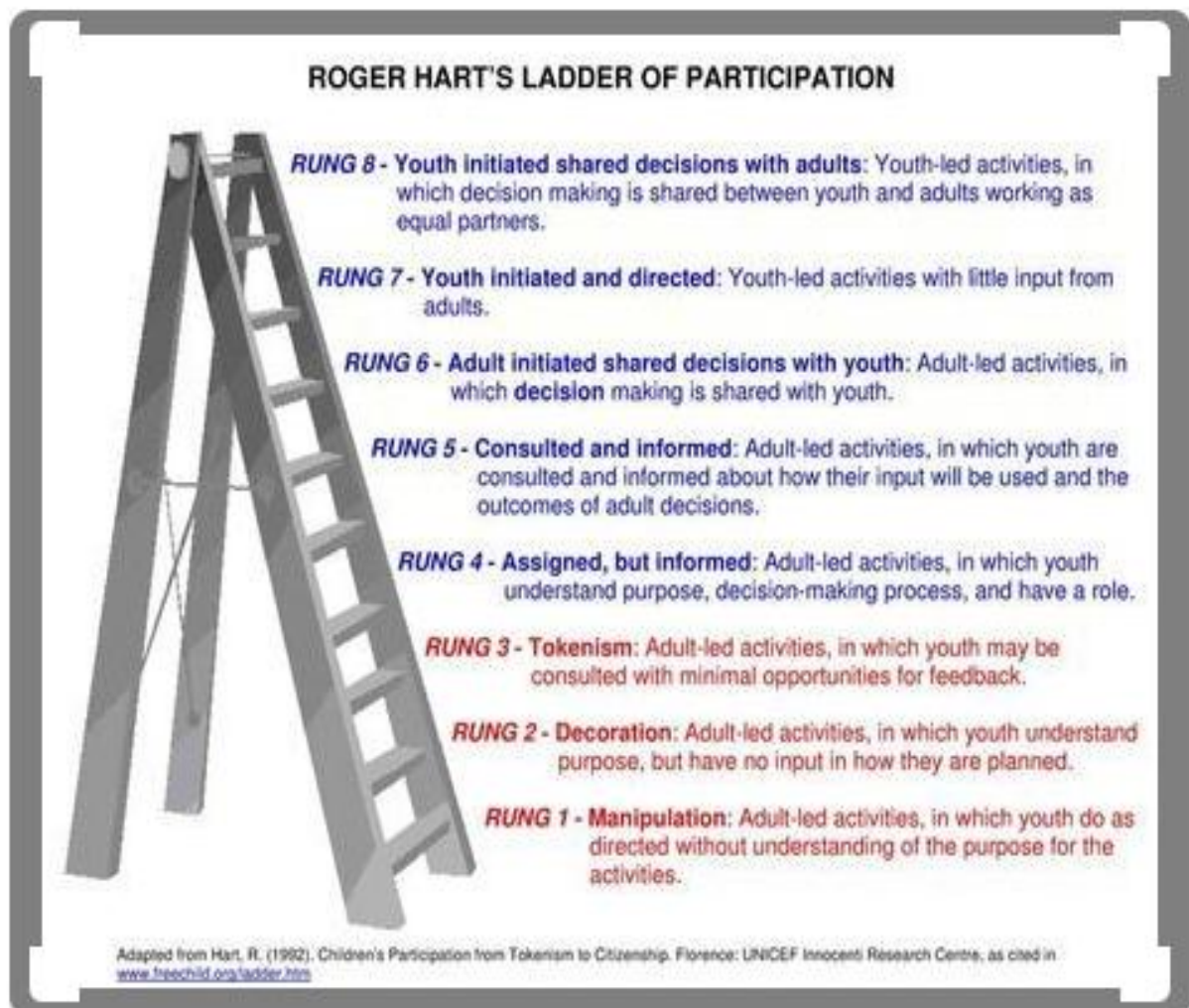
Commissioner for Children Tasmania, 2015



Theory base

Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation

Sociologist, Roger Hart, wrote a book called 'Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care' for UNICEF in 1997. The "Ladder of Children's Participation," also called the "Ladder of Youth Participation," is one of many significant tools from the book. The ladder is a metaphor to depict the degree of participation of children and young people in decision making. The lower three levels (manipulation, decoration and tokenism) describe non-participation; at these levels, children have little to no voice, or are given a voice but have no choice regarding how their voice is communicated. Hart (1992) suggested that adults working with young people commonly mistake these lower levels as meaningful participation. The subsequent upper five rings of the ladder are categorised as degrees of participation; assigned and informed, consulted and informed, adult-initiated with shared decisions, child-initiated, shared decisions with adults.



Co-Production in Manchester

Our Manchester, Our Say Vision

“We want Manchester to be a city where we value our children and young people, listen to what they say, learn from their expertise, and involve them in decisions. We will support them to understand their rights and responsibilities and help them to become active citizens”.



In March 2018, together with Manchester Parent Carer Forum (MPCF) and our Parent Champions, Manchester City Council launched our SEND co-production charter. The development of this came from a discussion with MPCF about how we could embed a model of co-production across all our work and ensure a consistent approach. The development of the charter was in itself an excellent example of partnership working bringing together: representatives from the MPCF, Parent Champions, Health, Education, Social Care and the voluntary sector.

The Charter shares a vision for “brighter futures and better lives” for our children and young people and declares that our best chance of achieving this is through working together. The Charter outlines our shared values and principles and a commitment from us all to ensure this provides the framework for everything we do.

More information can be found here:

[https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/manchester/fsd/files/send_co_production_charter .pdf](https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/manchester/fsd/files/send_co_production_charter.pdf)

<http://manchesterparentcarerforum.org.uk/co-production-in-manchester/>

Co-Production approaches are now enshrined in legislation:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention specifically highlights a child’s right to express an opinion, and it states that adults who are involved in making decisions which influence the life of a child or young person must have regard to their views.

SEND Code of Practice 2014

One of the key principles underpinning the Code of Practice is that Local Authorities must have regard to the views of the child or young person and their parents. The importance of the child or young person participating as fully as possible in decisions about their Education, Health and Care Plan is stressed. Any professional supporting a child or young person must provide the necessary information and support to allow them to participate, and the inclusion of these principles as part of the Children and Families Bill makes them a legal requirement.

Research Evidence – How can Co-Production work successfully?

A number of studies have looked at what makes popular methods for pupil participation, for example, student councils, effective or ineffective. In 2001, Wyse produced case studies of two secondary schools, and found that school councils in these schools sat on the tokenistic rung of Hart's ladder. School councillors did not feel listened to, the issues they raised were not acted on upon and there was no evidence of effective lines of communication with other pupils or school staff. Whitty and Wisby's 2007 study also identified factors associated with ineffective school councils. These included: lack of clear rationale for the school council, not considering whether the school was ready for a school council and not addressing staff reservations regarding pupil voice. They indicated that in order to be effective, pupils may require training about the role of council members. Researchers have raised concerns that if school councils offer pupils purely tokenistic opportunities to share views this can lead to a sceptical view of democracy, and ultimately, do more harm than good (Alderson, 2000; Burnitt & Gunter, 2013).

In order for school councils to be effective, it is useful for them to have a defined role, to work within boundaries which are understood by both pupils and staff and to occupy a distinctive position in the school (Cotmore, 2004). It is also important to consider how best to engage pupils. In the case of younger pupils, traditional 'adult' methods of eliciting views may be inappropriate due to pupils' age and experiences, and may inhibit pupils from giving their views. Cox and Robinson-Pant (2005) found that using visual communication strategies were particularly suitable for primary school children.

Anecdotal and case study evidence has been collected about the impact of the encouragement of pupil participation. Davies et al. (2005) compiled case studies from seven schools across England as part of a project commissioned by two trusts with interests in pupil participation; pupils said they felt the experience of participation projects gave them confidence and increased their self-esteem. They also improved pupils' relationships with teachers and led to improved teaching practices. One school conducted a small piece of in-house research and found a link between pupils' involvement in decision making and academic achievement. Harber and Trafford (1999) found that that move to considering and respecting pupils' views left pupils feeling empowered and valued. They also noted an improvement in exam results and, although unable to confirm causation, felt the increased motivation of the pupils was a likely contributory factor.

Benefits

Benefits of well implemented co-production approaches include building confidence and capacity across pupils, developing a sense of community and independent peer-networks, developing strong communication skills and helping pupils to feel empowered and engaged in learning opportunities. A key issue is how pupil participation and consultation can form the basis of an educational setting's ethos and be embedded in the culture.

Useful links

Research commissioned by the Children's Commissioner to examine children's participation in decision making in England.

[PART_DEMA2.indd \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)



<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/co-production-promoting-resilience-schools/>

<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YoungMentalHealth.section4.pdf>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020852318769143>

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/coproduction-in-mental-health-toolkit>

<https://blog.optimus-education.com/what-co-production-moving-theory-practice>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJDO1rcJbBw>

<https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Guide-to-making-decisions-booklet.pdf>

<https://manchesterparentcarerforum.org.uk/tag/send-co-production-charter/>

Putting Children at the Centre – Save the Children.

Practical guide.

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/putting-children-centre-practical-guide-childrens-participation>

