



"Children's participation in child welfare decision making: Recognising dichotomies, conceptualising critically informed solutions."

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Title: Children's participation in child welfare decision making: Recognising dichotomies, conceptualising critically informed solutions.

Introduction

Within the UNCRC, one of the most frequently cited principles is contained in Article 12. Article 12 affords all children the right to participate in all judicial and administrative proceedings affecting their lives and the right to have these views afforded due weight according to their age and level of maturity. For children known to social services, this includes during the assessment and planning stages of any intervention by the State, as well as in the judicial hearings that affect them (UN General Assembly, 2009). Disappointingly however, in its Concluding Observations to the United Kingdom (UK) on its Fifth Periodic Report, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter called the CRC) expresses the:

...concerned that:

(a) Children's views are not systematically heard in policy-making on issues that affect them; ...and that...

(d) Many children feel that they are not listened to by their social workers, reviewing officers, paid carers, judges, personnel working with children in conflict with the law, or other professionals, in matters affecting them, including in family proceedings. (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016: 6).

In this article, the practical and conceptual difficulties for professionals actualising the participation rights of children and young people in a consistent fashion are explored. Honneth's (1995a & 1995b) model of recognition is offered as a theoretical model

with practical utility, as a means of resolving this dichotomy, ensuring the voice of the child is heard within social work decision making. Whilst Honneth has been used before to situate all children's participation rights generally within a theoretical concept (e.g. Thomas, 2012), this article's unique contribution to the literature is to apply Honneth specifically to children known to social services who face challenges amplified by their involvement with child welfare agencies.

Honneth's conceptual framework.

What is Honneth's recognition theory? In the book *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth (1995) offers a triune framework concerning the construction of human identity. Considered as a multifaceted and systematic theory, it focuses on the importance of social recognition as a condition for the growth of psycho-emotional autonomy and self-realization (Marshall *et al.* 2020). Anchored in the tradition of the Frankfurt school and critical theory, Honneth 'sees recognition as the fundamental, overarching moral category guiding theory-building and politicised praxis aimed at securing social justice' (Houston 2016, 4), arguing that if there is no recognition, we cannot establish a successful relation to ourselves, others and the society in which we live, and the development of personal identity is at risk.

Honneth's (1995) conceptual framework is constructed around three forms of recognition mediated through relationships, (Table 1), (Honneth, 1995, 92–130): namely (i) individual (ii) The State/legal relations and (iii) communities of shared values.

INSERT TABLE 1

With each of these spheres, he associates a special form of recognition.

- In the sphere of close relationships, recognition appears as emotional affection (or love). It is an attitude of acceptance and the experience of being accepted by a person in his or her distinctive singularity. A lack of recognition in this human area of closeness (through abuse, denigration, emotional neglect) threatens the physical as well as the mental integrity of a human being (Altmeyer, 2018).
- Concerning the sphere of legal relations, from its different levels of group rules to a state's legal system, recognition appears as cognitive respect. 'The legal sphere of recognition allows people to be recognised as having "equal status"' (Maia and Vimieiro 2015, 163), which enables the experience of being an equal person among equals. If this concept is disregarded it leads to the exclusion of certain persons or groups from certain rights.
- In the sphere of communities of shared values, from clubs to religious communities or the daily working life, recognition appears as social regard or solidarity. In addition to the conditions of the legal sphere, people do not only aim at being an equal person among equals, but at being special individuals among equals. Recognition cannot only be experienced by having objective rights, but moreover by contributing one's individual talents, achievements, opinions, etc., to the community, which acknowledges them. Deprecating or even insulting individual achievements or opinions of others can be seen as typical forms of misrecognition in this sphere (Altmeyer, 2018; Lepold, 2019).

Background to participation in child welfare

In the UK, there has been a general growth in the participatory narrative at all levels, fuelling unprecedented internal organisational and personal introspection in social

work (Gallagher *et al.*, 2012). This organisational and self-analysis, is motivated by an acknowledgement that professionals working with children in need and at risk have struggled to involve children in a consistent and meaningful manner in some of the decisions affecting them; a criticism recognised in the UK through child abuse Inquiries (e.g. Laming 2003, 2009; Serious Case Reviews (e.g. Haringey Local Safeguarding Board, 2009; Coventry Local Safeguarding Board, 2013), and the Social Work Task Force (Department of Health/Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009) and through the Reviews of Child Protection (Munro, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Brandon *et al.*, 2013).

In these reviews, a shared theme materialised suggesting professionals do not listen effectively to the voice of the child and that this is a possible causative factor in fatally flawed assessments (Winter 2011). Succeeding inquiries (see Winter, (2010) for a detailed review) highlight comparable themes, appearing to support Munro and Brandon's earlier arguments. These reports cite sporadic social work visits to children, lack of personal relationships with children, lack of social work engagement, reliance on parental voice over children's voice, and a failure to prioritise children's views in any meaningful fashion, as recurring themes in child protection. The reports also cite a lack of caseworker engagement with children as being a primary cause of the child not being able to get the help they needed. In not taking time to see, hear, or centre the perspectives of the children, the caseworkers lost sight of their needs and the children became invisible with fatal consequences (Laming, 2003; Munro, 2011). These reports echo findings from Ferguson's (2017) ethnographic study which showed how children can become invisible in child protection work, especially when workers do not have adequate support to purposefully engage with and value direct engagement with children.

One review summed up the lack of involvement thus:

The lack of any prescribed opportunities for [the] child/ren to formally express their views, or actively participate within the assessment or decision-making process', 'or to have any independent access to external processes, represents a direct contradiction to the aspirations of safeguarding and human rights legislation and guidance.

(Birmingham Safeguarding Board, 2010: 8).

Kennan *et al.*, (2016), in a systematic review of the literature on organisational structures to aid participation, also acknowledge that enabling children's participation in the child welfare, child protection and alternative care context can be particularly challenging. In addition, workers across studies report a lack of skills in communicating with children and young people, as well as stress and fatigue from the complex, unpredictable and emotional work of child protection, which directly influences how well they can relate with and be open to building a relationship with a young person (Winter, *et al.* 2019). This point is confirmed in earlier studies by Bell (2011) and Hoy (2013) who examined the experiences of children and young people at formal meetings. Both authors suggest that the children and young people interviewed in their study, felt frightened, anxious, bored, embarrassed and exposed by the open discussion of their lives in organisational and legal meetings.

This has led Balsells *et al.*, (2017) to conclude that the practice reality in the child protection system, leans towards a lack of attention to the voice of children in decision-making. Further evidence exists to support this assumption. For example, Goodyer (2016; 2011) and Mateos *et al.*, (2017) based on interviews with children, adolescents, and youth who have gone through the child protection system, noted

that they were not consulted and were not able to express their views in decisions affecting what measures and changes occur in their lives. Diaz *et al.*, (2019a; 2019b) found similar issues noting significant barriers to children's participation.

These studies confirm earlier results obtained by Montserrat (2014) who found that children entering into the child protection system felt that the experience was traumatic: it occurs suddenly, without them being consulted, and with very little information about where they are going, why they are going, and what is going to occur. Goodyer (2011; 2016) too found that participation was challenging, with children not being able to participate fully in decisions about them. Schofield *et al.*, (2011), and Mateos *et al.*, (2017) also agree that participation practices are not yet fully developed in child protection systems, nor are they in line with legal, policy and practice requirements.

Evidence suggests that the growth in the involvement of children in decision-making has been slower still in respect of children with disabilities (Beresford, 2004; Cavet and Sloper, 2004; Vera & Isabel, 2018). For example, a major survey undertaken by York University in 2003, found that fewer than a quarter (21%) of responding local authorities involved disabled children within decision-making processes; even where this was occurring there was little evidence that participation was fully embedded in everyday practice (Franklin & Sloper, 2005). This has led Cho (2018) to conclude that many disabled children are not adequately involved in decisions and this is particularly true for young people with developmental difficulties.

What gets in the way of applying children's rights in practice?

Within social work, a seemingly incongruous dichotomy exists, i.e. the ostensible ambivalent attitude towards participation rights, despite the research evidence to

support their benefits for children and their positive impact on professional practice. This dichotomy can conceivably be accounted for by the idea advanced by Vis *et al.*, (2012), that professionals continue to have contradictory priorities and attitudes to the actual idea of participation itself. Thus, professionals may not value children's voice, see children as lesser than, not equal to adults, feel children lack capacity to have an opinion and they may lack the desire to share power with them. In this contested narrative, the very impression of participation, generates indistinct philosophic and practical dualities which become translated into practice ambiguity. This may mean that policies for participation are not created, that organisations do not have the practical processes available to encourage participation, that training is not offered to staff, and that participation is viewed as an anathema to good practice. This problematic discourse suggests Sanders & Mace (2006) & Wyness (2006), centres on the very nature and meaning of childhood, which Lee (2001) suggest reflects broader systems of beliefs about children in society that have changed over time.

In the realm of child protection, Barnes (2012) maintains too, that another reason why actualising Article 12 is challenging, is that child protection by its very nature is already multifarious and perplexing work in and of itself. Professionals are charged with the virtually unmanageable undertaking of finding a satisfying equilibrium between competing legal, operational and theoretical imperatives, whilst simultaneously endeavouring to satisfy the demands of an essentially unforgiving public to *get things right*. They are legally bound to act in the best interest of, and to safeguard children and simultaneously listen to the child, liaise with families and other interested parties (Davidson-Arad *et al.*, 2016).

This complexity is characterised by several diverse intrinsic challenges. To begin with, professionals need to determine what is in the best interests of the child in an environment where different stakeholders have their own conflicting interests, rights and needs (Pinkney, 2011). In addition, the UNCRC and Article 12 state that the views of the child should be considered according to age and maturity but gives no guidance as to who assesses the maturity of the child and what criteria to use (Archard & Skivenes, 2009b). Accordingly, children's participation depends not only on age but predominantly on the age at which the adult estimates children are able to actively participate in situations and interpret them correctly (Davis & Artaraz, 2009).

Article 12 also presupposes the adults' readiness to change his or her opinion, attitudes and decisions, according to what is expressed by the child (Bosisio, 2012). This presupposition however relies on the respect and appreciation of the other as a person whose opinions and positions are to be valued and included. All professionals involved therefore - parents, social workers, judges, psychologists, and the police - ought to consider children as able to make choices and involve them in decisions. Regrettably however, realising an actual and undistorted communication about what is right in real life between all actors is problematic (Archard & Skivenes, 2009a). Bessell & Gal (2009) and Bessell (2011) hypothesise that the reason for this difficulty could relate to theoretical and practical difficulties connected to the concept of difference.

The hypothesis regarding 'difference' is theoretically linked to the fact that for some in social work, because children do not fit the traditional liberal theory of rights that assumes independent, rational individuals capable of making choices, that they struggle with children being involved in decision making (Ezer, 2004). Because of

this deficit archetype based on difference, Tisdall *et al.*, (2008) argue that children tend to be granted protection in social work, which excludes them from decisions, deprives them of their autonomy, assumes incompetence and emphasises dependence on adults. Consequently, children have been largely denied the freedoms that are provided to citizens in liberal societies. Additionally, in child protection cases there is often a culture and prevailing ethos that problems are adult-centric, involving children only at the edges (Vis *et al.*, 2011) to protect them from the horrific details of abuse. Solutions to problems are therefore worked out with adults primarily (Winter, 2009).

Participation becomes more problematic when professionals deal with involuntary clients, have limited options and resources and where there is a lack of consensus about what is in the best interest of the child (Gallagher *et al.*, 2012). Often in these cases, decisions are taken without consulting children. Other reported barriers towards children's participation in child protection include social workers feeling insecure about communicating with children (Vis & Thomas, 2009), inadequate levels of training and supervision (Katz, 1997), a pervasive lack of skills (Ruch, 2014), and a ubiquitous privation of confidence and guidance (Alderson *et al.*, 2008).

Additionally, children's participation has largely been a top down development, rather than bottom up (Badham & Davies, 2007) with the resultant formal structures that government have established meeting with much criticism. Commentators such Cairns (2006) write that these structures lead to children acting like mini-adults, for a being dominated by the most resourceful children with agendas set by adults. The outcome of this approach according to Tisdall & Bell (2006) has meant that the participation agenda has met with fluctuating levels of success as it contends with other government agendas.

Furthermore, for children explicitly within the child protection system, inherent challenges regarding the implementation of participation rights arise from the fact that these children's lives are already complex and multi-layered, making participation testing (Donnelly, 2011). To begin with, unlike their contemporaries, children in care have an assortment of powerful, potentially uninvolved adults (judges, social workers, psychologists, teachers, health visitors, police, therapists – to name a few) make decisions without ever having to refer to the child (Cashmore & O'Brien, 2001). Compounding this, children in care may have grown up in poverty, have insecure attachments, poor role models and pre-occupied critical adults. This conceivably places the child at a disadvantage from their contemporaries when it comes to making informed balanced choices (Bell, 2011). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that children receiving social work services, afraid to voice their opinion lest they cede control of their lives to distant professionals, withdraw from decision-making processes and thus remain voiceless (Sanders & Mace, 2006).

In addition to the difficulties facing children, for organisations working with vulnerable children in capricious and oftentimes unpredictable worlds, enormous challenges also exist with regards to children's participation (Krappman, 2010). Governments fuelled by an antagonistic media take the simplistic view that all risks are predictable and therefore manageable. This has resulted in high levels of organisational, professional and personal anxiety, unrealistic expectations, and political concerns about the quality of child protection practice (Howarth, 2010). With the focus on risk management and protection (Author's own) [2], the opportunity for participation diminishes with adults anxious not to make mistakes, taking unilateral and sometimes unrepresentative decisions (Weatherall & Duffy, 2008). There is also a general lack of awareness about the rights of children, preventing organisations and

individuals working in a participatory manner (Kilkelly *et al.*, 2005; Kilkelly and Donnelly, 2011).

Thus, it is possible to see a conflicting imperative dominating current professional discourse related to children's participation; one which views children as active constructors of meaning versus another that views children as objects of change (Lee, 2001). Percy-Smith (2010) distilled this participation discourse into a continuum between child liberating and paternalist approaches, in which the liberator advocates that children decide for themselves, but the paternalist thinks that adults know best. Shemmings (2000), examining this notion added that social worker's attitudes to participation falls into one of two dichotomous attitudinal positions: a rights position expressing almost complete agreement with increased decision-making powers for children, and a rescue position reflecting the contrasting view. Shemmings determined that to resolve the tensions between personal beliefs and official policy, social workers:

may appear to agree with participation in principle by paying lip service to increasing service user involvement in decision-making while actually subscribing to a less empowering model of participation (p. 241).

Sanders & Mace (2006) argue that the complexity involved in resolving this dualism is challenging social work greatly to the point where failure to find consensus has rendered progressing more radical forms of children's participation in child protection:

more challenging than in other areas where significant progress has already been made, both in policy and practice (p. 90).

Nonetheless, despite the challenges faced by social work, it is imperative that the profession finds a way of ensuring that the letter, as well as the spirit of Article 12 is transformed authentically into practice reality.

Can things be done differently? Honneth's Recognition Theory and Children's Participation

In professional social work practice, one conceivable way of fashioning a solution to the undesirable dichotomy between the Convention's aspirations for participation and practice reality is to begin to deliberate more reflexively about the participation rights of children. The remainder of the article will address this, specifically exploring the explicit usefulness of Honneth's theory of recognition as a theoretical framework to help unlock the participatory impasse in child protection social work at an individual, state and societal level.

Honneth's conceptual framework

At the heart of Honneth's recognition theory is the significance of mutuality, transferred through interactions between individuals, between individuals and states and between individuals and communities which affirms relationships between all actors (Smith *et al.*, 2017). Honneth understands the foundation of affirmative relationships in terms of a basic moral claim for recognition of, and being recognised by, others. In this, recognition is essentially a humanistic standpoint with a more active and interactive view about autonomy, inter-dependence, dignity and self-realisation (Taylor, 1995). This worldview aligns itself with a more holistic, reciprocal

and respectful perspective on professional-child relationships, which children that receive social work services value (Turney, 2012). Hence, recognition for children entails being accorded the equivalent dignity and respect that others receive at every level of society. For Honneth, recognition is situated at the:

heart of what justice means today and consequently, a just society would be one where *everyone* gets due recognition (Thompson, 2006, p. 3).

Born out of three modes of recognition - (i) love, or the emotional recognition of the needs for love and care; (ii) the legal recognition of rights as a human being; and (iii) solidarity or social esteem, as part of one's contribution to a community - Honneth recognised that three key factors impact on, and shape individuals' enduring capacity to participate and engage with others. These three factors are:

- the sense of *self-confidence* (correlated to how we were, and are presently, situated within positive relationships),
- *self-respect* and
- *self-esteem* (Taylor, 1992).

Self confidence

Honneth depends deeply on Donald Winnicott's (1896-1971) object relations theory and the belief that the development of children cannot be abstracted from the collaborative connexions with a significant other in which the process of maturation takes place. For Honneth, the connexion between the significant carer and the child is of substantial significance in the development of a healthy child that feels loved, contained and significant. Honneth argues that the period of primary growth is an

age of practised development, in which each party acquires the capacity for the collective experience of emotions and perceptions – ideally emotional approval and reciprocated encouragement. This love relationship argues Honneth:

represents a symbiosis refracted by recognition (1995a: p. 106).

Honneth contends that this interpersonal psychoanalytical viewpoint, is particularly well suited to the purposes of a 'phenomenology of recognition' (Honneth, 1995: p. 98). This observation underscores the idea that an emotionally successful relationship between mother and child can initiate or progress a pattern of subsequent interactions and relationships that facilitate the development of self-confidence (Bainbridge, 2015).

Self-respect

Only when an individual enjoys self-confidence, developed out of a loving relationship Honneth argues, will they be able to then acquire self-respect. Self-respect Honneth argues has more to do with whether one has a good opinion of oneself and one's sense of possessing the 'universal dignity of persons' (Anderson, 1995, p. xiv).

Interrelated with this, being accorded rights is also crucial to developing self-respect (Anderson, 1995, p. xv). By rights, Honneth refers to the respect for persons inferred in contemporary legal relations encapsulating civil, political and social rights.

Honneth's domain of rights, encompasses responsibility for the development of self away from the immediate familial environment of attachment theory, into the need for legal recognition, which is the acquisition of citizenship rights as members of communities. The first step however is that:

subjects reciprocally recognise each other with regard to their status as morally responsible persons (Honneth, 1995, p. 110).

This tends to yield both an extension of the classes of individuals to whom rudimentary rights are extended and an extension of the kinds of rights to which they are entitled: one becomes a bearer of rights if socially recognised. Rights empower the bearer, and both legitimise the demand for mutual respect and enable the development of self-respect. With legal recognition, one can view oneself as a person who shares with all members of a community the qualities that make participation possible.

Self esteem

Honneth's third principle, solidarity, postulates that an ethical life is the basis for mutual esteem and self-realisation. Self-realisation is in turn grounded on the community's acknowledgement of an individual's qualities and accomplishments. According to Houston (2015, 2016), having one's contribution recognised by significant social networks, helps foster a sense of pride and capability, which in turn builds self-esteem and underwrites a sense of social solidarity. Solidarity:

then, is more readily achieved within a group with shared goals; the greater challenge is to extend that solidarity, based on reciprocal recognition of each other's particular worth, to a wider society (Thomas 2012: 457).

Applying Honneth's theory to children's participation at three different spheres of recognition

Recognition theory offers an alternative image of humanity and provides an altered worldview based on reciprocity and the interchange of mutually agreed values that says something about citizenship, involvement and the immersion of peoples in a compassionate community. Using Honneth's general tripartite framework of recognition - outlined in figure 3 (adapted from Douglas, (2017) to incorporate children's participation in social work), it is possible to consider the participation rights of children in social work. In this newly adapted model, we can see spheres of recognition that are inextricably linked to one another at individual, state and societal level.

INSERT Table 2 Honneth's tripartite theory of recognition

- *At the individual level*

Having an emotional bond is an important source of comfort and warmth for children in the child protection system. Social workers are ideally situated at the individual level to provide a close emotional connection with the child that maybe called, to use Honneth's term, love. Such relationships argue Smith *et al.*, (2017) have elements of mutuality; each can learn from the other by listening to what the other has to say as equals. There is an emphasis on setting and on creating spaces in which people can reflect and do things together and this can extend to making decisions in a participatory way. This is framed by going the extra mile for those you care about (Author's own) [1]. For example, one can go the extra mile by ensuring meetings are held in a comfortable, non-intimidating place, that children and young people have an advocate, that meetings are not subjugated by the needs of adults, that children and young people speak first, that any reports are written in an authentically child-

friendly style and that all ways of helping children and young people communicate their views are vigorously pursued.

This of course would involve professionals accepting children and young people as individuals with idiosyncratic opinions that are valid and discretely personal. Lundy (2007) echoes this sentiment when she says that the importance of Article 12 is that the voice of the child is listened to regardless of whether one thinks the opinion is mature or not. This would ensure that children and young people are not seen as '*in need of protection*' but separated out and their world explored from their personal prisms by adults that are wedded to delivering ethically cognisant services based on participation. Even if it is not possible to completely fulfil a child or young person's wishes when they are expressed – which can happen in child protection due to child-welfare concerns – if children and young people feel that their voice has been heard, it can at least avoid problematising or undermining their voice.

- *At state level*

At state level, Honneth can likewise be used to contemplate more innovatively about children's rights. Legal recognition for Honneth meant that children are to be recognised as citizens with all the citizenship rights that others enjoy. For Honneth, this translates into an already taken for granted assumption of mutuality in all matters concerning the child. This helps create a participatory culture that understands participation as an unconditional right and therefore places a legal mandate on social workers to involve children and young people. If staff have worked sincerely to ensure children and young people's voice is heard, they should feel that their voice has been honestly heard and that it was considered in any outcome affecting them.

Children and young people must feel that their voice carries the equivalent weight of all the professionals present at meetings and that their voice is not discounted or disregarded due to their young age. This for social workers in relation to children and young people in the child welfare system, means there is an imperative to refer to them for their opinion and enable participation in decisions based on that opinion about such issues as their care, health, education, placement, and contact plans. Including legal recognition as integral to the child protection ethos of participation at this level, underscores the significance of respectful societal and judicial arrangements from the exercise of care and avoids misrecognition, and what Honneth identifies as the social pathology of *invisibilisation* (Houston & Montgomery, 2017).

- *At civil society – economic level*

At the civil society – economic level, Honneth's model safeguards the democratisation of processes and decisions, where all actors' voices are heard, aligning directly with Article 12. Honneth's model also supports philosophies connected with social justice that is situated more easily in social work's natural lexicon of theories. For example, children and young people at this level should not be in a position where their rights to participation are compromised because our system is overburdened by trying to support children and families without adequate resources. Nor should we disavow calls for more investment in children's services, at a time when neoliberal governments divest children's services of much needed cash. Social change also needs to happen more rapidly and with less resistance to seeing children and young people as those equally able to contribute fully to the social order.

Notions of 'being' and 'becoming' are intrinsic to this praxis (Qvortrup, 2009). Described by Uprichard (2008), the *becoming* child is seen as *an adult in the making*, lacking the competencies of the adult that he or she will *become*. As a result of this deficit archetype based on difference, children tend to be granted protection in social work which excludes them from decisions, deprives them of their autonomy, assumes incompetence and emphasises dependence on adults. Intertwined with this deficit epitome is Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1992) discusses the process of habitual subordination through which children can be excluded from the prevailing and powerful social narrative. As a result of being continually undermined and excluded, children learn to stay quiet and adults learn to give less weight to their opinions if voiced. In child protection decision-making, this cycle has the potential to perpetuate itself until the voice of the child is drowned out.

Collectively then, in social work at the individual level, the child's voice is recognised as significant, legitimate and valid. In turn, this augments the child's sense of self, empowering them to move self-assuredly in and between the other state and social levels whilst having their voice and agency correspondingly legitimated at each sphere. Children, recognised as having value as agentic citizens now have an increased sense of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. This in turn helps them nurture a growing aptitude as rights bearers, encouraging other individuals, the State and society to form a reciprocated relationship in which the child's voice has real authentic currency.

As such then, Honneth's model can confer a more natural theoretical orientation to social work practice, providing theoretical synchronicity, that social workers can exploit to increase participation. Honneth's model is ultimately useful because it affords social workers a way of thinking about the symbiotic relationship between the worker, the

child, the community, the context of child protection and the aspirations of Article 12 in a manner that recognises each voice as legitimate. This ensures that reciprocal recognition is not just reduced to dialogue, but that children have a real influence on decisions and practices that affects them, that their voice is heard and that their voice genuinely affects practice initiatives; all of which matches the conceptual and practical aspirations of Lundy's 2007 model of participation.

Thus, using Honneth's recognition theory, we now begin to view children differently.

We now recognise:

- Children as belonging to the class of morally responsible persons.
- That children are rights bearers.
- That they are entitled to respect.
- That children are recognised as people with talents and capabilities who contribute in a variety of ways to society and culture.
- That children are deserving of esteem.

In this new way of seeing children, recognition would designate an ideal communal relationship between all subjects, in all spheres, in which each sees the other as equal. The utility of the model lies in its capacity to go some way to resolving the dichotomy between practice reality and Convention aspiration vis-a'-vis participation. The model invites us to look at children not only as recipients of care and affection, but also as givers of care and affection, and as rights-bearers and rights-respecters, and as potential, if not actual, members of a community of solidarity based on shared values and reciprocal esteem.

There is also the potential to use Honneth's theory to cultivate embryonic emotional bonds between the professional and the child, which Smith *et al.*, (2017) feels is

missing in relationships in child protection. Warming (2015) feels this is the result of a pervasive discourse in social work of professional intervention and accountability. Once accepted, it becomes possible to analyse children's place in society using the concepts provided by Honneth's recognition theory: to ask when, where and how they achieve reciprocal recognition (i) as love, (ii) as respect and (iii) as esteem (Thomas, 2012). The result is a discursive construction of children as objects for adult care and professional treatment.

Conclusion

This article has added to the discussion of children's participation rights by focusing specifically on the unique participation rights of children known to social services. In the article, I suggest that there exists an incongruous dichotomy within social work related to children's participation in decision making that has contributed to a practical, ethical and theoretical diminution of Article 12. The article has posited some reasons for this dichotomy and offered Honneth's model of recognition as a possible solution to resolving this. I have argued that Honneth's tripartite theory of recognition, offers social workers a humanistic worldview, which can be used to help them think creatively and reflexively about participation. The theory can be used to critique current practice, offering social workers a template to build participatory practices, based on the equal recognition of children's citizenship and agency. In this, Honneth's theory can be used to evaluate how well new participatory practices satisfy the criteria of love, rights and solidarity.

The strength of the theory for social workers is that it proffers a humanistic perception of growth and development, with a more dynamic and collaborative exposition of participation. Such an interpretation lends itself to a more holistic,

reciprocal and respectful perspective on social worker-child relations that positively encourages the participation rights of children going beyond mere dialogue. His theory is one of fairness, mutuality, connectedness, with applicability in a range of decision-making situations. By accepting Honneth's theory of recognition, social work can begin to make progress addressing the practice dichotomy concerning participation aspiration and reality: a dichotomy that continues to bedevil social work. Seen from the child's perspective, the development of these participatory practices may be less patronising, problematic and adult-centric.

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