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Review of Children's Rights 0-8: Promoting Participation in Education and Care by M. Kanyal

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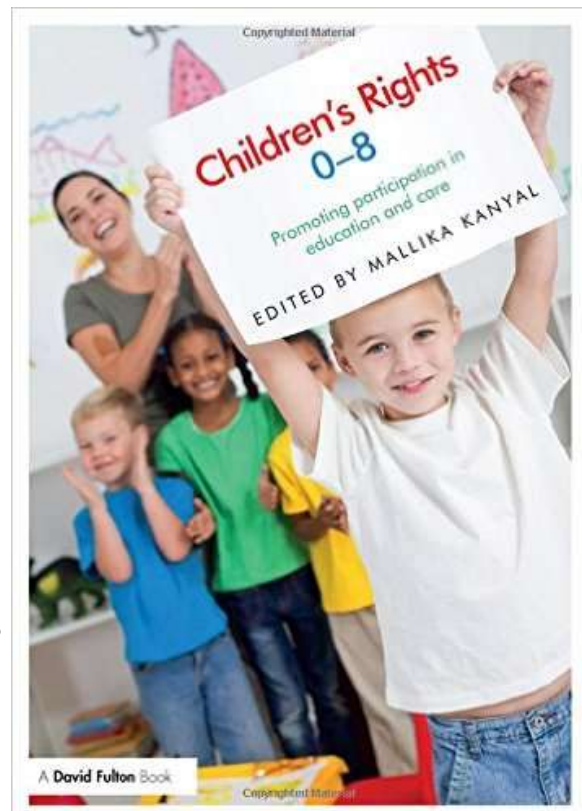
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The book *Children's Rights 0-8* discusses the right to participate in education and decision making for young children. The title itself was somewhat unclear as the book limited the discussion of children's rights to participation and one must only assume that the 0-8 is in reference to the age of children. Though the title itself is unclear, the contents of the book are well developed and can be a useful tool for those who work with young children as caregivers or educators. The theoretical development of child participation makes this a book suitable resource for researchers and scholars.

The author, Kanyal, begins the introduction to the book with a brief description of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) but discusses the scope of the book to be limited to articles 12 and 13. The focus on these two articles develops the purpose of the book, which is to increase the understanding of children's participation in order to create educational and care environments that enable children to make choices.

The introduction concludes with four implications that the UNCRC and the right to



children's participation has on educators and caregivers:

- It presents a challenge to the role of adults and how they think about themselves (Woodhead, 2008).
- It empowers both adults and children, which may challenge traditional roles of adult-domination.
- Children must be viewed simultaneously as competent and vulnerable (Kjørholt, 2005).
- The rights of children must be viewed holistically. The right to participation cannot be viewed as separate from other rights (such as the right to non-discrimination or the right to life) (Bae, 2010).

Kanyal discusses in the introduction, as well in the first part of the book that the view of children and their participation in society is a socially constructed right. Therefore, I would add to the above list that the implications of the UNCRC include a challenge to the social constructs of the society in which the rights are being implemented. Increasing children's participation in education and care will challenge cultures and societies in different ways; producing varying level of challenge. This is discussed further in the second chapter.

The back cover of the book states that the book is an "accessible read for students and practitioners, as well as researchers". The structure and formatting of the book help to fulfill this claim. Each chapter begins with three aims, followed by an introduction. Graphics and/or research data is included whenever necessary to illustrate a concept. The end of each chapter concludes with a summary, "points to consider and questions to ask yourself", references, and definitions of terminology. The structure is consistent throughout. The questions at the end serve to promote further conversation and thought, and can be used by a group of practitioners or by students. The terminology defined at the end of each chapter helps to guide the reader who may be unfamiliar with the field.

The content of the book is divided into three sections. Part I has two chapters, which discuss the background of children's rights and children's participation. The historical overview of children's

rights includes discussion of UNCRC as well as the overlap of rights and humanitarian efforts from a global lens. This section also discusses childhood and child participation from a social and cultural perspective. Part II consists of four chapters and develops the theoretical background of participation and discusses models of participation in both care and early childhood settings. The final section, Part III, discusses research conducted by Kanyal and her colleagues in the participatory approaches.

Part I: Childhood and Children's Rights

The first chapter discusses the history of children's rights. While this paper will not give, in detail, the aims of every chapter, the first chapter should be the foundation of the book and is therefore important to discuss at length. The three aims of this chapter as stated by Kanyal are:

- To outline the history of children's rights, with a focus on the implementation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of The Child and its role in promoting the rights of the child.
- To identify how issues framing children's rights appear to overlap with humanitarian and political concerns about child welfare.
- To consider why recognition of children's participation is important in shaping the present agenda on the rights of the child, and the advancement of children as political selves.

While the aims, as stated by the author, are met thorough the content of the chapter, many sections lack detail, requiring individual readers to have background knowledge prior to reading *Children's Rights 0-8*. Though the book is relatively short in length, the foundations of children's rights should be extensive enough to give practitioners or students, with little previous knowledge, a historical background in order to understand later chapters, which develop theoretical foundations.

Kanyal begins a discussion about how childhood is constructed by society and how each society has a different understanding. This discussion is developed further in the second chapter to include cultural variations in participation as they relate to

children's rights. What is lacking is specific examples to help the reader understand the idea of social constructions of childhood. In the first chapter, Kanyal briefly mentions child labor, citing Wall's (2011) work as to how the West and the developing world hold vastly different approaches to child labor standards. In chapter two, she furthers this discussion using the work of Prout & James (1990) to again briefly mention that universal models of childhood are typically based on rich, Western countries. What is lacking is specific examples to guide the reader and help them to further question the role of childhood in their own society. It should also be noted that childhood definitions do not have to be specific to a region. Perceptions of childhood can vary from home to home and within a community, depending on socioeconomic status and positionality of cultural groups (Qvortrup, 1987).

The background information on the UNCRC is appropriate for the purpose of the book, focusing specific attention on articles 12 and 13 which relate to participation. Prior to reading *Children's Rights 0-8*, the reader should be familiar with the full text of the UNCRC, as the book's scope only covers two of the fifty-four articles. In her discussion of the UNCRC, she talks about the quick acceptance of the convention by many nations and how they made commitments to protect children and ensure that their rights are being granted. It should be noted that as of the time this book was published, only three countries in the world have not ratified the UNCRC. This included the United States, which might shock many readers. Kanyal concludes Chapter 1 with some questions to help guide further reflections and research by the reader. One of these questions asks the reader to compare the rights of the child to the rights of the adult, which may lead the reader to learning more about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is the mother document to the UNCRC.

Chapter 2 focuses on creating a socio-cultural lens with which to view children's rights. One such discussion in this chapter deals with the reality that children are required to be part of the workforce in order to meet family economic needs. This discussion is important as it helps to develop the reader's ability to analyze child rights through a more informed lens. In this example, to say that all children have the right

not to work, is oversimplifying children's rights. Rather, rights need to be viewed through the society they are being granted in. Taking a step back and examining the cultural practices and economic needs of an individual society allows for a more critical view of children's rights. In the case of child labor, as pointed out in the book, the well-being of the child can be the determining factor in the examination of rights violations rather than a strict one-size-fits-all rule regarding child labor.

Part I ends with a brief introduction to the theories of child participation while beautifully connecting the previous discussion of socio-cultural impact. Kanyal reminds the reader that participation in a society is socially constructed and therefore cannot be looked through a universal lens. Kanyal uses Vygotsky's (1986) socio-cultural theory to discuss the hidden curriculum in educational systems and how the social and cultural environment in which a child is being educated in impacts their learning environment. This section provides a transition into Part II of the book which examines the theories and practice of child participation.

Part II: Children's Participation: Theory and Practice

Chapter 3 begins this part of the book with a discussion on participation, the arguments for child participation, and the barriers to implementing participation in education and care context. Kanyal points out that England has incorporated child participation into the legal system in such ways such as making it a legal requirement for local authorities to listen to children, as well as implementing children's participation into the curriculum. Limitations, however, exist in implementing children's right such as misalignment in values between parents, caregivers, and other institutional participants which create. This chapter ends with an illustration of child empowerment and how to safeguard against institutional practices which may stifle children's participation rights.

Chapter 4 discusses the various models of participation. What is unique about the way this chapter is designed, is that it covers both theoretical and practical models. While it is valuable for readers to have the theoretical background needed to

understand child participation, educators and caregivers can also find practical ways of implementing these theories into their context. Kanyal spends the first half of the chapter discussing six theoretical models by giving a brief overview of each and provided illustrations when necessary. The second half of the chapter is dedicated to three practical models of participation (based off the theoretical models). Each of these also are accompanied by illustrations and in some cases, examples from Kanyal's own research. It is the incorporation of the actual research examples that makes this chapter so powerful to practitioners. Kanyal discusses real implementation and gives practical suggestions on how others can make child participation a reality in their context.

Chapter 5 is really an extension of chapter 4, but narrows the focus of child participation to young children and babies who may not yet be able to communicate their ideas verbally. The chapter focuses on five C's (child, curriculum, care, connectedness, and community) drawing on the many ways in which young children can participate in group care setting even if they may not be able to verbally express their options. The authors of this section (Luff and Martin) provide their own case study as an example and discuss the role that parents can play in creating an environment that support participation from babies and toddlers.

The final chapter in Part II (chapter 6) authors Gibbs and Coper discuss the challenges to child participation. This chapter provides a case study and multiple vignettes to illustrate examples of how child participation can look in the early years. What seems to be the emphasis in this chapter is that it is important to identify the preferred voice of the child. While some children may be comfortable expressing themselves verbally, others may use action such as eye contact, physical movement or facial gestures to express their ideas and opinions.

Part III: Children's Participation and Research

The final section of the book consist of one chapter in which Kanyal, Luff, Cooper, and Webster discuss child participation in research. The beginning of the chapter gives a brief history of participatory approaches to research and offers some models that

encourage child participation. While not mentioned in this chapter, many of the models follow the Youth Participatory Action Research Model (Camarota & Fine, 2008).

The ethics of child participation are discussed with careful consideration for the role that adults play. As it is the ideal that children are able to participate in decision-making, particular attention needs to be given to the role of adults in the research. Creating an enabling environment in which children feel safe to express themselves (either verbally or non-verbally) is key to helping the child become less dependent on adult advocacy. Coupled with the discussion of ethics is how to gain consent from children. The authors give many ideas on how consent can be particularly obtained (especially from young children) through examples of their own research.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to types of research in which children can become active participants. These include drawing pictures, interviews, questionnaires, visual and aural technology, and observation. In each case, a practical example is given with supporting documentation of the authors' own research projects. This chapter is particularly powerful for those who are in education and care giving context as it shows real examples of how children can participate in both research and change making.

Overall, this book was a fantastic read. What is most powerful is the diversity of the audience, which may benefit from the book. Kanyal and her co-authors have created a book that is grounded in theory, while still being a very practical tool for practitioners in the educational and care-giving settings. It is important for all to understand the theories or the reasons why we do what we do, but not to get so lost in theory that we are unable to implement these parties in a real setting. The fact that this book provides examples from the authors' own research makes this book a useful tool for those wishing to implement these ideas. For the length of the book, Kanyal and her team have created very detailed examples that would be easily transferred into the reader's own environment.

I would encourage all who are working with young children to read this book, as it is a great tool to help practitioners ensure the rights of children are being met.

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