

Book Reviews

E. Kay, M. Tisdall, Addressa M. Gadda and Udi Mandel Butler (2014), *Children and Young People's Participation and its Transformative Potential: Learning from Across Countries*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, £68.00, pp. 236, hbk.

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There are two things that really attracted my attention to this book; they were the phrases 'transformative potential' and 'learning from across countries'. Many studies on children and young people's participation have claimed that it is empowering, while others have doubted this empowerment. Therefore, the book's reference to transformative potential was eye-catching and uplifting for me. I also liked the idea that the book presents, i.e. we can learn lessons about children's participation in other countries. The book's 12 chapters present studies predominantly from the Global South (Brazil, India, South Africa) and the UK, and the case studies were written by academics and practitioners.

The book focuses on children's right to be heard collectively as a group with an emphasis on the impact of such participation. The case studies range from participation at community level, municipal and state level, to the national level. This is the strongest highlight of the book as it enables the reader to see participation across different societal levels, and more importantly to determine the impact of such participation, referred to in the book as 'transformative participation'. According to the authors the transformative potential of children's participation can be achieved at (1) an individual level for children, young people and/or adults; (2) political and institutional structures; and (3) in attitudes, values and cultural practices.

Tracing the history of participation in social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the authors argue that 'participation was intertwined with transformation' (p.22). Thus participation was expected to lead to transformation of social relations and practices that caused social exclusion. With this principle underpinning the book, the authors argue that if participation enables those with power to maintain the status quo then the transformative objective of participation is defeated. The authors engaged in a critical discussion of what it means to be 'transformative' and caution against the myth of a simple and automatic linear process between 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'transformation'. However, I found the discussion somewhat conflated, especially when 'empowerment' was described as 'transformative participation'. Whereas the authors note a close connection between 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'transformation', they did not discuss the nature of such a connection. They also did not discuss what they meant by 'empowerment', thereby falling into the myth that everyone understands empowerment. To their credit, they acknowledged that defining empowerment was challenging since there are many definitions of it (p.28). Nonetheless, it would have been useful to discuss which definition(s) they had adopted.

Most evaluations of children's participation tend to be immediately after or during the project, but this book presents some case studies that have sought to evaluate the long-term impact of participation. Chapter 7 presents an example of the transformative impact of participation with interviews of 3 former participants of a children's rights programme in India. What I liked about this case study is that it is an impact evaluation that was undertaken

5 years after the children had participated in the programme, and it aimed to assess the long-term changes in the participants' lives. The young people reported that their participation had transformed their lives. Chapter 9 also presents a case study whereby the transformation was at the societal level. In this case the children used radio to question adults on issues that the children would not have ordinarily questioned adults about. Over time the children observed a change in adults' attitudes towards them i.e. adults began to seek the views of children whereas previously this was not done.

The book is very thought-provoking and it encourages readers to decolonise the participation of children and young people. Children have been colonised to listen quietly without an utterance. In decolonising children and young people's participation the authors urge adults to 'be quiet, to step back and listen' (p.52). They termed this 'the reflexivity of learning', i.e. unlearning speaking and learning to be quiet. I was struck to note the activities of street children, child soldiers, children's membership of peer groups and gangs could be seen as forms of participation. While the authors do not argue that the activities of child soldiers or gangs are good, they make the point that adults dream up what is considered necessary or appropriate for children. They argue that 'extreme' examples such as child soldiers or gang membership are not being given attention as compared to activities of children in schools, community projects, youth clubs etc. I couldn't agree more with the authors; children and young people's participation in such 'extreme' activities are often studied from the perspectives of criminal justice. In decolonising children and young people's participation, the authors call for attention to such activities.

In as much as the book presents examples of transformative participation, the authors are mindful that such transformative shifts may not endure throughout time and changing context. They note that the number one challenge facing children and young people's participation is how to make it meaningful, effective and sustainable; a responsibility that rests on adults – since adults play a critical role of either assisting or blocking children and young people's participation. It is a good read for academics and practitioners interested in involving children and young people's participation. The book discusses both the successes and challenges encountered in implementing the case studies.

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Harris Beider (2015), *White Working Class Voices – Multi-Culturalism, Community Building and Change*, Bristol: Policy Press, £24.99, pp. 208, pbk.
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This is a very timely addition in the contemporary debate relating to the intersectionality of social class, ethnicity, nation, society and citizenship. Harris Beider looks and listens to the white working class in the United Kingdom from a particular and welcome perspective, an academic but also a very experienced community development worker. Both of those perspectives run clearly throughout the book, a close academic critique of how class and ethnicity intersect within local communities; but Beider also widens the critique out of a global perspective of class and 'whiteness'.

Over the last thirty years the white working class in the UK and in the US appear to have become a research focus in their own right, represented as mysterious, frightening, and even valiant, all through the lens of the academic researcher. I have read hundreds of these studies and