Is anyone listening?

The impact of children's participation on policy making

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This thesis is submitted in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped me to complete this thesis and I am indebted to them all. Special thanks to my supervisors Dr. Sally Holland and Professor Mark Drakeford for their support, encouragement, critical feedback, helpful discussions, inspiration and patience. Each has contributed something unique to this thesis and helped me articulate my ideas and thoughts more clearly at every stage of the research. Thanks too to Dr. Emma Renold for all her constructive comments and to Professor Andy Pithouse for putting the idea of doing a PhD into my head and making me believe I could do it. A big thank you too to all my fellow doctoral students at Cardiff University whose emotional and intellectual support along with their humour and a healthy contempt for academic egos, saw me through the days of doubt.

Thanks also to my family and friends especially John who did so well in putting up with handling a distracted wife and supported me with patience and kindness through each stage of my research but especially during the long writing days, bringing me copious amounts of tea and sustenance just when I needed it.

Finally I wish to thank all the children, young people and adults who participated in the research and generously gave their time in interviews and focus groups. It was an honour and a privilege to share in their lives.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of children and young people's participation on policy making in four settings, a youth forum and school council in Wales, UK and two examples of established participation structures in the international development context. The drive to include children as 'policy actors', as a legitimate group in the policy making process, has led in Wales, and in much of the UK, to the burgeoning of youth forums and school councils. But evidence of the impact of children's public participation remains difficult to capture and little previous work has been done to evaluate the influence of children's forums on the design, delivery and evaluation of public services.

This thesis draws on theories of governance and power as well as the social construction of childhood to examine the policy influence that each of the forums had from the perspectives of the key stakeholders involved. The research makes a contribution to understanding the factors that enable or inhibit children's 'voice' being turned into policy 'influence'. Children's forums are more likely to affect changes in public services where there is clarity about objectives; where efforts are focused on well-understood policy or practice opportunities; and where there is close integration between child participation structures and similar structures targeting other civil society groups at a local level. The importance of policy networks and the linking of the children's resources with other influencing factors emphasises the important role of supporting adults in reflexively navigating the tensions in children's public participation.

The thesis calls into question whether anyone is really listening to children's views and opinions in the new governance spaces of a devolved Wales and argues that more needs to be done to insist on change and support children's claims to express their views and to have those views taken into account, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the study

The subject of this thesis is the participation of children in the governance of public services. The definition of 'children' includes those up to the age of 18 years. In recent years both internationally and within the UK there has been unprecedented attention given to engaging children in decision making around the design, provision and evaluation of public services that impact on children's lives. The growth of children's participation in the UK can be traced through a number of developments including pressure from young people's user groups (in particular young people in care) and the rise in the idea of the 'consumer citizen' in government policy over the last 20 years (Cockburn, 2010). However, despite attention from academics, policy-makers and practitioners and considerable investment by governments, the question of 'what difference does it make?' has received surprisingly little scrutiny.

The effect or impact of children's participation on the quality or effectiveness of public services is a particularly neglected area. This seems partly because participation in decision-making that affects one's life is taken for granted in western democracies as a civil right and certainly a 'good thing' and partly because there are methodological challenges in assessing the outcomes of something as ill-defined as 'participation' (Burton, 2009). As will be explored within this thesis, the term 'participation' is understood differently by different people in different contexts. Understandings range from a literal definition of participation as 'taking part' (with all the limitations implied) to the notion that participation is a concept that leads directly to self-determination and autonomy.

The notion that participation is a 'good thing' which is nevertheless difficult to measure, is relevant to the study and performance of all 'citizen engagement' but a further factor giving rise to the lack of attention given to the impact of children's participation on public services is suggested by the sociology of childhood. The work of Jenks (2005), Mayall (2000) James and Prout (1997) has highlighted the influence

of how children are perceived and conceptualised. If children are seen as 'little-people-in-the-making' who need opportunities to practice participation in order to become good future citizens then the processes of children's involvement and the impact on the participants as young adults is of more interest than the impact of the children's engagement on public services. If, however, children are viewed as social actors with their own perspectives and abilities to influence decision making as children, and as rights holders who can call to account those who have a corresponding duty to fulfill that right, then the impact on the actual decisions being made about public services is seen as more important (Qvortrup, 2003).

1.2 My interest in the topic

My own interest in studying this topic stems from many years working as both a practitioner and a policy manager to support and promote children's participation in public decision-making within the context of new, devolved governance arrangements in Wales. Following a referendum on establishing a devolved parliament or assembly in Wales, the National Assembly for Wales was established in 1999. Devolution in Wales was part of a much broader 'new governance' agenda that dominated contemporary British politics in the 1990s. New governance challenged the tradition of a unitary, centralised monolithic state and embraced a more 'deliberative democracy' (Cohen, 1997: 12). Pluralist perspectives emphasised the inclusion of a whole range of diverse interests as the most appropriate means of delivering services (Newman, 2001). Inclusive policy-making is defined in the seminal policy document *Modernising Government* as:

> ensuring that policy makers take as full account as possible of the impact the policy will have on different groups – families, businesses, ethnic minorities, older people, the disabled, women – who are affected by the policy… (Cabinet Office, 1999: Paragraph 1981, unpaginated).

The early days of devolution in Wales suggested exciting possibilities of a government that was closer to the people and citizen centred (Hodgson, 2004). The first Welsh Assembly Government made it clear that their commitment to citizen-

centred government included Wales' youngest citizens. In its first strategic plan for Wales (WAG, 2000), *Better Wales*, it stated:

> Every young person in Wales has the right to be consulted, to participate in decision making, to be heard on all matters that concern them or have an impact on their lives. (2000: 6)

Successive Welsh Governments followed this through investing a relatively generous proportion of resources in establishing and maintaining both local (i.e. school and municipality based) and national structures and mechanisms to facilitate children and young people's participation in decision-making on public services or what Tisdall (2008:421) refers to as 'public or collective decision-making'.

Having been part of that process for over ten years, I was keen to understand what had been the impact of these changes – I could see plenty of 'deliberative' activity but what difference had it made to public services? Had anyone been listening to children's views and opinions and taken them into account? I was working as a policy and research officer for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and as part of a children's policy network that sought to influence government policy and establish structures within the new institutions to ensure the privileging of children's interests and their rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). I was interested in how government policy came to be shaped and influenced and the role of those working on the inside – civil servants and politicians and those working on the outside – NGOs, campaign groups, businesses and civil society including children themselves.

Combining these personal interests led me to approach my inquiry into the impact of children's participation on public services by looking more broadly at theories and empirical work that seeks to explain relationships between the individuals, communities and the state. As my studies progressed I realised that there was relatively little previous research into children's participation in public decision-making that drew on political science theories of governance and citizenship as well as childhood studies to explore the processes and outcomes of children's

participation. Even though it seemed there was a lot to learn, cross-fertilisation across disciplines was in its infancy (Tisdall and Davis, 2004).

Another factor influencing my choice of research questions and the design of my study was an exposure to children's participation in the international development context. I had visited and engaged in children's participation in a number of developing countries including India and Cuba and witnessed examples of some of the more radical initiatives in child participation that Lansdown claims exist in the 'developing world' (2006:153). This is interesting, not least because of the relative absence of the state as provider and protector in children's lives in these contexts. Like Lansdown (2006), I surmised that there was considerable benefit in looking to some of these international developments to build a greater understanding of what is possible at home here in Wales and to gain insights into how processes and outcomes may be linked.

1.3 Research design

These perspectives guided my choices of where and how to undertake my research. My central research focus was on identifying and assessing the impact of children's participation in decision-making about public services with a view to testing out whether the new models of governance operating in Wales since 1999 have created spaces that encompass children as 'active participants' in public decision-making (Tisdall and Bell, 2006). I was interested in selecting case studies in Wales and internationally that operated at different levels of governance including: at a very local community level; at a higher, local government level; and at a high level of governance within an organisation.

Two case studies in Wales were selected as fieldwork sites. One, 'Lamberton', is a well established local authority youth forum supporting the participation of 11-25 year olds in local government decision-making. Over 100 young people are members of the forum which meets bi-monthly in the local authority council chamber. Sub-groups meet more regularly to do the influencing work and report

back to the whole forum. Some of the young people in the youth forum represent other forums, for example, school councils, youth clubs, community regeneration youth partnerships and specialist interest groups (e.g. disabled children, looked after children). The issues the youth forum chose to work on during the research included the accessibility of careers advice and the allocation of the Educational Maintenance Allowance or EMA. EMA is an allowance available to children from low-income households in Wales who stay on at school after their 16th birthday.

The second Welsh forum was 'Marlings', a newly established school council in a primary school supporting the participation of four to 11 year olds in the governance of the school. In this school council each year group in the school annually elects two members (a boy and a girl) to represent their interests. The school council meets at least once a term and during the research worked on a Healthy Eating campaign, toys and equipment for the playground and fundraising for the Haiti earthquake.

Two additional case studies were selected as examples of initiatives that supported children's participation in public decision-making in an international development context. One of these, 'ASHA', is located in south India and comprised a programme of 13 children's parliaments based in a number of poor rural villages in Tamil Nadu supported by a local NGO. The villages are occupied by Dalits – the lowest caste in Indian society. All children aged between eight and 18 in the village are members of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliament or NCP. The children elect, from amongst themselves, a number of 'ministers' including a prime minister. Other ministerial portfolios in the children's parliaments reflect those in adult parliamentary institutions which broadly follow the British constitutional model. The ministers receive training on child rights and their role and function. The NCPs meet weekly and are supported by older young people who also run a supplementary education programme (SEP). The issues worked on by these NCPs during my research included the replacing of an approach road; the quality of teaching in school; and the neutralisation of an insect nest.

The second international case study, 'CHiP' is a children's advisory body set up by a international non-governmental organisation (INGO) to advise it on its programme of work and the delivery of its services and to hold the senior managers and trustees of the organisation 'to account'. The advisory group has 12 members comprising two young people from each of the six 'regions' of the world that the NGO works in (South America, Africa, China, Bangladesh, UK and the Middle East). The advisory group meets annually in London and works intermittently through email and telephone conferences during the year. The issues worked on by the group during my research included: an accountability charter; and establishing mechanisms to ensure that decisions taken by the board of trustees and the senior management team are informed by the views of child beneficiaries.

Once data collection had commenced it became clear that the CHiP case was more of a hybrid of a UK-based and international example. The meetings took place in London and the people the children's advisory group were trying to influence were all UK-based managers and trustees. Over a third of its membership was drawn from the UK with the remaining eight members flown in from the regions of the world where the INGO works. My rationale for these choices (discussed in more detail in chapter four) was that by exploring the impacts of what were deemed, fairly typical examples of children's participation (within their own contexts) outside as well as within Wales, I would have opportunity to compare and contrast different approaches leading to richer understandings of the processes involved and how these processes might link to policy outcomes.

The study examined the influence that a range of children's deliberative forums – all established by adults - have over public services, exploring both the outcomes of their deliberations and the processes involved. Participation was located, for the purposes of this study, within a wider theoretical framework of governance perspectives which recognise and support partnerships and policy networks, encouraging greater civic participation. The question my research sought to address was: how does children's participation (through deliberative forums established for that purpose) impact on the governance of public services? Inevitably a study of

participation in decision-making also has to be informed by theoretical perspectives on power and I drew on a range of theorists who have applied late postmodern ideas about governmentality to community engagement and the dual conceptualization of participation as a means of empowerment and of social control (see for example, Taylor, 2007).

A study with 'objective overtones' (Bryman, 2004: 21) was my original aim but the methodological challenges of firstly measuring outcomes and, secondly, attributing these to processes (especially when it involved an independent variable as difficult to operationalise as 'participation') required some re-conceptualisation. My headline research question was subsequently broken down to a series of sub-questions which might better explore the varying perspectives of the main stakeholders and particularly the child participants and support workers in each of the four case studies. These are:

- What changes in public services have occurred as a result of children's participation in policy making and service development?

- How do children/support workers/managers/policy makers understand how children's views influence the design, implementation and evaluation of public services?

- What can be seen as enabling or inhibiting children's influence upon public decision-making?

1.3.1 *Methods*

Addressing these questions required an in-depth qualitative approach and I employed a longitudinal multiple case study design utilising observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and some documentary analysis. Fieldwork in three of the four case study sites was conducted over 14 months. In these three case studies data were collected at a point when the deliberative forums were

selecting issues to work on i.e. the 'before' dimension and approximately 12 months later when I returned at the end of the forum's annual cycle (e.g. at the end of the school year in Marlings) to explore what the children had achieved in terms of influence, i.e. the 'after' dimension. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with the participating children; the support workers; senior managers and governors, i.e. Elected Members (Lamberton), the Chair of the school governors (Marlings), Directors (CHiP), before and after the influencing activity. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a range of 'policy-makers' who were the subject of the children's influencing activities and relevant policy and administrative documents were examined to explore organisational accounts of the purposes, activities and achievements of the four forums.

The interviews and focus groups were designed to help the researcher gain an understanding of the nature and quality of participation by children in the four deliberative forums. They also aimed to identify the impacts of the children's participation according to the stakeholders involved and to explore how evidence in support of such claims could best be captured.

For practical reasons I was only able to visit India on one occasion, so with the ASHA case study I spent three continuous weeks in the field collecting data. To some extent, this resulted in a stronger reliance on the recollections of my research participants than in my other case studies but this was bolstered by the assiduous contemporary records of the activities and achievements of the forums, made available to me by the supporting NGO. It will be seen that the more concentrated immersion in the field over a continuous, intense three week period in such an unfamiliar environment delivered new insights into the processes of children's participation in the south Indian context.

Data were analysed using a framework that categorised different types of impacts across three broad dimensions of change and a complementary socio-legal conceptual framework that enabled exploration of the steps involved in turning children's 'voice' to 'influence' with reference to the UNCRC (Lundy, 2007). My

ontological and epistemological perspectives are outlined in chapter four, where it will be seen that a critical realist approach was adopted as fitting with the emancipatory possibilities I wanted my research to reflect. Thus, while I recognised that knowledge is a construction shaped by social actors in context, I was also concerned to explore aspects of the institutional context and the mechanisms that shaped knowledge construction in each of my case studies (Delanty, 2005).

1.3.2 *Definitions*

Participation in decision-making is not an easy concept to define or measure. There are a wide range of decisions that affect children and young people in their family, in their schools, in other service providers and at government level. This research is concerned with the impact of children and young people's participation on 'public decisions' made by public service agencies about policy and service provision (as described by Kirby with Bryson, 2002:11). A variety of methods have been used by public service organisations to involve children and young people in decision-making on policies and services and the quality of the participation process is perceived as variable (Lansdown, 2006). To consider the policy outcomes of participation it was essential to understand the process by which any impacts were seen to have been achieved.

The multiple and sometimes competing definitions of participation are explored further within the thesis but broadly the concept adopted in this study is that articulated in Article 12 of the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child and expanded upon in the Committee's General Comment (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009) as it applies to children collectively participating in the governance of public services. This incorporates the right of children to be heard, to be listened to and for their views to given due weight in all matters affecting them.

The right to be heard applies to every child who is capable of forming her or his own views without discrimination on any grounds such as age, race, gender, disability, socio-economic circumstances or any other status. The General Comment makes it

clear that State Parties are required to make particular efforts to enable children with fewer opportunities (including those who are vulnerable) to be heard.

Children are entitled to express their view freely and space and time for this must be created by the relevant duty bearers be they governments, parents or schools. Children are entitled to express their views on 'all matters that affect them': matters that affect them as individuals (such as medical treatment or a court order on custody) and matters that affect them more collectively as children (such as education policy, transport, budget expenditure, urban planning, and poverty reduction). The General Comment expands on the matters children should be enabled to participate in, to include: the family, the school, in healthcare, in civil court proceedings, in juvenile justice systems, in child protection proceedings, in local communities and in local and national government policy making (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

In line with the focus on a socio-legal definition of children's participation as the child's right to be heard, the operational definition of children in this study is the definition of a child in the UNCRC i.e. aged 17 and under.

The term 'public' decision-making is used in this thesis to describe policy-making and decision-making concerned with the design, delivery and evaluation of public services. This 'public' decision-making is distinguishable from participation in individualized decision-making (i.e. about one's life and choices) and involves children usually as collective groups, participating in and influencing the design, delivery and evaluation of the public services that affect them. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child demands that children are enabled to express their views freely *in all matters affecting the child* (my emphasis). As the United Nations General Comment on Article 12 and children's right to be heard makes clear, all matters, includes the more 'public' matters of the type and quality of the schools that children attend, the social services and health care they receive, the parks they play in and the youth clubs they attend , as well as those matters that are decided upon in the 'private' sphere of the family. Children,

as a number of commentators have argued, are subject to intense state and public interventions and are more dependent on public services and institutions than many other groups and have for too long been officially excluded from the relevant policy making processes (Tisdall and Bell, 2006).

1.4 Contribution

The study provides a detailed examination of how children's participation in quasi-formal deliberative forums operates and influence public policy making. The thesis attempts to add knowledge in two areas: how children's participation through such structures might impact on the governance of public services and secondly, what factors might work to enable or inhibit whether and how such influence occurs. The findings have important policy implications especially in Wales where in May 2012, the Welsh Government will commence legislation that places a duty on them, to pay 'due regard' to the UNCRC and thereby to children's views and opinions.

The need for a means of capturing the evidence for children's views having influence on public services is getting more urgent. Concerns have been raised from adults and children alike that children's participation in the public decision making can be seen as tokenistic, a tick box exercise that fails to deliver any substantive change (Sinclair, 2004). Understandably, this perception can 'turn off' many would-be participants who arguably have better things to do with their time. The debates about children's participation now stretch beyond the mere recognition that children should participate, to demand that participation results (and perhaps as importantly – to be seen to result) in 'political' change (Tisdall and Bell, 2006)

Promising lines of inquiry for future research are identified, for example to explore the influence that children have over public decision-making in other forums in different settings and to test out new and worthwhile hypotheses about what helps or hinders that process.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is in two sections. The first section reviews previous scholarship on the subject of children's participation and understandings of new governance and citizen engagement more broadly; discusses theoretical perspectives and provides a detailed report and reflection on the methodology employed. The second section of the thesis presents the empirical data and discusses the implications of the findings.

Section one

Chapter two sets children's participation in public decision-making within the wider context of participatory governance and citizenship in the UK. The chapter reviews theories of governance and policy making and explores tensions between consumerist and democratic approaches in service user involvement and the tensions between social control and empowerment aspects of 'public' participation. It considers some more optimistic understandings of the nature of power, theories on policy change and the concept of policy networks and concludes with a summary of the key ideas that informed my research into the impact of children's 'public' participation.

Chapter three locates the study in the context of devolution in Wales and explores the theoretical and empirical literature relating more specifically to children's participation. Theories relating to childhood, children's rights and children's citizenship are explored and the influence of the different social constructions of childhood and how they influence the impacts of children's participation are examined. Attention is focused on the key role of supporting adults and their capacity to 'navigate the tensions' inherent in children's 'public' participation. Previous scholarship is reviewed to clarify key concepts and to identify useful methodological approaches and analytic frameworks. The objective of this chapter and the previous one is to critically explore the theoretical perspectives that

impinge on the research topic and review previous empirical work which can inform the research design and choice of methods.

Chapter four outlines the research methodology, the justification for the approach used, and the limitations of the research design. The methodological approach adopted is then set out. The factors influencing the selection of the four case studies are outlined along with the qualitative data collection methods employed and the approach taken to the data analysis. Ethical considerations and the strategies adopted to enhance validity are discussed. The chapter includes a more detailed description of each of the four case studies.

Section two

Chapters five to eight present the findings of the research. Chapter five explores: the ways in which the different children's forums included in the study operated and the influencing activities they were engaged in over the study period. This chapter also examines the stated purposes of the forums and explores relationships between institutional motivations and participation processes and outcomes.

Chapter six examines the impact of the children's participation from the perspectives of key actors. The children's 'change objectives' or the things they wanted to change are then contrasted with the changes in public services or polices that were seen to result. The analysis in this chapter explores the impact of the children's participation on policies and services and links between these and institutional motivations for establishing and sustaining the forums. Chapter seven explores in more depth the processes involved and considers how children's 'voice' was turned into influence in each of the case studies and the factors that the data suggest, worked as 'enablers' and 'inhibitors' .

Chapter eight draws together the analysis and re-interrogates the data to explore (with reference to the cognate theoretical perspectives identified in chapters two and three) the tensions that those engaged in 'public' participation had to navigate

and the potential that this opens up for emancipation and progression. Chapter eight provides a platform from which to discuss in the final chapter (nine), the implications for policy and practice and further research and to consider the theoretical and methodological insights gained from the study.

Chapter 2: New Governance and Public Participation

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to set the concept and practice of children's participation in public policy within the wider context of participatory governance in Wales and the UK, charting the shift from government to governance in an increasingly complex and fragmented world. Children have rarely featured in political scientists' analyses of 'participation' and children and childhood have typically been left out of the more 'mainstream' political theories (Hinton, 2008). Arnott (2008) suggests that children's concerns, like those of women are seen as being in the private sphere rather than in the public domain and therefore not up for discussion in public policy discourses. However, as Arnott (2008) and Tisdall and Davis (2004) note, there is much to be learned from examining children's participation using theoretical perspectives concerned with the broader relationship between the state and its citizens. Many of the tensions that exist in the field of children's participation are tensions that relate more broadly to participatory governance, that is participation by adult citizens, in the design and administration of public policy (Shier, 2010).

The intention in this chapter is to set my research in the broader context of citizenship engagement in Wales and the UK and to explore what the wider discourse on governance and citizenship participation can contribute to an understanding of the processes and outcomes of children's participation in public decision-making. Chapter three explores perspectives relating more specifically to the concept of children as 'policy actors' that is, as a legitimate group in the policy-making process (Arnott, 2008).

The literature review in this chapter and the next will serve a number of purposes. Firstly it positions the research within a theoretical framework searching out the *'*conscious and unconscious assumptions of scholarly enterprise', exploring how these assumptions have forced the definition of problems and findings regarding

the impact of children's participation (McCracken, 1988: 31). Secondly, the literature review provides an opportunity to critically review conceptual approaches to understanding and capturing the varied impacts of participatory activity. Thirdly in line with the purpose of this study, the review will help ensure that the findings of this investigation build on previous research and debates regarding public participation in a manner that will hopefully benefit both the research participants and other children and young people.

Thus the literature review will incorporate previous research on this topic and the governance and policy context but also theoretical considerations relating to the position of children in British society and how concepts of impact and evidence are understood across relevant public services. The increasing demands from governments and donors across the UK for 'hard', 'cause and effect' evidence to support budget allocations (Cabinet Office, 1999), has led to a growth in the last decade of a concern with evidence based practice. Such an approach is often underpinned by a positivist tradition but while this study has an interest in evidence-based policy making, it is also recognised that there are many barriers to a rational policy making model (Hill, 2005) as this chapter will highlight.

The literature search identified very little previous research that has succeeded in capturing evidence of the policy outcomes of public participation. For example, the findings of a major review on service user participation in social care in the UK suggested that it was not possible to report on the effects of participation because there was so little monitoring and evaluation of the difference service user participation is making, albeit, the author reports, 'no shortage of information about ways to involve service users'. So, the author concludes, 'although much is going on, we do not know whether it is leading to a lot of service change, a little service change or no service change at all' (Carr, 2007: 28).

However, there is a wealth of relevant theoretical literature relating to participatory governance and linked concepts. This chapter focuses on theoretical ideas about governance and the engagement of citizens in policy-making that most closely

aligned to my research questions and the themes and analytic categories emerging from my fieldwork. The next two sections of this chapter (2.2 and 2.3) place relevant developments in an historical and political context, with an exploration of the transformation of the modern state in the late twentieth century from 'government' to 'governance'; characterised as the 'hollowing out' of the nation state and the emergence of multi-level governance (Newman *et al.,* 2004; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1997). The concept of a shift in power from the state to non-state actors including towards citizens and in particular, public service users, is explored in some depth.

Section 2.4 examines theoretical approaches to policy making, particularly the dominant theories on policy change and the concepts of pluralism and policy networks. This section also explores what is involved in 'public' participation and considers the models of power at play, including the capacity for participatory structures and mechanisms to serve as a means of social control as well as of empowerment. A final section (section 2.5) summarises what I see as the key learning from this review and defines the approach that was selected for the research in terms of theoretical frameworks concerned with governance and policy making.

The focus in this chapter is on governance discourses in the UK and whilst global trends for increased civil society involvement in governance do exist I am mindful that the Western concept of governance will translate differently into other national contexts (Taylor *et al.,* 2009), including India where one of the case studies was located. This makes comparisons with the UK-based sites challenging. The thesis is primarily concerned with exploring how new governance spaces in Wales have created opportunities for children to influence public policy whilst looking to other, international examples of good practice to determine learning that could be applicable in the Wales/UK context. So, while there is clear scope for comparative analysis across my four case studies within the research design, the fours sites are not directly comparable in terms of aims, structure, processes and functions. To assist considerations of the transferability of learning points from India to Wales

and the UK, reference will be made to the broader socio-political factors that shape public participation in India throughout the thesis as well as referencing international development literature when discussing key operational concepts.

2.2 From government to governance

The shift from government to governance in the UK is widely recognised as happening during the latter part of the 20th and early part of the 21st century and is particularly associated with New Labour and the 'modernizing', public management reform agenda (Peck and 6, 2004). The key drivers for change in how we are governed are seen as globalisation and the complexities of society in the 21st Century which reduced the capacity of the state to manage its own economy. Newman (2001) notes also the challenges from within (often based on ethnic or cultural patterns of identification) to the political legitimacy and integrity of the nation state. The growth of quangos in the 1990s and the top down neo-liberal government was seen to be eroding democratic accountability and undermining the legitimacy of decisions about public policy. The decline in voter turn out in the UK from 80% in 1951 to 59% in 2001 (Electoral Commission, 2006) and in civic engagement more generally provoked widespread concern about the future of democracy in its current form (Fahmy, 2006).

But the roots of the changes go back much further and it is important to understand how different ideological approaches to the relationships between the state and its citizens, and to social and economic conditions, played out in Britain in the period since the welfare state was founded. The period of 'consensus politics' (Addison, 1975), that characterised the founding of the welfare state in Britain in the post world war two period, was underpinned by a belief across all political parties that poverty was remediable and that social progress fostered by expertise and professionalism would be achieved under the benign social role of the interventionist state (Pierson, 1998: 19).

By the 1970s it was clear that the post-war pattern of sustained economic expansion in which this was all grounded was in serious trouble. Unemployment and inflation were rising, economic growth was faltering. Pressure on welfare state budgets rose sharply as demand increased (with unemployment) and revenue declined (with the slump in economic activity) forcing government to curtail social spending (Ellison, 1998). These events can thus be seen as challenging the compatibility of a market economy and the welfare state, with welfare states in advanced capitalist societies seen by some, as contradictory (Pierson, 1998).

2.2.1 *The New Right's solution*

For the New Right of the 1980s, in this crisis, the welfare state was the 'villain of the piece', uneconomic, undermining incentives to work or to invest, unproductive, denying freedom of choice and encouraging inefficiency. At the same time they claimed, welfare services were ineffective, despite the huge resources directed at poverty they had failed to eliminate it and they trapped the poor in 'cycles of dependency'. Many commonplace social policies of the 1980s and 90s have their origins and at least part of their justification in these ideas. The need for welfare state retrenchment in the 1980s was justified by the re-thinking of the role of welfare to reflect the new economic conditions (Ellison, 1998).

Privatisation was a major feature of this Conservative era along with concerns about efficiency, value for money, competition and the market. The strong attachment to the market during the Thatcher years saw the private sector become a major provider of welfare services, and assured the introduction of market forces into many of the remaining areas of the public sector. The organisation of British welfare was thus transformed as the central role of the state as a direct welfare provider was seriously challenged (Ellison, 1998).

Secondly, in contrast to Keynesian welfare collectivism, which as noted, they believed had created a dependency culture, Conservative governments in the 1980s and 1990s wanted to use social policy as a means of revitalising what they

regarded as the 'traditional ideals of individual responsibility and self-sufficiency' (Ellison, 1998). This approach stressed the individual's duty to work and to provide for family and dependants in contrast to the Keynesian emphasis on individual rights to employment and social protection (Lister, 1998). The new right thinking of the 1980s and early 90s downplayed collectivist notions of social citizenship and emphasized a highly individualistic form of civil citizenship (Roche, 1999).

The Conservative governments of the 80s and 90s brought a new perspective to ideas on accountability, arguing that real accountability comes through the power of the consumer rather than through their elected representatives (Bochel and Bochel, 2004). These concerns about accountability and control spawned a raft of regulation, quangos and the emergence of a 'new public management' combining elements of public administration with the more instrumental approach of business management (Bochel and Bochel, 2004). Under New Labour in the 1990s and early 2000s, concerns about accountability and control remained. The idea of partnership between different sectors and organisations continued to be emphasised and new public management continued to flourish (Peck and 6, 2004).

2.2.2 *New Labour and 'inclusive' governance*

The Labour government elected in 1997, made the shift to governance part of the New Labour project, symbolising as Newman observes 'a break from the social and political ideologies of the new right, but also a recognition of the challenges faced by social democratic government in conditions of globalisation' (2001: 2). Complex social issues including social exclusion, inequalities in health and community regeneration were still eluding traditional approaches to governing through hierarchical instruments of control, while growing social differentiation was making the task of governing even more difficult (Newman, *et al*., 2004). Kooiman (1999) argues that in such societies no government is capable of determining social development. The role of the state thus shifts from that of 'governing' through direct forms or control (hierarchical), to that of 'governance' in which the state must collaborate with a wide range of actors in networks that cut across the public,

private and voluntary sectors and operate across different levels of decision-making (Newman, *et al*. 2004). The shift to new governance under New Labour was thus driven by concerns over accountability, trust, legitimacy, transparency and efficiency (Rhodes, 1997). As I have described, these were concerns that were familiar to the previous Conservatives governments.

New governance challenged the Westminster model with parliamentary sovereignty and power centralised in the cabinet and the prime minister with accountability only through elections held once every five years. Instead of a unitary, centralised monolithic state, new governance under New Labour was seen to embrace a more deliberative democracy which Cohen defines as:

> a framework of social and institutional conditions that facilitates free discussion among equal citizens – by providing favourable conditions for participation, association and expression (1997: 412-13).

Devolution in Wales and in Scotland, and in due course Northern Ireland, were key elements of the New Labour project as was the broader concept of multi-level governance. Multi-level governance replaced the linear, hierarchical model, with authority being exercised across both vertical and horizontal dimensions (Hill, 2005). The 'vertical' dimension refers to the linkages between higher and lower levels of government, for example, between the Welsh Government and the UK Government and between the Welsh Government and local government, including their institutional, financial, and informational aspects. Here, local capacity building and incentives for the effectiveness of sub-national levels of government are crucial issues for improving the quality and coherence of public policy. The 'horizontal' dimension refers to co-operation arrangements between regions or between municipalities (Hill, 2005). These agreements are increasingly common as a means by which to improve the effectiveness of local public service delivery and implementation of development strategies.

Other characteristics of New Labour's 'new' governance included the involvement of non-state actors; shifting boundaries between public, voluntary and private

sectors; network interactions based on shared purpose and founded on trust; interdependence between organisations and significant autonomy from the state (Rhodes, 1997). Rhodes (1995) uses the term 'Hollowing out of the State' to summarise what has taken place in the UK. He also notes it is not without its problems. Fragmentation, a lack of co-ordination and attenuated accountability are all, he suggests, some of the more negative features of new governance.

It is not clear as yet how the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in the UK will continue or change the approach of its predecessors. The concept of a 'Big Society' has been much talked about by elements of the Conservative Party as a means of 'empowering local communities and individuals' (BBC News, 19th July, 2010). However, despite a number of launches to promote the concept of the 'Big Society', there has been little follow through in terms of policy intentions. Ellison (2011) argues that rather than a return to the Thacherite consumerist approach of the 1980s and 1990s, the 'Big Society' as expounded by David Cameron is an example of his pragmatic approach to gaining power and part of his 'swift decision to move to the centre ground of politics' (2011:46). However, not all the Tory Party membership have been happy with the strategic direction adopted by Cameron. The threat of disloyalty within Conservative ranks, Ellison (2011:46) suggests, lends credibility to the view that 'the shift in focus achieved by Cameron, although real, has been overstated'. Lister (2011) suggests that the broad approach towards citizenship articulated by New Labour continues with the Coalition with some critical differences including: a greater hostility towards the state by the Coalition with attendant reductions in public expenditure that are challenging existing civic participation strategies.

The slimming down of the state and the increased involvement of non state actors in policy processes and public service delivery in the UK under New Labour form the backdrop to my enquiry. As shall be further discussed in section 2.2.4 below, while some theorists see this trend as opening up opportunities for meaningful citizen participation (see for example, Cornwall and Coelho, 2007), others see the 'new' participation spaces as little more than efficient conduits of state power (see for

example, Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Before embarking on an exploration of these contrasting views, I turn now briefly to emphasise the relevance of the move from government to governance as described above, to the study.

2.2.3 *'New Governance' and children's participation*

Chapter three will chart the development of children's participation in public decision-making within the context of this move from government to governance but it is important to note here that the changes in the way we are governed over the last 15-20 years provide an important context to my study. The 'new' governance arrangements described above strive to be inclusive, relying as they do on networks and partnerships which are preferred because they can be more flexible and more responsive to local need and conditions (Rhodes, 1997). New Labour's emphasis on making sure that citizens (and more specifically service-users) are the focus of government required, it was argued, that service users' concerns be listened to and taken into account by policy makers and service providers; and that they should be involved in decisions about how public services are provided (Cabinet Office, 1999, chapter 3, para 6).

The establishment of youth forums or councils in all 22 local authorities in Wales and the introduction of a statutory requirement to establish school councils in all schools in Wales in 2006 (WAG, 2005) have been an integral part of the Welsh Government's commitment to more inclusive and responsive governance. So too has been the establishment of a number of general structures within the Welsh Government designed to foster the inclusion of otherwise excluded groups and deliberative democracy. An example of this is the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council which brings together representatives of the voluntary sector with Assembly Members (Chaney and Fevre, 2001). Understanding the drivers and motivations behind these developments is important when observing and trying to determine the actual impact and outcomes of some of these new 'participatory' structures and institutions.

The move to new types of governance and in particular, the concerns with accountability underpinned the establishment of the children's advisory group in CHiP, my third UK-based study. The resourcing of the children's advisory group for CHiP formed part of a broader imperative to improve the organisation's accountability to beneficiaries in line with a number of directives from the United Nations and the UK government's Department for International Development (INGOA, 2005).

My fourth case study, ASHA was located in Tamil Nadu, India. The trend towards new governance is global (Taylor *et al.,* 2009), and in the world's largest democracy, civic participation is also seen in some quarters as a means of ensuring accountability and developing 'active' citizens to counterbalance the state (Hildyard *et al.,* 2001). 'Good' governance has become a central issue in international development, equated as it is with democracy and a vibrant and active civil society. NGOs are seen to be vital in the way they help create and support civil society. As Tisdall and Bell report, international donors have, intentionally substituted them for the state, as more efficient service providers and more able to reach the 'poorest of the poor' (2006:105).

It will be seen from the interviews conducted with NGO leaders and government officials that these drivers were certainly present in the Indian case study. However, notwithstanding the fact that the Indian constitution was heavily influenced by the British parliamentary model, the political culture in India that frames governance opportunities is different to that operating in the UK. The role and capacity of the state in meeting basic needs is very different as are citizen expectations of the state. With insufficient time for an in-depth sensitisation to the Indian context, the differences made it difficult to determine exactly how concepts of new governance play out in the Indian context making direct comparisons across all four studies, in this respect, problematic.

Nonetheless it became evident that the participatory forums and structures that were researched had been indelibly shaped by strong national and international drivers associated with the shift from government to governance. Later chapters

will suggest that to varying extents the UK-based children's forums I studied, all owe their existence to top-down, central government directives and resourcing associated with 'new' governance arrangements. Similarly, it will be shown that, the conflict observed between top-down directives for more inclusive governance (but also for more efficient, cost cutting and target driven service provision) and the bottom-up world of complex and sometimes contradictory interests, where objectives are muddled and differently understood by the various stakeholders, was a stark reminder of the continued, if mediated, significance of the state as an actor (Jessop, 1999).

As Barnes *et al.,* (2007) conclude in their examination of public participation initiatives in England, normative assumptions held by power-holders can frequently serve to limit alternative voices and models of organisation, ensuring that decision-making structures and processes even in these 'new governance spaces' remain impervious to citizens' views. I turn now to explore an alternative, more pessimistic critique of the nature of new governance spaces which suggests that the scope for real influence in these contexts has been limited.

2.2.4 *Power to the people? A critique*

The move from government to governance has, some theorists argue, opened up new opportunities for non-governmental actors (including citizens) to engage in government. However, as Taylor (2006) notes, the extent to which these new spaces represent a new vision of the public domain with a genuinely new settlement between the range of potential players and new, more socially inclusive forms of citizenship is contested (see also, Cornwall, 2004 and Newman, 2001). Some theorists of governance offer an optimistic perspective on these trends, suggesting that the emergence of 'negotiated self-governance', based on new practices of co-ordinating activities through networks and partnerships, offers participants the opportunity to influence government (Stoker, 1998).

In contrast, other theorists draw on governmentality theory to offer a more nuanced analysis (see for example, Taylor, 2007). These authors suggest that while state power has become decoupled from the state as government and is instead produced through a range of sites and alliances at a distance from the state (Miller and Rose, 2008), forms of power outside of the state can sustain the state more effectively than its own institutions (Foucault, 1980). Nonetheless, governmentality theories do allow for the possibility of resistance by 'active subjects' who not only collaborate in the exercise of government but also shape and influence it (Taylor, 2007:297).

Much of the literature on policy making under new governance arrangements suggests that the exercise of power continues to reward some interests over others. Power can be subtly expressed as Day's (2004) review of the ambiguities of civil society in Wales illustrates. He cites the 'conditionality of inclusion on 'their' terms' and suggests, not unrealistically, how 'the speed and the intensity of policy formulation only admits the skillful and well-resourced into the process' with smaller, less experienced organisations and more marginal groups finding themselves shut out (Day, 2004: 651). In the global South, researchers have been highly critical of a wider range of participation initiatives which despite rhetoric of de-centralisation, are characterised by power imbalances between participants, explicit and implicit co-option and continuing centralisation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The UK literature paints a similar picture with, as Taylor (2007) suggests 'the community rhetoric over the years far outpacing the reality of partnerships on the ground' (2007:298).

Newman *et al.,* (2004) characterised the UK Labour Government in terms of a number of 'mutually conflicting" regimes of governance. On the one hand collaborative governance strategies were introduced to help solve a number of cross cutting social problems but these then were subordinated to other policy imperatives, 'linked to highly managerial forms of governance based on a plethora of goals, targets and performance improvement strategies' (2004: 218). Forms of direct control from the centre include 'an intensification of audit and inspection

regimes, coupled with the specification of national standards for local services'. These controls, Newman *et al.* (2004:218) continue, 'create institutional constraints and limit the capacity of participation initiatives to shape policy and practice from below'. Thus the authors conclude, 'new forms of governance then do not displace the old but interact with them, often uncomfortably'.

This is the broader context for my exploration of the impact of the participation of children in public policy. My research aims to test out the assertion that new models of governance in Wales have created spaces that encompass children as active participants in public decision-making (Tisdall and Bell, 2006). The role of state actors and the exercising of power in the policy-making processes are a key point of reference. The discussion now turns to explore how citizen participation in the shaping of public services in Wales has evolved in line with the shifting ideas and understandings of governance. The aim here is to help root children's participation in Wales in the context of wider developments around the engagement of service users in welfare policy and service development and illustrates common tensions. As shall be detailed in chapter three, the construction of children as 'service users' in the 1980s and 1990s (albeit with adults in charge of determining children's 'best interests') remains an important stage in the development of concepts of children as active citizens and as a legitimate group in the policy making process.

2.3 Public participation in shaping public services: parallel developments

Richardson (1983) observes the opportunity to 'take part' is a fundamental tenet of the democratic system of government, although just who participates in voting, in political debate in letting those with power know their views on issues that concern them, remains an important issue and one that is central to this thesis. Citizenship can be a mechanism for exclusion as well as inclusion and feminists have been critical of general conceptualisations of citizenship which are inherently gendered and ignore the positions of women and other less powerful groups in society such as people from black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people (Lister, 1998). As will be explored further in chapter three, Roche (1999) and Cockburn

(1998) maintain that similarly, normative conceptualisations of citizenship operating in the UK have specifically worked to exclude children.

Notwithstanding its roots in political philosophy over the centuries, Richardson, writing in the early 1980s, saw extending the boundaries of participation by users and consumers in shaping welfare services, as a 'new political issue' coming to the fore over the previous decade. Richardson (1983:10) traces the drivers for this back to demands from consumers of welfare services who were increasingly unwilling to accept the authority of others to formulate policies on their behalf, but also, importantly, to the demands from those responsible for providing services. These latter demands, Richardson (1983) suggests, were arising from a situation where, with the growth in the scale of institutions through which welfare services were administered and delivered, service providers were concerned that they were becoming too far removed from the experiences of the 'customers' they were seeking to serve. Service providers, Richardson (1983) asserts, wanted new ways of bridging the gap.

Richardson's seminal work is a reminder of just how widely reflected ideas around service user participation were in the social policy of the time. For example, Richardson (1983:21) notes, the Seebohm report on the re-organisation of local authority personal social services in 1968 urged social services departments to 'consider how clients might be more involved in decision-making and service delivery'. Whilst children as a group of consumers or service users were not generally perceived at this time to be as in need of a voice (it was parents who were deemed to know what was best for their children), the 1975 Children Act introduced the appointment of 'guardian ad litems' who were to be appointed by family courts to directly represent the child and ensure that their voice was included, in court proceedings.

Despite this promising start in the 1970s, Richardson (1983:117) notes that by the early 1980s, 'interest in participation was down to a trickle'. The gauntlet of public participation and consumer rights was picked up subsequently by the New Right

and then by New Labour but with very different ideological underpinnings. The tensions between 'consumerist' versus 'democratic' approaches to service user participation which came to characterise the last 25 years are still apparent today and were clearly evident across the UK-based case studies. The discussion now turns to consider the ideological and theoretical roots of the consumerist and democratic positions that inform the current political context of citizen engagement in the UK. Understanding these different ideological approaches is essential to comprehending the key tensions surrounding children's 'public' participation across the study sites.

2.3.1 *Public participation: consumerism and democratic approaches*

The concept of public participation was bolstered by developments in public policy and management under the Conservatives in the 1980s or (depending on your point of view) the concept of 'consumer' participation was hijacked by the New Right during the Thatcher years. In particular, John Major's Conservative administration attempted to make services more responsive and accountable. There was a shift away from a pattern of welfare provision where professionals know what's best for their clients to perspectives that recognised the desirability for individuals to have more control over decisions that affect them, viewing them as consumers or customers. The growth in emphasis on the centrality of individual participation during the 1980s and 1990s was underpinned by the New Right perspective that stressed individual freedom and choice and included theoretical analysis of the motivations and operation of the welfare bureaucracies and public choice (Hill, 2005).

The consumerist view associated with the New Right is founded on the role of the market and the move towards a mixed economy of welfare including provision by the private and independent sector. The emphasis is on identifying the preferences of individuals and users of services as consumers. The language of participation is overlaid with the language of the market, while challenging the perceived dominance of the bureaucrats and professionals in large areas of welfare. At its

basis is the idea of buying or choosing goods and services rather than making collective provision and issues about whether individuals have the resources to use a particular service, are relegated to a minor role (Ellison, 1998).

Conversely, the democratic approach to participation in public policy is more linked to people's roles as citizens and tax payers and their related rights and responsibilities. This approach views the provision of public services as part of the state's commitment to enable citizens to participate in social and public life. The democratic approach and collective action did not completely disappear during the 1980s and 1990s, although at times it struggled to distance itself from the dominant political discourse of consumerism. In a number of sectors the democratic approach lived on, increasingly favouring the ideas of service-users speaking for themselves and seeking to progress equality and civil rights (Beresford and Croft, 1992). Links with studies of social movement during this period (see Ellison and Pierson, 1998 for three accounts) illustrate how the place of women, disabled people and to a lesser extent gay and lesbian people, as valued and respected citizens in shaping the public services they receive, improved during the 1980s and 1990s.

No such claims have been made in relation to improvements in the value placed on children as citizens and service users (as yet) but the overlapping developments that worked to encourage an emphasis on participation in the last half of the twentieth century remain very relevant to the study of children's participation today. The tensions between the competing ideologies underpinning consumerist versus democratic approaches to service-user participation are still alive and well and most relevant to this study. As Shier (2010) notes, understanding the tensions that are common to citizen participation more broadly as well as those that affect children specifically is important if the concept and reality of children's participation is to be progressed.

As noted in section 2.2 above, under New Labour, public participation took centre stage as a key element of the accelerated shift from government to governance. New Labour's emphasis on participation can be seen as occurring at a number of

different levels including: the involvement of individual users in decisions affecting them; a desire to achieve more user and public representation in decision-making processes; and a concern with the very legitimacy of representative democracy. The case for greater public involvement has been promoted as a 'good thing' in its own right – reinforcing democracy and the civic culture, as well as contributing to the development of social capital and potentially leading to better policy making (Bochel and Bochel, 2004).

International development has witnessed a similar rise in concern with participatory approaches. Participatory development emerged from the recognition of the shortcomings of top-down approaches which became evident in the 1980s (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The ostensible aim of participatory approaches was to ensure people were central to development. Even the World Bank joined in, seeing participation as a process though which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect their lives (World Bank, 1994). This alternative to the donor driven and outsider-led development was rapidly and widely adopted by individuals and organisations with participatory approaches being justified in terms of 'sustainability, relevance and empowerment' (Cooke and Uthari, 2001: 5).

I will return later in this chapter to consider further the extent to which public participation can be understood to have a controlling function rather than an emancipatory one. For now, it is important to note that a number of analysts (Shier, 2010; Barnes, 2008; Newman, *et al*., 2008; Taylor and Percy Smith, 2008) concur that significant tensions exist between meaningful service user participation in policy development and service delivery, and the tightening and centralisation of assessment and control systems.

Having outlined the development of public participation within an historical and political context and identified a number of key external influences that inform how citizen participation more broadly might be constructed (and thereby inform the analysis of the case studies), the discussion now turns to consider in more detail the

concept of 'public participation' in policy-making. Theoretical approaches to understanding the complexities of the policy-making process and how it might best be influenced by non-state actors, are briefly reviewed. These approaches suggest new and interesting perspectives and analytical categories for interpreting the data and making sense of *how* children might influence policy change through established deliberative forums.

2.4 Public participation in policy-making: theoretical perspectives

Participation finds expression in many ways but essentially, participation is about taking part, getting involved in some activity with other people. As Richardson (1983) noted, the debate about participation in public policy explores what 'taking part' really means - does it require involvement in decision-making itself or only some input into the process by which decisions get made? What about power and influence to make changes or to put issues on the agenda? Cornwall suggests that participation is an 'infinitely malleable' concept that can be used to evoke and to signify almost anything that involves people (2008: 269).

Before exploring further the role that servicer users or citizens might play in the making and implementation of public policy it is instructive to consider what is meant by the term 'public policy' and to explore ideas and theories about the process of policy-making. The study of social policy is of course a huge field and after a brief review of what is meant by the term public policy, I have chosen to provide an overview of theories relating to policy *change* as well as those relating to the concepts of policy networks and communities as these seem the most pertinent to the thesis.

Public policy is a term associated with government – usually meaning the activity of governments (Colebatch, 2009:4). Hill tentatively defines policy as 'a course of action, especially one based on some declared and respected principle' (2005: 6). It is more than a decision, embodying the idea of rational action. But the concept of policy and of policy-making does not have a clear and unambiguous definition; the

use of the term varies depending on who is using it. The values of instrumental rationality with legitimate authority determining collective goals may be the normative basis of understandings of public policy but the term 'public policy' is not merely a descriptive terms. As Colebatch (2009:21), notes:

> it is a concept in use, and understanding 'policy' means understanding the way in which practitioners use it to shape their action…..It leads us to ask who is involved, in what settings, how action is framed, and what is the significance in this process of the idea of authorised purpose: that is, to ask questions about policy as a process, not simply as an outcome.

Policy is a process of social action and interaction, it is socially constructed and thereby, variations in how people 'do policy', are to be expected. The idea that policy-making is a rational, staged process whereby issues or problems are identified then recognised by government and acted upon using an evidence base is seen by many analysts as largely a myth (Nutley and Webb, 2000). Essentially, as Hill (2005) notes, the study of the policy process is the study of the exercise of power in the shaping of policy, the key questions are about the sources and nature of power.

The idea of 'policy-makers' is also not as bounded as the term suggests. In reality it is hard to demarcate the boundaries between policy making and implementation and a whole host of actors will be involved in the policy processes. Colebatch (2009) describes the different dimensions of policy practice, the 'vertical', where the dominant account is authoritative choice and the 'horizontal' where the dominant account is structured interaction with officials negotiating across departments and with other levels of government and using authority (and expertise) from outside government.

The vertical stresses policy as a rule, transmitting downward authorised decisions. The focus of analysis is instrumental action, rational choice and the force of legitimate authority. In the horizontal dimension, there is an understanding that there are many policy participants and analysis is concerned with relationships among these participants in different organisations, the nature of these linkages,

how they are formed and sustained, the interpretative frameworks and the institutional formations within which these are mobilised. In the horizontal dimension, negotiation and consensus are important and it is seen as more fruitful to concentrate on participants, how they got there and what they do (Colebatch, 2009).

Both dimensions are important and are not mutually exclusive. Colebatch describes three key elements that can be seen as the basis of participation in the policy process which move along both dimensions (2009:9). The first is *authority*, a construct which frames the action in particular ways that gives standing to some participants over others in the policy process. The second basis for participation is having *expertise* that is relevant to the problem. Service users or citizens can, Colebatch (2009) argues, be construed as 'experts' and as such, they help frame the problem as well as generating responses to it. The third basis of participating is *order*. A key function of policy, Colebatch (2009) notes, is to jointly construct organised activity which is stable and predictable.

Having briefly explored some of the headline characteristics of 'policy-making' as reflected in selective political and social science literature, the discussion now turns to explore theoretical perspectives on policy change. Here, we are concerned with identifying what is perceived to be the policy changes that have resulted from children's participation in a number of deliberative forums. The following review of some of the main theoretical approaches to how policy is changed by non-state actors sheds light on some of the processes involved. The review identifies perspectives that focus on policy resistance to change as well as perspectives that focus on the potential for dramatic or incremental change. Theories that emphasise the potential for change through the operation of policy networks are subsequently considered in some depth as they provide a useful framework for exploring how the 'voices' of children in the four study sites might transmute into 'influence' over policy (Lundy, 2007).

2.4.1 *Theories on policy change*

This section reviews some key perspectives on the policy making process and how policy may be changed. It will be seen that the review reveals useful conceptual frameworks for the study into the influence that children's deliberative forums have on policy making. For example, these theories emphasise the complexity of the policy making process rather than the normative view which characterize policy making as somehow linear and rational. The familiar 'garbage can' theory of decision making (see Cohen *et al*., 1972) suggests that the identification of policy solutions does not necessarily arise from problem identification and analysis. Instead pre-existing solutions can result in a search for problems to which they become attached (Nutley and Webb, 2000: 28).

In essence, complexity and an inherent element of disorganisation in policy making mean that chance often plays a significant role in the outcomes and will impact upon the role that service users or interest groups might play in policy formulation and implementation. Recent theories allow more space for the conscious manipulation of outcomes by relevant actors and acknowledge a number of ways of conceiving policy change, from theories that focus on *resistance* to change, through those which suggest *incremental* change, to those which explore the possibility of more *dramatic* shifts (Smith, 2009).

Theories focused on policy resistance to change

Those theories which suggest that policymaking is highly resistant to change from non-state actors emphasise the role of politics in shaping policies or focus on the way in which institutional and organisational processes act to limit policy change. Theories that emphasise the role of politics include Foucauldian inspired interpretations of contemporary social policy (Coveney, 1998; Petersen, 1996) to more neo-Marxist accounts of policy making (Burnham, 2006). These contributions share the notion that an underlying political project is driving policy activity, whether that project be the production of self-regulating subjects (as Foucauldian

interpretations suggest) or the continuing dominance of the ruling elites (as neo-Marxist accounts claim).

From this perspective, policy making is presented as a highly restrictive process with little potential for service users to play a role in making policy. These theories are criticised for over-emphasising the coherence of dominant interests and, consequently, denying the complexity and messiness of policy realities (Smith, 2009). Neo-Marxist accounts are often accused of economic reductionism and of downplaying the agency of individuals and non-dominant groups (Jessop, 2004).

The second group of theories which have been used to emphasise policy resistance to change are those which focus on the impact of institutions and organisational structures on policy making. From this perspective policy decisions are considered to be significantly shaped by the institutions and policy procedures within which they are embedded (March and Olsen, 1984). As will be discussed in chapter three, there is contrary evidence that new participatory governance structures and mechanisms created in Wales by the National Assembly have positively shaped policies that promote and support children's participation (Thomas and Crowley, 2007).

Theories focusing on the potential for policy change

In contrast there are a number of theories about the policy making process which focus on the potential for dramatic or incremental policy change. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) conceive of policy development as a series of 'punctured equilibriums'. That is, they acknowledge that there are periods in which policy change happens incrementally (indeed it is often suggested that this is the norm); they also suggest however that there are other moments during which dramatic shifts can occur. 'Punctuated equilibriums' are seen to occur when persuasive ideas increasingly gain attention, subsequently becoming unstoppable (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). The concept implies that a number of different factors are required to converge in order for the kind of rare large-scale policy change that marks a punctuation.

Kingdon's (1984) ideas about the policymaking process developed out of his observation that key policy actors in the USA were often unable to retrospectively explain why particular policy outcomes had occurred. Kingdon (1984) refined the 'garbage can' concept and developed a 'multiple streams' model whereby three separate streams – the problem stream, the policy stream and the political stream develop independently of each other but come together to produce policy change. Such theories therefore open up a much greater possibility for influence by service users and other external interest groups, on policy-making.

For Kingdon (1984), the key to understanding agenda setting and policy change, is in recognising the patterns that emerge in the coupling of the three streams and activating the opportunities afforded by short-lived 'policy windows'. Kingdon places emphasis on the role of the actors who promote various potential policy agendas and solutions (albeit that actors' efforts can only be successful when other factors converge with their ideas). Theories more associated with incremental policy change emphasise long-term processes with non-state actors shifting policy gradually. Improving the communication mechanisms between policy makers and external interest groups to develop shared understandings and to gradually change actors' perceptions and ways of thinking is seen as key (Smith, 2009).

Another group of theories which support the notion that service users or interest groups are only likely to contribute to incremental policy change involves the concept of policy networks or policy communities (see Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Marsh and Smith, 2000). These theories concern the ways in which policy ideas are circulated between a variety of actors. What links the various actors involved in a policy network is a sense of shared culture or set of beliefs (McPherson and Raab, 1988). The emphasis placed on the role that a sense of shared culture plays in defining and holding together such networks implies they are not a means by which radically new ideas and alternative ways of thinking are likely to develop. By their very nature, success is dependent on a high degree of consensus amongst members (Smith, 2009). There is some overlap between theories of 'institutionalism' as the structure and membership of policy networks is often perceived to be heavily

influenced and organised by previous policy decisions and outcomes (Marsh and Smith, 2000). What distinguishes accounts which employ the concept of policy networks is the fact that networks are usually presented as fluid structures which can be shaped by the agency of the actors within them as well as by external and temporal constraints.

In summary, the main theoretical contributions presented on policy change suggest that policy making is a complex process in which the interactions of a diverse number of actors determine policy outcomes. Those theories that allow for the idea that policy change occurs in response to the influences of non-state actors (whether it be incrementally or more dramatically), open up the possibility that children as a collective might play a direct role in policy change and development. Such an approach does not deny the contribution of some of the theories relating to policy resistance to change. Thus where policy change does not occur, despite the intended influence of ideas which challenge dominant policy approaches, it will be important to explore why this is so and to not simply assume that the situation could never have been otherwise.

In the context of (new) governance theories explored earlier in this chapter, the concepts of pluralism and policy networks outlined above provide a useful framework to help make sense of the data generated in the case studies. The discussion now turns to explore in more depth the notion of policy networks and the potential a policy network analysis has for understanding how policy change occurs (or not) in the four case study sites.

2.4.2 *A policy network analytic framework*

An analytic framework focused on policy networks and a pluralist approach is most appropriate for this thesis given the central focus on the influence of children on policy making in the context of a shift from government to governance. Due regard will also be given to how power is distributed structurally in each case study in order to recognise for example, the influence of class, gender, and race. This framework

will be used to explore, comparatively, across the study sites: what groups and individuals participated in the policy process? How were they linked? What resources (authority, expertise or order) did they bring to the process? And what value was attached to those resources? Also explored will be how state institutions, such as local authorities and schools, exert power and control on the ways in which children and young people behave in the participative structures to which they are invited.

Children's participation in public policy in the context of new governance implicates pressure or interest groups and their interaction within policy networks. Grant (2000:14) describes a pressure group as 'an organisation which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy'. Grant's analysis of pressure groups in the 1970s made a distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' groups (see also Tisdall and Davis, 2004). Insider groups are ascribed a legitimate status by government which involves them in meaningful consultation. Outsider groups are not able to achieve such a position and thus do not get similarly engaged. Insider groups typically know and play by the rules of the game. These rules govern how participants should behave to gain and maintain access to a policy network (Smith, 1997). Maloney *et al*., (1994) divide outsiders into two types: those who are outside because they are designated by policy makers to have incompatible goals or ideologies and those who choose, by contrast, to stay outside. 'Thresholders' are on the borders of being insiders and outsiders, again either by choice or exclusion – they are dynamic and their status may change over time. The position occupied by children and other stakeholders in each of my case studies may determine whether they get involved in meaningful consultation about specific policies.

Policy networks or collectives in this analysis are essentially formal linkages of interest groups – they can represent issues or communities. Colebatch (2009) reminds us these terms are not definitive and are used primarily to direct attention to the social and interactive dimensions of the policy process (as distinct from the hierarchical and linear perspective). Concepts of resource exchange and bargaining

are, Marsh (1998) suggests, fundamental to understanding how policy networks lever power. Tisdall and Davis (2004) note that an interest group's resources are what attract policy makers to involve the group in the policy process and the strength and type of resources are what the group has to bargain with in order to influence policy (Tisdall and Davies, 2004). Understanding the resources the children's forums bring to the policy table in each of my fieldwork sites and also *how* they or others use these resources was an important consideration when exploring the factors that work to enable or hinder children's influence on policy outcomes. Tisdall and Davis (2004) successfully applied a policy network analytical framework to their study of children's participation in the development of policy for disabled children in Scotland. They examined the status of children and young people (and their parents) in the policy process; the resources they each brought and how these resources were valued (or not). Aspects of their analytical framework will inform the analysis of the data from the four case studies in this doctoral research.

In summary, a policy network and pluralist approach fits well with my preference for exploring children's participation in the context of the potential afforded by new governance spaces, The approach acknowledges the shift from government to governance, from a unified executive response to 'popular will', where power is concentrated in the executive to a process of governing that involves many groups reflecting public interests. Hill's (2005) contention that pressure groups that grow up alongside the formal institutions of government come to play an important direct part in representing the views of specific interests, fits well with developments in the new governance spaces created in Wales through devolution as I will detail in chapter three. However, my analysis also needs to be mindful of being too utopian in outlook. The 're-centralisation of political control' (Newman, 2001:163) also evident in governance spaces can serve to limit 'the scope for participation to contribute to a more open and reflexive style of governance'. As governmentality theorists argue, re-centralisation is very evident in the 'what' and the 'how' of policy making; in the dominance of a neo-liberal economic discourse both globally and nationally; and in the ascendancy of a centrally determined,

performance driven culture (Taylor, 2007:301). The final part of this review of pertinent theoretical approaches to understanding participation in public decision-making returns to explore the ways in which power is exercised in new governance spaces.

2.4.3 *Analysing power*

The concept of power and the manner in which it is exercised in the decision-making processes that the children's forums in the research sites are engaged with (for example in the local municipality in ASHA and Lamberton; in the school in Marlings and the INGO in CHiP) is central to this study. But power and its application is rarely straightforward. Thus, notwithstanding the opportunities that policy network theorists see for non-state actors to engage in the policy making process, other theorists argue that beyond the rhetoric, new governance spaces are still inscribed with the state agenda. In the context of community participation, Taylor (2007:314) describes what she calls the 'squeezing' of new governance spaces where responsibilities are pushed down to communities and individuals while at the same time control is retained at the centre 'through the imposition and internalisation of performance cultures that require 'appropriate' behaviour'.

Lupton *et al*., (1998:48) explain how applying a more nuanced and multi-dimensional conception of power illustrates the limitations of public participation and reveals the subtle ways in which the state wields its power:

> Forms of public participation may be established which appear to give people influence when viewed in terms of single-dimension explanations of power, but are actually used to prevent certain issues from being discussed. By channeling interaction to a limited agenda, attention can be diverted away from areas of potential conflict that those in power wish to avoid. Seen in this way, participatory mechanisms can serve as a means of social control by preventing challenges to the status quo. By engaging people and giving them responsibility in a particular area of policy or service, moreover, the process of public participation may also serve to contain criticism and unrest by helping the public to appreciate the realities of government and/or implying public support for the actions taken.

Similar points about the potential for participatory mechanisms to serve as a means of social control and exclusion are made in Milbourne's (2009) study into work with disengaged young people at a community level in the UK and also by Taylor (2007) who looks at participation in community development and Kothari (2001) in relation to participatory approaches in international development. The data analysis was informed by these nuanced understandings of power as played out in each of the fieldwork sites. The analysis particularly addressed who was enabled to participate in the children's forums, who was excluded (or excluded themselves) and how the different forums worked to recruit a range of different interests rather than just 'the usual suspects' (Alderson, 2000 and Cairns, 2006).

Also explored was how agendas were set and by whom and the purposes that the stakeholders invested in each of the children's forums. For example, later chapters will show how each of the study sites used different mechanisms to involve children. The school council (Marlings) and youth forum (Lamberton) in Wales comprised elected representatives, with the latter working to ensure that children's groups in the poorest communities elected around a third of the youth forum's representatives. Whilst some of the children who were members of the INGO advisory panel (CHiP) had been elected by some of their peers, most were selected by international staff in the country of origin according to very fluid and pragmatic criteria. The Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in India (ASHA) were in principle open to all children aged 6-18 but in reality they struggled to involve adolescent girls (because parents were concerned about protecting their purity) and adolescent boys (who were apparently too busy studying for exams).

Cornwall's (2004) conceptualisation of a spectrum of participation 'spaces' provided useful and related ideas to help make sense of the power dynamics between children and adults that were reflected in my data. She contrasts the relationship between spaces created through an invitation to participate and those that people create for themselves (Cornwall, 2008). 'Invited' spaces are described as structured and owned by those who provide them, no matter how participative they are in practice. Spaces that people create for themselves have a very different character

with considerable differences in status and power to the 'invited spaces'. Most often they consist of people who come together because they have something in common, rather than representing different stakeholders or different points of view. These kinds of spaces can be important as sites where groups 'can gain confidence and skills, develop their arguments and gain solidarity and support that being part of that group can offer' (Cornwall, 2008:275). Gaventa (2004) and Shier (2010) suggest that progress is most likely at the interstices between the popular and invited spaces. 'Navigating the intersections of relationships', Gaventa (2004:38) argues, may 'in turn create new boundaries of possibility for action and engagement'.

It will be seen that the children's forums in the four case studies reflect a range of different types of 'invited' spaces: a youth forum set up and owned by the local authority (Lamberton); a school council set up and owned by the school (Marlings); an advisory 'governance' group set up by an international NGO (CHiP) and Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments set up by an NGO in India. Later chapters will consider the relationships between these 'invited' spaces and the 'popular' spaces that the children inhabited although access to the latter spaces was restricted in the majority of the fieldwork sites for practical reasons.

This concludes the review of theoretical perspectives concerned with public participation set within the context of the move from government to governance. The final section of this chapter summarises the key learning from this review and denotes the theoretical approaches concerned with governance, policy making and the exercise of power that informed this research. It reflects on the tensions inherent in the concepts of citizen participation and participatory governance and highlights important research questions and themes that have informed the study.

2.5 Conclusion

The methodological approach employed in this study was to use the reviews of previous theoretical and empirical scholarship (in this chapter and the next) to

inform the definitive research questions and themes; the operationalisation of the key concepts; the choice of the data collection methods; and the concepts and frameworks used in the data analysis. This concluding section summarises the key theoretical perspectives concerned with service user and community participation that guided my empirical inquiry and in particular the data analysis. Data were analysed and reported on with particular reference to these more promising ideas and theoretical perspectives throughout section two of this thesis.

As will be discussed in detail in chapter four, evaluating public participation and assessing the outcomes of the participation process is notoriously challenging. Taylor (2003) suggests that the lack of monitoring and evaluation on the impact of public participation is to do with the conceptual clash between citizenship and consumerism which is being exposed as participation becomes more widespread and sites of resistance are revealed. The potential for navigating the tensions that result from this clash, to allow for action and meaningful citizen engagement in policy-making is a key theme that was explored throughout the research. The review has dispelled any thoughts that it might have been possible to study a linear, rational policy-making process, with a beginning, middle and an end and instead it has drawn attention to horizontal as well as vertical perspectives of the policy process. It has highlighted a number of useful theories for explaining and understanding policy change or resistance in response to children's influence, including governance and pluralism theories, and concepts of policy networks, interest groups, insiders and outsiders and the valued resources of authority, expertise and order.

The review has also demonstrated the importance of exploring the exercise of power within the *process* of participating and the links between process and discernible *outcomes.* The key issue of interest here that divides many analysts is whether the changes in the way we are governed in the UK has led to a situation where citizens are more empowered and enabled to influence the public policy agenda or whether the displacement of centralised control has just been replaced by more dispersed, fragmented but still state-controlled power across new sites of

action. Charting and analysing the power relationships and the interaction between the children's forums and the adult stakeholders is at the heart of this inquiry.

The thesis also draws on post-structural theories to illustrate that while the power of the state may well have been 'hollowed out' and dispersed through a plurality of agencies (and this is an hypothesis explored in later chapters), attention was also directed to how knowledge and power continues to regulate social activity through the self-disciplining of actors, be they citizens, workers, or organisations. In this way the study design combines the strengths of governance and pluralism theories while giving credence to the nuanced exercising of power by the state, institutions and the agency of individual participants (Newman, *et al*., 2008). Devoting attention to understanding participation as a governing strategy will help to explain and better understand the ambiguous mix of empowerment and co-option experienced by children (Cotmore, 2004).

The review in this chapter has shown how, as Tisdall and Bell (2006) suggest, the debates around the changing forms of governed and governance, policy networks and new institutionalism, social capital and civil society, provide useful ways of understanding children's participation in 'public' decision-making. The next chapter will review additional theoretical perspectives concerned with the related concept of children as 'policy actors', that is, a legitimate group in policy making processes, acting within new governance spaces. It also includes a review of key empirical work on the impact of children's public participation on policy-making although here too, there is a dearth of previous research. The reasons for this apparent gap are explored further in chapter four when reflecting on the methodological challenges of evaluating public participation and in chapter five when the data analysis focuses on the objectives the 'owning' organisations invest in structures to facilitate children's participation in designing, delivering and evaluating public policy.

Chapter 3: Children as Policy Actors

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the concepts of governance and public participation and highlighted the importance of exploring how power is exercised in the decision-making processes that the children's forums are seeking to influence. Chapter two concluded by highlighting the tensions between positions which see public participation as a means of empowering citizens, of re-building trust and renewing democracy and those that see public participation as just another means by which the state exerts control of its citizens in an increasingly complex world. This chapter explores additional perspectives on children as 'policy actors' and relates the tensions between participation as control and participation as empowerment to current discourses around childhood and children's rights.

In chapter two it was noted that the four forums included in my study are all examples of 'invited' spaces, that is they are structures set up by organisations run by adults to facilitate children's participation in governance and in the improvement of public services (Cornwall, 2004). The two forums in Wales, a school council in a primary school (Marlings); a youth forum set up by a local authority (Lamberton) are broadly representative of structures for children aged 4-11 and 11-25 respectively, established in the majority of schools and local authorities in Wales under direction of regulations and guidance from the Welsh Government (WAG, 2011 and 2005). Similar structures have been set up in many schools and local authorities across other parts of the UK although not on a mandatory basis (Turkie, 2010; O'Toole and Gale, 2006). There are, as shall be explored in this chapter, ambiguities within these 'top down' deliberative participatory structures whereas Cockburn (2010) reminds us, enthusiasm for citizenship can be weak, based on an undemocratic education system, a short term 'consumerist' notion of participation and 'an emphasis on partnership rather than an expression and contestation of difference' (2010:306).

It will be seen that the international case studies in my sample, the children's advisory group that meets annually to advise senior managers and trustees in CHiP and the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in India are also examples of 'invited' spaces although the children's parliaments operating as they do at village level should be understood as strongly community-based. Both of the international forums can also be seen as manifestly linked to the global 'governance' agenda. As will be explored in chapter five, the motivations of the NGOs setting up these forums are rooted in international concerns to enhance accountability and improve governance arrangements through the inclusion of civil society.

The contribution this chapter makes to the thesis is four fold. Firstly, it positions the conceptualisation of children's participation and the development of policy and practice around children's 'public' participation in both an historical and a 'new' governance context especially in relation to Wales where devolution has, it is argued, opened up new opportunities for public participation (see Chaney *et al.,* 2001). Secondly, the chapter explores the discourse around childhood, children's rights and children's citizenship, reviewing selected theoretical perspectives on children's 'public' participation and their relevance to the key research questions and themes. Thirdly, it reviews the most promising theories and models to describe, explain or understand the processes and outcomes of children's 'public' participation in terms of their utility for analysing the case studies. Fourthly, the chapter includes a review of the methodological approaches of selected empirical studies on the impact of children's participation in public decision-making.

The learning from these sources will help further refine and clarify the conceptual focus of the study and identify useful analytical frameworks as well as inform, more broadly, my choice of research methods. The search procedures for the literature review were described at the start of chapter two but it should be noted that the search on children's public participation focused on English speaking sources that were cognate to the UK and to the broad international development context.

The next section sets children's public participation in an historical and political context. Thereafter section 3.3 considers children as rights holders, active citizens and policy actors in the context of new governance and devolution, drawing on different perspectives on childhood, children's rights and children as citizens. Section 3.4 reports on the practice of children's participation with reference to definitions and conceptual models from the literature. Section 3.5 explores the impact of children's collective participation in shaping public policy and public services with reference to empirical work. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings arising from the review and their implications for the design of the research.

3.2 The development of children's participation

Arguably children and young people face considerable controls by both the state (at all levels of governance) and civil society (Parton, 2006). The normative status of childhood as developmental and a time of vulnerability help to shape children's relatively high dependence on public services (Arnott, 2008). But children have until relatively recently been offered only limited opportunities to get directly involved in local and national policy making in the UK (Tisdall *et al.,* 2008). The participation of children has become an important element of international development in the last 20 years. While children's participation is conceptualised and pursued in a wide variety of ways and at different levels across the global South, from children representing their countries at UN gatherings to children's clubs in rural villages engaged in community development, there has traditionally been a focus on participation at the local level and children's relationships with adults in their immediate environment. The child's need to be protected and cared for was a central tenet of the Declaration of Children's Rights endorsed by the League of Nations in 1924. The 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child continued a paternalistic theme and it was not until the 1970s that formal recognition came of the political and civil rights of children to have a voice and to be heard (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009).

The designation by the United Nations of 1979 as the International Year of the Child raised the profile of children's rights. Pressure groups and organisations advocating on behalf of children emerged in the UK, including the Children's Legal Centre which opened in 1981. So too did service user groups reacting to what they experienced as negative, paternalistic welfarist responses portraying them as passive recipients. The *Who Cares?* group established in 1979 by young people in the care system played a key role in introducing the idea that young people who were in public care should have more influence over their own care and treatment. *Who Cares?* developed subsequently into the *National Association of Young People in Care (NAYPIC),* which in turn spawned *Voices from Care* in Wales and *A National Voice* in England.

These child-led, service user movements whilst largely limited in the UK to the public care system developed in parallel with a strong, user-led disability movement. Beresford (2007) and Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) note how these embryonic user-led models were subsequently driven to the margins by the contrasting consumerist, managerialist approach to participation which as noted in chapter two, emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century with the increasing use of market approaches within health and social care services. The consumerist approach views participation or service user involvement as essentially restricted to issues around access, information, choice and redress rather then fundamentally influencing services and the factors that impact on them (such as policy making, resource allocation and management). In contrast, more democratic approaches emphasise the equal worth and decision-making capacity of citizens challenging the activities of institutions and organisations which shape their everyday lives (Shier, 2010). In reality, consumerist models at play in the UK have primarily constructed the parent rather than the child as 'consumer', working on the post war assumption of parents acting as intermediaries between the state and children (Arnott, 2008).

The enthusiasm for participatory development with children amongst international and intergovernmental organisations in the 1990s was largely preceded by the appearance of child-led movements in many parts of the global South notably the

child-led African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) and Concerned for Working Children organisation in India (Reddy and Ratna, 2002; Hart, 2008). The mobilisation of children to further their rights and improve their circumstances is more of a tradition in countries of the global South, with few examples in the UK of children, collectively campaigning on a range of broader political issues. Recent notable exceptions have been series of walk-outs, sit-ins and protests by school students across the UK against the Iraq War in March 2003 (Badham, 2004) and the involvement of thousands of school students in protests against proposed education cuts and higher tuition fees in November 2010 (Guardian, 24th November, 2011).

With participation as one of its key themes, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (UNCRC) stimulated exploration of the potential of children's participation in both international development initiatives and service development in the UK. Governments and NGOs throughout the 1990s and 2000s sought to establish mechanisms (laws and structures) and provide opportunities for children to have a voice and to have their views taken into account in respect of matters affecting them. As discussed later in the chapter, debates about children's right to be heard over this period have developed within a protection – liberation continuum informed by different perspectives on childhood. Children's participation in decision making has been one of the most debated and examined aspects of the UNCRC. Article 12 of the UN Convention requires state parties to:

> assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Books have been written, research has been undertaken, thousands of initiatives have been introduced, and spaces for children's voices have been created from the school to the global community (Lansdown, 2010). But it is only recently that children have entered into the discourse as policy actors and the development of children's rights in terms of public participation has been patchy across countries

(Hinton, 2008). Arnott (2008) contends that important theoretical questions about the construction of children as 'policy participants' underlie this patchy implementation. This discourse is explored in some depth in section 3.3 of this chapter. My research into the impact of children's participation in shaping public services requires a strong understanding of the implications of the dominant constructions of childhood in the cultural contexts of each of my case studies. I turn now to examine children's collective 'public' participation in the context of the new governance 'turn' in the UK outlined in chapter two and particularly in relation to devolution in Wales.

3.2.1 *Children participating in governance and policy making in the UK*

Children may often feature in photo-shoots to enhance the family friendly credentials of election candidates, but by way of their lack of franchise, children's rights and interests are traditionally not at the centre of government policy or attention. However, in recent years, Arnott (2008) suggests there are signs that governments across the UK are including children more directly in policies designed to renew democracy and civil society. Similarly, Tisdall and Bell (2006) contend that there has been a shift across the UK towards viewing children as direct participants in the policy process and increased inclusion of children into previously closed policy networks in public decision-making. As discussed in chapter two, debates surrounding constitutional reform in the UK were placed against the rhetoric of rejuvenating government and civil society (Dyer, 2001). The establishment of the Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament were to be part of a new approach to politics which would be more inclusive and participatory.

Attempts to re-cast social democratic institutions in the late 1990s and 2000s in the UK created opportunities to challenge assumptions underpinning the post-war consensus which constructed children as dependents rather than active citizens. This, Arnott (2008) reflects, has important repercussions for the nature of power relations between children, families and the state. As Makrinioti argued, within the welfare state children had their needs articulated and satisfied only implicitly and

indirectly (1994: 274). As the state seeks to reform the 'welfare state' the positioning of children both conceptually and practically has become increasingly contested. Nonetheless, the twenty first century has heralded a clear and strong commitment to children's participation in decision-making in law, policy and practice across the UK (Arnott, 2008; Badham, 2004).

In 2001, the government in England set out an expectation that government departments would develop action plans to involve children in their core mission and work (Children and Young Person's Unit, 2001). A review of this process by the Carnegie Trust indicated that progress was uneven but nonetheless important strides had been made (Cutler and Taylor, 2003; Badham, 2004). Arnott (2008) contends that the Scottish Executive has involved children in policy making and extended areas in which children are constructed as policy participants. For example, children have been offered more involvement in schooling issues such as curriculum choices and school management. While in Northern Ireland the devolution process has had to contend with a different history of conflict and the upholding of civil rights, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 placed particular duties on statutory authorities to take into account the impact of their services and policies on children as well as on other groups (OFMD, 2005).

Taking stock of developments in children's policy and practice since the establishment of devolved government in Wales in 1999, Thomas and Crowley concluded in 2007, that the 'participation agenda' has caught on with 'participation by children in governance and public policy making increasingly becoming an accepted part of practice' (2007:177). The National Assembly for Wales has adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the basis of all its policy making (National Assembly for Wales, 2004) and there has been strong Welsh Government and cross-party support for the strategic development of children and young people's participation across Wales in the last decade. Up until 2011 (when government priorities changed in the light of budget cuts and a change in political leadership) the Welsh Government funded structures to support and enable participation in policy and service development, including youth forums in all

22 local authorities and *Funky Dragon*, a national children and young people's assembly and introduced regulations to make schools councils mandatory in all schools in Wales (WAG, 2005).

A direct legacy of the outgoing First Minister of Wales, Rhodri Morgan, *The Rights of Children and Young Person's Measure 2011* requires the Welsh Government to pay 'due regard' to the UNCRC (NAfW, 2010). Full implementation of this Measure (which equates to a UK law) scheduled for 2014 requires Welsh Ministers to take account of children's views in their policy making in line with Article 12 of the Convention and support the participation of children in the development of a 'Children's Scheme' which will set out how the Government will comply with its obligations. When the Welsh Government are 'involving' children in the drawing up of the scheme it must, the legislation demands, be a process of 'deliberative engagement' not just a tick box, or one-off exercise (Williams and Hoffman, 2012).

The last decade has seen a proliferation of formal structures located in schools and local authorities across the UK to facilitate children's participation in governance and public participation (Tisdall, 2010). In Wales all 22 local authorities and all schools are required by law to have such structures. Some authors are critical of such structures, seeing municipal youth councils or forums as 'top down' and mimicking flawed adult structures and school councils as having limited power, favouring high achievers and excluded from core issues of teaching and learning (Cairns, 2006; Alderson, 2000; Wyse, 2001). Other scholars have noted how the insistence in these state 'owned' structures for children to behave in a particular way and play by the rules of the game, works to advantage the already advantaged and exclude more marginalised children and young people (see Cockburn, 2010; Macpherson, 2008). Tisdall *et al.,* (2008) note that these formal structures have a 'technocratic quality' linked to the managerialist agenda but caution against the polarising of ideas that see formal participation as 'bad' and less formal approaches as 'good', suggesting that different approaches will best suit different locations (Tisdall, 2008:351).

However, as Tisdall (2010) comments, many of these more pessimistic studies of the potential of formal, pupil and civic structures to deliver effective participation for children, were completed some time ago and subsequent research is suggesting a more mixed picture with more children and young people reporting positive benefits of their involvement in school councils and youth forums (Tisdall, 2010; Percy-Smith, 2007; Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Stafford *et al.,* 2003). Undoubtedly, there is much more still to be done in Wales and the other nations of the UK. In Wales, the funding of participation structures remains short term, opportunistic and in times of austerity, vulnerable to cuts.

Skeels and Thomas (2006) argue that support for the development of participation by younger children (10 and under) in public policy is under-developed and the inclusion of 'hard to reach' remains a key issue in Wales. While there is political commitment, supporting structures and many examples of good practice, there is still a need for cultural and organisational change to truly embed within the governance of Wales, the concept of children as policy participants. In conclusion, the literature suggests that devolution in the UK has heralded many more opportunities for the engagement of children in the policy making process in Wales and Scotland. But the extent, to which devolution has delivered inclusive governance for children in Wales, is, more questionable as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

One of the debates most relevant to understanding whether the development of children's 'public' decision-making in the context of 'new' governance has led to real changes in the construction of children as 'policy actors' is the relative emphasis on process or outcomes. This has implications for this study. Arnott (2008) suggests that the question of whether children have more say and influence in both their lives and the wider community is still up for debate with division over the relative importance of *process* over *outcome*.

This tension around the fundamental purpose of children's participation suggests competing ideologies at play. Differing views on the purposes or objectives of

children's participation in governance and policy making are underpinned by competing ideologies about what the concept of 'childhood' actually means, as well as by the vying 'consumerist' and 'democratic' ideologies outlined in chapter two. Whitty and Wisby (2007) in their large scale study of schools councils in England and Wales suggest these latter tensions link back to the 'mutually conflicting' regimes of governance produced by, on the one hand New Labour's concern to directly control events through top down managerialist strategies and institutional constraints and on the other hand, their concern with local participation and collaborative governance. These tensions were explored in chapter two. Approaches to assessing the impact of children's participation and stakeholders' perceptions will need to be shaped by consideration of what impacts are desired or intended (Cockburn, 2010). The next section of this chapter examines the 'childhood' discourse in some depth as it has important implications for the focus of the empirical work in this study and for the data analysis.

If children's participation is favoured by governments for its developmental effects, for example in encouraging more active (and compliant) adult citizens then it could be that children are being constructed as individuals rather than as a legitimate group in the policy process. Allowing children to participate on a collective basis may offer opportunities to influence policy decisions more readily. Thus, it was important to explore the different cultural orientations towards children as participants in governance and policy making that operated in each of the case study contexts.

3.3 Discourses of childhood, children's rights and children as citizens

Children's participation in decisions affecting their lives both individually and collectively has developed alongside understandings of the marginalisation of children's citizenship rights on the 'basis of their difference (real and constructed) from an adult norm of assumed citizen' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005:369). Notwithstanding the tension between emphasising children as a 'group' and the reality of a multiplicity of childhoods, Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) suggest that during the

1990s children and young people were often ignored and denied access to forums where they could be heard. Adults' attitudes and behaviours failed to recognise children's capacity to determine their own lives (Qvortrup 1994). In his analysis of social changes over the past thirty years Parton (2006) suggests that while children and young people have been placed at the centre of policies and practices (recognising that they are persons in their own right) concerns about safeguarding vulnerable children has resulted in increasing control and regulation of their lives - which in turn regulates and constrains their agency.

The discussion now turns to explore different constructions of childhood and perspectives on children's rights and to consider how different theoretical positions inform understanding of children as active participants in the policy making process.

3.3.1 *Childhood*

Childhood in northern Europe in much of the twentieth century has been seen as a distinct stage of life in relation to adulthood (Qvortrup, 2003). But more recently thinking about childhood has changed, influencing adult attitudes to children and their involvement in policy-making. The construction of childhood which sets children apart from adults is now seen as both problematic and contested (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). Traditional theories of childhood rooted in developmental psychology saw childhood only in terms of its position in the structure of society, i.e. in relation to adulthood. Developmental perspectives situate childhood as a stage in the lifecycle, characterised by dependency and immaturity and reinforce the notion that children lack the capacity to be involved in decision making at certain stages or ages (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009).

The view of children as 'little-people-in-the-making' places the status of childhood as having little value in its own right (Qvortrup, 2003). James and Prout (1997) argue that through their constructed 'otherness', children's status in British society is as 'non-persons', relegated to a social, economic, and political marginalisation. This leads to a 'deficit' approach in models of childhood, rather than a 'strengths'

approach that takes into account the diversity of children's experiences and their agency. Qvortrup's work challenged the notion that childhood is just a stage on the way to achieving adulthood (Qvortrup 1994). He argued that children should not be positioned as 'not yets' or 'becomings' but as 'beings'. Children, he argued are social actors who, either as individuals or collectively, have an impact on childhood and in shaping it. Thus, the 'new' sociology of childhood of the 1990s challenged concepts of childhood as universal and the image of children as incomplete. Instead children were to be seen as active participants rather than passive recipients of social welfare provision. As social beings in their own right, children's own voices reflect the reality of their lives (James and Prout, 1990).

Contemporary understandings of childhood reflect the diverse contexts of children's lives, experiences and relationships. Childhood is understood not as a universal category nor with universal features, as experiences of childhood are inevitably shaped by family, environment and economic and socio-political conditions (Hart, 1997; Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). Western views of childhood tend to promote a conception of childhood that reinforces dependency and domesticity (Thomas 2000), ignoring the experiences of children who are for example, in prisons or who are young carers.

Although childhood is defined and understood very differently across societies, Lansdown (2006) argues that all operate with certain assumptions about levels of children's capacities. In the main, Lansdown (2006) suggests, these assumptions derive not from what children are capable of doing, but from what they are entitled to do in a given environment. Thus in the UK, children under 11 years old are widely deemed incompetent to go out very far without adult supervision (Hillman *et al*.,1991). By contrast in many developing countries, there are far greater expectations of responsibility from young children. For example, in parts of Zimbabwe, boys of this age are expected to build their own house while girls are considered capable of running a household. As Lansdown, comments; 'It is not that children in these contrasting environments have intrinsically different capacities:

rather it is that the expectations from and the experiences of children inform their level of competence' (2006: 140).

The discourse on social construction of childhood has influenced thinking about the value of children's perspectives and secured greater legitimacy for promoting children's participatory and citizenship rights informed by children's accounts. Asserting that childhood is a social rather than a biological construct, it reframes childhood as a construct of society at any given time constituted by social and historical features, and recognises the significance of varying theoretical understandings and cultural representations (James and Prout, 1997; Prout, 2005). While this perspective is not without its critics (Lavalette and Cunningham, 2002), it has been central in promoting debate about the status of children and young people in an adult world and the construction of children as participants in policy making and governance (or not).

Article 12 of the UNCRC is an example of a representation of childhood where children are viewed as social persons or 'beings' rather than 'becomings' (Flekkøy and Kaufman, 1997). Prout (2005:1-2) argues that these dualities, popular in the new sociology of childhood in the late twentieth century (while perhaps necessary at the time to ensure the new studies of childhood included attention to children as active social beings and not just as the passive objects of socialization), now need to be reconsidered. Core to Prout's argument for re-connecting the two dichotomies is a conviction that in post modernity, childhood and children (and indeed adulthood and adults) are best conceptualised as both 'beings' and (a multiplicity of) 'becomings' in which all are incomplete and dependent (2005: 66-67).

The practical manifestation of this conceptualisation is developed by Prout in a later paper with Tisdall, where the relational dimensions of public participation are privileged and emphasis given to the 'mutual interdepencies and inter-subjective understandings between adults and children' (Prout and Tisdall, 2006: 243). The authors conclude that 'children's participation cannot be understood outside a set of relationships that constitute all the actors' (Prout and Tisdall, 2006: 243). This

concern with relational and intergenerational aspects of children's participation has been developed by other authors, most notably Percy-Smith (2006) who calls for a more inclusive understanding of children's participation which places children within wider community-based social learning and development. The 'collaborative intergenerational spaces' that Percy-Smith envisions, Mannion (2010:332) suggests 'repositions adults and de-centres their role from one of dominant carer to co-inquirer or interpretive learner with children and young people'. Tisdall and Bell, (2006) likewise call for a re-consideration of the positioning of adults and children in so-called participation initiatives.

The focus of my research has been heavily influenced by these debates not least because the model operating in the Indian case study of Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs), inextricably and purposefully linked children's participation to adult participation structures and capacity building in contrast to the isolation of the children's 'participation' in the other three case studies. Unlike the youth forum and school council in Wales (Lamberton and Marlings) and the children's advisory group in CHiP, the NCPs in ASHA were not stand- alone entities, but were formally linked with other civil society and governance structures. Austin (2010) suggests that this more integrated approach, popular in the international development context, means that children's proposals get broader political, legal and social support.

Empirical work in the UK, has established that in contrast, isolation from adult associational structures and wider governance structures is a common feature in the rash of new deliberative forums established by schools and local authorities across the UK in recent years (see for example, Tisdall, 2010; Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Cairns, 2006). Indeed, later chapters will explore Tisdall and Bell's assertion that the separation of children's participation in this way, 'limits the potential for children's participation to be political, to challenge and insist on change' and ensures that children' remain on the margins of political and policy decision-making' (2006:116).

The approach to researching children's participation in this study encompasses a re-connection of the social and the developmental but, nonetheless, it is also important to recognise that traditional constructions of childhood do present challenges to the idea that children as a group can be 'policy actors'. Social policies focused on children frequently emphasize outcomes related to the future production of good adult citizens neglecting children's 'now' experiences (Holland, 2008). Children are seen as relatively passive and powerless and childhood as a rather inconvenient passing phase. The structuration of the relationships between children and adults in society is very important, power is unequally distributed and children as a group, not withstanding the intersections of class, gender and ethnicity, have less political and economic resources on which to draw on than most adults (Mayall, 2006). The discussion now turns to build on these analyses with reference to debates focused on children's rights.

3.3.2 *Perspectives on children's rights*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and specifically Article 12 have undoubtedly been an important rallying point for children's rights advocates who have used it as a lever to keep children's participation firmly on the policy agenda (McNeish and Newman, 2002: 188). A child rights approach has also been central to contemporary studies of childhood which emphasize children as social actors in their own right, influencing as well as being influenced by the world around them (Prout, 2003).

Attitudes towards children's rights reflect the values and prejudices of society at any given point in time (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). Varying perspectives emphasize points along a continuum where on the one hand children are seen as propertyless, uneconomic individuals with little power who need increased, legitimate opportunities for autonomy and self-determination (Shaw, 1989; Hart, 1997). At the other end of the continuum, children are seen as dependent and less competent than adults and therefore in need of adult protection (Jans, 2004).

Lindsay (1992) identifies three broad perspectives on rights: liberationist, protectionist and pragmatist, which provide a useful starting point when analysing debates about and responses to children's rights. In addition they provide insight, useful to the study, into the complex relationships between children, their families, and policy makers and service providers, who will hold varied positions on what can be seen as a rights continuum.

Liberationists are associated with the work of Holt (1975) and promote children's rights to self-determination and autonomy asserting that children should have the same rights as adults, for example: the right to work, vote, have financial independence, be able to choose where and with whom they live and to have sexual freedom. The liberationist perspective is clearly controversial and denies many of the rights of children outlined in the UNCRC such as those concerned with protection and provision. As Lundy (2007) reminds us a key aspect of human rights is that they are indivisible, interdependent and interconnected. The imperative of Article 12 which affords children the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and for those views to be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, has to be understood alongside other relevant UNCRC provisions, including Article 5 (right to guidance) and Article 19 (right to protection from abuse).

The *Protectionist* approach has its origins in the 'child-saving' philosophies of the late nineteenth century when legislation was first introduced to provide some protection to children in their own home. Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) contend that subsequent legislation and the high levels of state intervention in the lives of children and families have effectively been dominated by protectionist ways of thinking in the UK. Parton (2006) concludes that the dominance of the protectionist perspective has been a source of disempowerment for children and their families. As Parton (2006) explains, children and young people are an increasingly regulated and surveyed group, whose lives are measured by targets and outcomes. Such regulation, Parton suggests, is unlikely to support the voice and agency of children and young people.

Lindsay's (1992) description of the *Pragmatic* approach rests somewhere in the middle of a continuum between liberationist and protectionist approaches. It recognises that children should have the opportunity to express their own views within the context of their evolving capacity, progressively taking on more decisions for themselves (see Lansdown, 2005). The concept of 'evolving capacity' developed by Lansdown (2005) offers an alternative to ideas about competency that are based on age. It recognises that although childhood is not an undifferentiated period and a 17 year old has profoundly different needs and capacities to a six month old baby, there is no universal agreement on what children need for their optimum development, what environments best provide for those needs and what form or level of protection is appropriate for children at a specific age. As illustrated in section 3.3.1 above, the understanding and nature of childhood varies significantly around the world. The key concept of the evolving capacity of the child embodied in article 5 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child incorporates the obligation to provide guidance and direction to children as they grow up but it focuses on capacity rather than age as the key determinant in the exercise of human rights.

The defining feature of the pragmatic approach is the promotion of the rights of children within legislative structures and policies that are defined and imposed by adults. This then means that children's rights to participation have to be balanced by regard to their best interests (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). In the UK, adults have legal rights which if infringed, can be enforced by legal action against some person or organisation. Children's rights are not of this kind. Essentially they are defined and enforced by adults on the child's behalf. Much of the law in the UK concerned with a child's 'right' to be consulted or participate in decisions affecting their lives is couched in terms that allow considerable adult discretion. For example, Section 22 of the Children Act which places a duty on local authorities to consult with children when making decisions about their lives states that the local authority should ascertain the wishes and feelings of the children regarding the matter to be decided 'as far as is reasonably practicable'. Power relations between adult decision-makers and the children affected by the decision-making is therefore a key factor in understanding the impact of children's participation in policy making. It is the

adults, who largely set the rules, assess children's capacities and determine their best interests.

The broad thrust of this inquiry tends to align with the pragmatic approach outlined by Lindsay (1992). I am mindful of the power invested in adult decision-makers and agree with Lansdown (2010) that while children may well now be engaged in advocacy, social and economic analysis, campaigning, research, peer education, community development, political dialogue, programme and project design and in democratic participation in schools, the extent to which their participation actually results in change is still largely dependent on the discretion of adults. The danger, as Tisdall and Bell reflect, is that 'children's engagement is perceived as appealing, though a disposable addition to main governmental business' (2006: 116).

As Roche (1999) argues, the language of children's participation can be too 'cosy' and there is a need to be more critical of the circumstances in which children are asked to participate in decision-making. Lundy (2007) makes a helpful contribution to the debate, proposing a move away from the cosiness of phrases associated with Article 12 such as 'the voice of the child' towards a framework for understanding Article 12 with all of its constituent parts. That is, the child's right to express their views on all matters affecting them freely *and* the child's right for those views to be given due weight. Lundy's concepts of children's right to 'audience' and to 'influence' in addition to 'space' and 'voice' provided a useful analytic tool, to help develop understanding of the factors that work to either enable or inhibit children's forums to impact on policy-making. This brief analysis of perspectives on children's rights provides useful insights into the question of power, emphasising the important role of supportive adults in children's participation. As Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010:362) conclude, adults are crucial to children's participation, professionals have a key role as 'advocates who can ensure that children's perspectives are represented, and also protect them from undue risk'.

The discussion now turns to consider briefly the related and similarly contested concepts of children's citizenship which inform constructions of children as a

legitimate group in the policy making process and therefore of relevance to this inquiry.

3.3.3 *Children and citizenship*

Dominant and polarised ways of conceptualising children are evident in debates about childhood and children's rights (Roche, 1999). Children are either portrayed as in need of protection (from themselves or others), that is, 'child as victim' or as dangerous and in need of discipline, that is, 'child as threat'. Prout (2003) sees this as a reflection of the tensions between control and self-realization in late modernity with rhetoric around children's participation in society working alongside greater surveillance and regulation of children. Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) note that both concepts have been dominant throughout the twentieth century and have informed debates about care and control in social welfare policy. The ambivalent nature of children's relationships to civic society in the UK is further illustrated by the varying ages at which they are allowed to drink alcohol, drive a car, join the army, get married, have a tattoo, gain employment, receive benefits and pay tax while having responsibilities as carers and it still being legally defensible to hit a child.

Citizenship is a contested concept even for adults - with a range of complex and contradictory meanings. While Marshall's (1950) classic definition of citizenship as a collection of civil, political and social rights endures, there are limitations to his analysis. Citizenship can be seen as a mechanism for exclusion as well as inclusion. Coles (1995) notes that Marshall's perspective ignores power structures in society that often serve to exclude groups such as: women, disabled people, black and minority ethnic groups as well as children, from participating in formal expressions of citizenship. Feminists have also been critical of general conceptualisations of citizenship which are inherently gendered. Women's initial exclusion from citizenship was premised on their dependency and perceived lack of competence and rationality. Such reasons are similarly used to deny citizenship to children (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Lansdown (1995) observes that children's exclusion from citizenship is also underpinned by the protectionist discourse discussed earlier in

this chapter with an emphasis on age and understanding rather than on children's evolving capacity.

Citizenship for children essentially means inclusion as legitimate members of society whose voices and perspectives are valued (Willow and Neale 2004). Cockburn (1998) and Roche (1999) argue that to include children within our concept of citizenship we have to change our understanding of what citizenship represents. Moosa-mitha (2005:369) calls for a 'difference-centred' citizenship for children where children are treated as 'differently equal' members of the public culture in which they are full participants'. Jans (2004) calls for a 'child-sized' citizenship. He argues that if citizenship is conceived of as participation in society, rather than more narrowly defined in terms of rights, responsibilities and national identity, and also seen more as a process than a static way of being, then children (and adults) can learn to give meaning and form to active citizenship.

This review of perspectives on childhood, on children as social actors, rights-holders and active citizens encouraged me to explore, through triangulated data generation and analysis, how childhood was constructed in each of the four fieldwork sites and to consider critically how these perceptions helped or hindered children's public participation. The review also encouraged an exploration of relational and spatial aspects of the children's forums and the role of supportive adults. Wyness (2009) drawing on a study of pupil and civic councils in England, similar in make-up to the forums in the Lamberton and Marlings case studies, considers the role that adults play in supporting children's participation. Utilising Moss and Petrie's (2002) juxtapositioning of children's 'spaces' for civic participation with the concept of children's 'place' in society as investments for the future, Wyness (2009) suggests that adults supporting children's participation have to juggle contradictory pressures. On the one hand these workers are circumscribed by the institutional priorities (of the school or local authority) and on the other hand they are trying to ensure the children's forums or councils 'had some influence within structures that on the whole marginalised the position of children and young people' (Wyness, 2009:404).

While Wyness (2009) concludes that it is difficult, for the adults supporting school and youth councils, to reconcile and balance these conflicting pressures, the tensions can also give rise to opportunities. This analysis suggested that the roles of adults who advise the children's forums and the ways in which they support children in navigating and negotiating power and relations with adults in their respective contexts, and how this relates to the impact of the participatory structures on policy-making, would be a rich seam of analysis for this thesis. This review now moves to reflect on the actual practice of children's public participation - exploring definitions and conceptual models that informed the design of this study.

3.4 The practice of children's participation: definitions and models

There are multiple and sometimes competing definitions of participation in decision making. Hart's definition also used by UNICEF (2003) positions participation as a right of citizenship that involves 'sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives' (1992:5). There is also a distinction between participation in collective decision-making and participation in decisions about the lives of individual children (Thomas, 2007). My study is concerned with children's collective participation in decision-making about public policies that affect children's lives, particularly children's involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of public services and in the governance of social welfare and development organisations.

Kirby with Bryson (2002) note there are different levels and types of involvement in this 'public' decision-making including one-off consultations (e.g. surveys, focus groups); regular or extended programmes of involvement at both the organisational (e.g. school councils) and area wide strategic level (e.g. council youth forum; social action youth groups); as well as integrated daily participatory approaches (e.g. democratic schooling). Projects vary from consultations through to self-advocacy

projects with differentiation related to project aims and the relative power between children and adults (Lansdown, 2006).

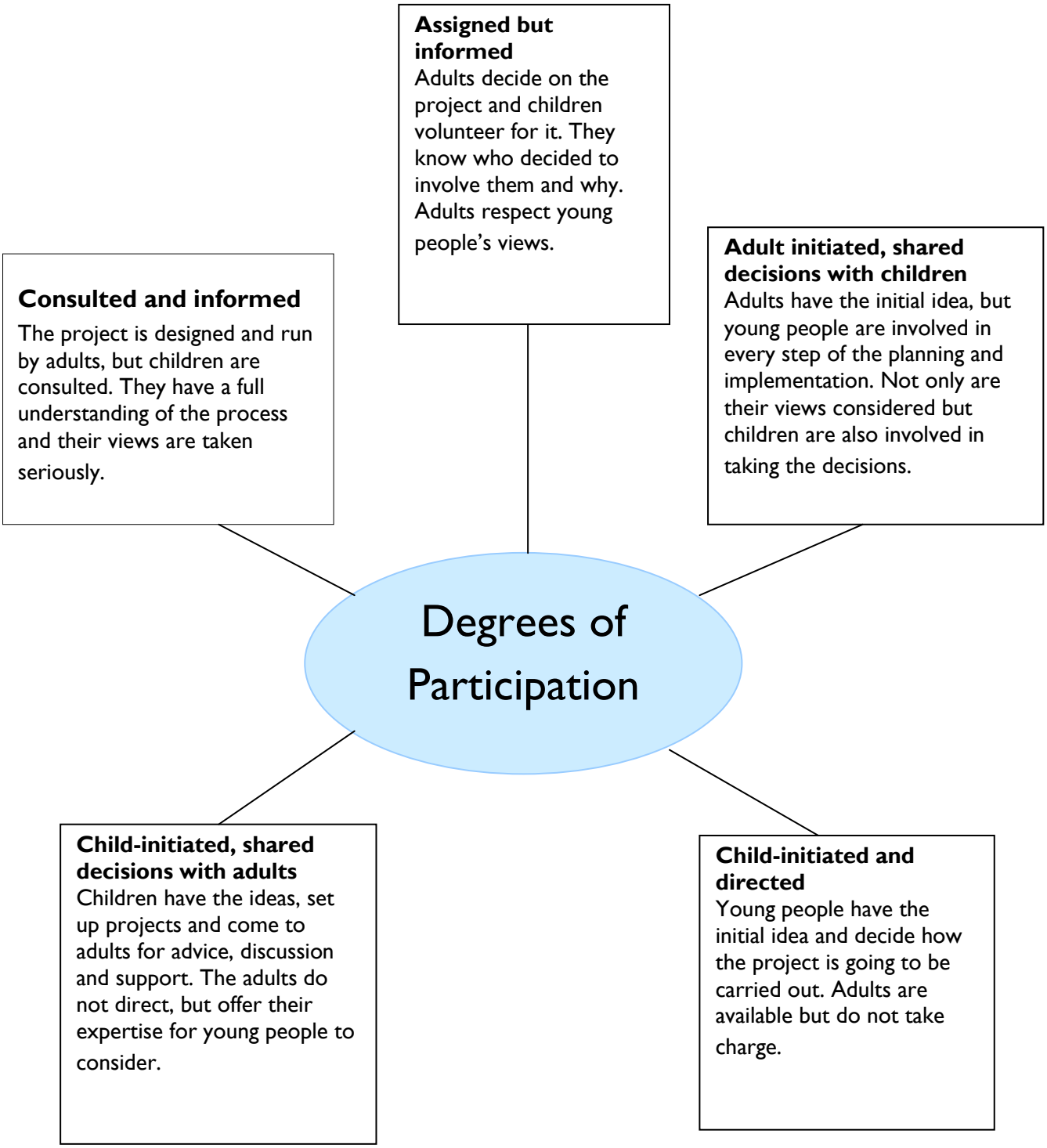
The literature makes a distinction between 'formal', managed, top-down participation and more 'bottom up' participative democracy (Cockburn, 2010; Badham, 2004). Thus youth forums, school councils and national, government funded consultations would be examples of the former and young people's mobilisation to protest against the Iraq war in March 2003, an example of the latter (Badham, 2004). Shier (2010) commenting on some common tensions in children and young people's participation practice in Nicaragua and the UK, uses the concepts of 'invited' and 'popular' deliberative spaces for children's participation as developed by Cornwall (2004) and described in chapter two. With illustrations from his work in Nicaragua, Shier explains how there is rarely a simple choice to be made between 'popular' and 'invited' spaces, the boundaries between the two spaces are unstable and it is more helpful to think of a range or spectrum of participation spaces. The critical point he says is that 'the power and effectiveness of these spaces lies not in the spaces as such, but in the connections and movements between them' (2010: 4).

This study is focused on examples of the more formal, extended programmes of involvement in the UK and a more 'bottom-up' development in rural India. The interest here is in the connections between what goes on in these invited spaces and the agendas and immediate concerns of the child participants that may be initially articulated in the more popular spaces. For example, fieldwork in this research explored whether youth forums and school councils such as Lamberton and Marlings are an effective means for children to influence policy and services in a way that they would perceive as connecting to their own agendas, concerns and experiences. This is then contrasted to changes at ASHA, brought about by the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments operating in villages across an agricultural region of Tamil Nadu in India and the impact of those changes on children's daily lives and experiences.

Much of the existing research into children's participation focuses on the different 'levels' of participation and what makes for meaningful participation, that is, participation where children's views and opinions are taken into account and given due weight in the decision-making process (McNeish and Newman, 2003). A common reference point in this body of work is Hart's 'ladder of participation' (1992, 1997) an adaptation of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969). According to Hart (1997:40), the model is intended as a metaphor to 'Illustrate the different degrees of initiation and collaboration children can have when working on projects with adults…….more importantly it was meant to show what is not participation'.

Thus the balance of power can be seen as a crucial determinant of effective participation. The first three rungs of the ladder (tokenism, decoration and manipulation) are classified as 'non-participation'. The remaining five rungs demonstrate different degrees of participation with the highest rung being where children initiate the project and share decisions with adults. Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) acknowledge that for its time Arnstein's ladder was ground-breaking, presenting practitioners with a model to reflect on their practice and develop more radical ways of working. The main criticisms of this model (see Treseder, 1997) centre around the fact that the image of a ladder suggests that one should be seeking to reach the top i.e. that participation initiatives should aim to operate at the highest level of participation thereby inferring that initiatives operating at a lower level are somehow inferior. Treseder (1997) argues that different levels may be appropriate depending on the reason for participation and uses the concept of a wheel with varying degrees of power depicted as spokes that may be applicable in different circumstances (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Degrees of participation



From: Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making.* London: Save the Children.

This study utilises Treseder's wheel as a framework for assessing the degrees or 'scope' of children's participation in each of the selected case studies with reference to the views of the key stakeholders. Finally, in this section Kirby *et al.,* (2004) report on assessing the potential impacts or benefits of children's participation and they provide a useful framework for understanding the changes that result from children's 'public' participation. This framework was adopted for exploring the changes that were seen to have resulted from the children's participation in each of the four case studies. Kirby *et al.*'s (2004) impact assessment framework spans three broad dimensions of change: the impact on children themselves in terms of confidence, skills and access to opportunities; the impact on social and power relations between children and adults; and finally, the impact on policies and services.

This research focuses predominantly on the last dimension, the power relations between children and adult decision-makers and the images of childhood that shape these relations together with the motivations of those seeking to involve children in policy making. Chapter four which sets out the methods selected for this study describes the adaption of Kirby *et al.*'s (2004) framework in detail. This review of key definitions and models used in previous research assisted in operationalising some of the key concepts at the centre of my research and provided a number of useful frameworks for generating and analysing data. The discussion now turns to review previous research into the impact of children's participation on policy-making in order to generate further conceptual insights that informed the study design.

3.5 The impact of children's participation on policy and service development

As previously noted, there has been little empirical work to date to assess the impact or outcomes of children or indeed adults' participation on policy making. The research that there is emphasises the developmental benefits that attach mainly to the individuals who participate rather than the instrumental benefits associated with the decisions or policies made as a result of more participation.

Most of the literature reflects an assumption that children's participation in decision-making can only result in positive impacts or benefits with the omni-present assumption that involving children in civic life will enable them to learn about rights and responsibilities and become good, adult citizens (Drakeford *et al.,* 2009).

Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie (2006) caution against an unquestioning acceptance of this discourse warning against dichotomizing parents and children's rights, as if these are in opposition, when children and parents together may be marginalised through other factors such as class, race and gender. The authors suggest that child participation may privilege the already privileged. The perspective that the formal children's participation structures in this study (as with the normative assumptions about citizenship outlined in section 3.3.3), can be exclusionary encouraged me to reflect on the recruitment and inclusion strategies employed in each of the case studies and to examine the extent to which they enabled the representation of children from a variety of backgrounds and not just the more privileged.

The lack of research into the impact of children's participation remains a concern – under the UNCRC children have the right to both express a view and for that view to be given 'due weight' . Shier suggests that 'there is no point in enabling children to express their views if they are not going to be taken into account' (2001: 113). The literature suggests the reasons for the absence of research into the impact of participation are complex and not just related to the methodological challenges. They relate too, to the motivations and purposes invested in children's participation by the state, as I shall discuss below.

Previous research evaluating the impact of children's participation

Kirby with Bryson's (2002) review of the evidence of the benefits of children and young people's participation revealed surprisingly little empirical data. The benefits to the children and young people involved are most commonly described in terms

of knowledge, skills, confidence and self-esteem (Kendall, 2010; Halsey, *et.al.,* 2006; Kirby *et al.,* 2003; Fitzpatrick *et al*., 1998). In their overview of evaluations and research relating to children and young people's participation, Kirby with Bryson (2002) note that the types of skills developed were generally related to group and communication skills as well as other skills that were more directly related to the activity in which they had been involved (for example,. financial management, drama, research (2002: 24). Other benefits recorded in Kirby with Bryson's (2002) review include: benefits for education and employment and the fact that young people got some enjoyment from their activities. Halsey *et al.*'s (2006) review of the literature reported similar benefits for children and young people and while they did locate studies reporting impacts on organisational practices (e.g. refining mechanisms for young people's participation) and some strategies and polices (e.g. changes to health services and facilities in response to the views of chronically ill and disabled children), they also reported that any assessments of impact were hard to achieve and were rarely done in a systematic way .

Discussions about the benefits to the wider community reflect traditional views of childhood. Kirby *et al*., (2003) note that the process of being involved in decision making is seen to encourage young people to be more responsible for their actions bringing immediate benefits to community relations. The study by Fitzpatrick *et al*., found that youth involvement in urban regeneration 'had a very positive impact on the way that young people were perceived by officials and councillors' (1998: 30).

Other authors conclude that the wider community benefits because children and young people learn how to play an active role as citizens in adulthood. This issue is seen in some quarters as important, 'particularly for the future of democracy, because early involvement ensures their future commitment, thus saving a democracy that is currently at risk' (Council of Europe, 2003:109). With high levels of concern about adult voter participation this is an argument that can be particularly influential with politicians. However, it is difficult to find any evidence that young people who have been involved in participative activities are more likely to vote in adulthood. This argument illustrates the view of childhood as 'children

becoming' which as noted earlier in this chapter, remains a major factor in the UK in terms of encouraging greater 'public' participation by children and young people.

Kirby with Bryson (2002) found a stronger focus on the impact of participatory activity on participants themselves rather than on policies and services with far more detail available on processes rather than outcomes. Sinclair observed that 'more is known about how to support young people to make participation more rewarding for them – but less about how that participation can bring about change' (2004: 115). Despite this, Kirby *et al.,* (2003) found that a number of organisations were hoping the involvement of children and young people would lead to improvements in service development, client support, experience of services, access to and use of services, and service accountability. Indeed, helping to improve services was identified by most organisations in their research as an important reason for involving children.

Interestingly, Percy-Smith's (2007) evaluation of the development of young people's participation plans in two Children's Trusts in England also identifies the importance service providers and policy makers place on gaining messages about more effective services but compares this with the overriding value young people place on the personal benefits of their participation, for example, the impact on their learning and development and on their confidence.

Reasons for the lack of previous research

There are many practical difficulties associated with appropriate and rigorous frameworks to evaluate public participation as Burton (2009) outlines but the literature on the impact of children's participation suggests to me that the absence of evaluations of the policy outcomes of children's participation is strongly linked to dominant perceptions that the desired outcomes of children's participation are about shaping future adult citizens rather than delivering more effective public services. Cockburn (2010: 310) suggests that the best pre-condition for deliberative projects involving children to have an impact and to demonstrate tangible 'results'

is ‘for those establishing deliberative projects to be clear about what kind of *decision* participants are able to make’.

Tisdall (2010) divides motivations for children’s participation into four types, which she describes as: appeals to moral and legal rights; consumerism and service user involvement; addressing democratic engagement; and finally, enhancing children’s well being and development (2010: 322). The apparent links between motivations, purposes and outcomes suggested by this literature review and by Tisdall’s (2010) typology, encouraged exploration of the data to ascertain the motivations of the organisations which established and supported the four children’s forums in this study. Later chapters will reveal how further analysis worked to locate these motivations and purposes within the particular constructions of childhood operating in each context and will explore the relationships between these variables and the perceived impact of the forums’ deliberations on public policy.

In their comparative study of social participation by children and adolescents in Italy and Scotland, Rossi and Baraldi (2009) emphasise how the ambivalences concerning the social construction of childhood influence the overall goals and perceived impacts of participation initiatives. They cite teachers and education workers in both countries selecting learning as the main result of participation rather than empowerment and active participation in public decisions. Franklin and Sloper’s (2007) study into the range, nature and outcomes of disabled children’s participation in England highlights the importance of having a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of participation amongst all partners in the process. They concluded that there were few examples of disabled children directly influencing service commissioning, service priorities or service evaluation and they call for more evaluation and attention placed on defining and measuring outcomes of participation to help services plan participation more effectively.

Kirby with Bryson (2002) note that to evaluate participatory activities programmes effectively we need to be much clearer about their aims and objectives. Given the power imbalances between young people and adults, Sinclair (2004) argues that it is

particularly important for the adults to check their own motivations and their preparedness to work in partnership and to recognise the validity of the child's agenda. Clarity and shared understandings of the aims and objectives of policy making are often problematic and evaluating the influence of one particular group on potentially complex decisions is undoubtedly difficult. Policy makers and service planners will generally have to balance a variety of interests and discerning the relationship between evidence and policy making is notoriously problematic. Tisdall and Davis' (2004) policy network analysis of a Scottish initiative involving disabled children in designing a White Paper suggests that other interest groups, including NGOs, can help children to lever more power within the policy making process but they also note how in some of the deliberations in their example, it was parents' interests that trumped those of the children.

A number of authors have aired concerns about the extent to which children's participation impacts and benefits children's lives (Tisdall and Davis, 2004; Chawla *et al.,* 2005*).* As De Winter argues (1997), it is not enough just to provide structures for children to engage in decision-making if those structures do not bring about any change in their ability to participate as equal citizens. Young people are frequently consulted but rarely do they hear what happens to their view or the changes that follow (Taylor and Percy-Smith, 2008). To date it seems much of the concern in practice and in the literature has been about avoiding 'non-participation' and aiming for an appropriate level and quality of participatory practice. The chapter now concludes with a summary of the most important ideas and concepts arising from this literature review and notes how these influenced the research design.

3.6 Conclusion: Are children becoming active participants in the policy process?

This review has described how devolution in the UK in 1999 seemingly opened up new opportunities for children's 'public' participation in Wales and cited debates about the relative importance of the participation *process* over *outcomes* within governance theories and the 'childhood' discourse. Exploration of the different

perspectives on childhood and children's rights illustrated how situated constructions influence how children's participation in policy making (and its desired outcomes) is perceived. The review highlighted work that emphasises the mutual interdepencies of children and adults and the relational aspects of children's 'public' participation. This perspective encouraged me to consider the important role of adults in supporting children's effective participation in policy-making. The governance and governmentality theories explored in chapter two, which afforded a more nuanced understanding of power as a fluid and multi-dimensional concept, also suggested that the action of the supporting adults in 'navigating the tensions' inherent in children's public participation, should be a key theme to be explored throughout my research (Shier, 2010; Taylor *et al,.*2009).

Reflections on the definitions and models of children's participation in section 3.4 suggested a number of useful analytic tools for use in this study. These included Cornwall's (2004) concepts of 'invited' and 'popular' participation spaces that have recently been applied by Shier (2010) to an analysis of children's participation in the UK and in Nicaragua; Treseder's (1997) framework for conceptualising the degree or scope of children's participation and Kirby *et al.'*s (2004*)* framework for understanding the changes that might be expected to result from children's participation.

The review highlighted the lack of previous research into the impacts of children's participation and questioned the motivations of organisations establishing forums and structures to support children's public participation. This encouraged a comparative analysis of the relationships between the objectives of the organisations in the four case studies with regard to child participation and its impacts. It was also noted that the tensions between participation as empowering and participation as control highlighted in previous research, provoke important questions that needed to be explored about the inclusiveness of the participation mechanisms under investigation and the links to wider political and economic structures. Overall these perspectives indicated that it was important to consider the social and cultural context in which children are located and to consider

critically how perceptions of childhood, enabled or inhibited children's participation to have an impact on public decision-making.

Adopting these perspectives also had implications for the methods of inquiry that were selected to investigate the impact of children participation. The 'new' sociology of childhood favours qualitative methodologies that consider children's own accounts and place children as active participants and 'meaning makers' in the research process (Holland, 2008). Although, it is important to be mindful that a reliance on qualitative methods can divert focus from the pervasive structural issues which quantitative methods can more readily highlight. However, a desire to understand children's own accounts, the meaning events have for children, how they understand themselves and their relationships with others have informed the choice of methodology employed in this study.

The review in chapter two of the contributions that governance theories offer to this research and the reflections in chapter three pinpointed a number of important considerations for further research and specifically for this study. The final point to note from this chapter is that evaluating the impact of children's participation will be a challenging task. The next chapter will now outline the methodological approach and response to this challenge.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the detail of the research design and includes:

- an explanation of the choice of setting and population and the methods selected;
- a description of the data collection methods used;
- a description of the approach to analysis; and
- a review of the ethical considerations.

The strategies employed to build rigour into the design and execution of the research are also outlined. The chapter concludes with reflections on the adequacy of the approach taken. The chapter includes consideration too of the general reflective approach adopted and aims to make more visible how the research was influenced by my understanding of the social world, including my perceptions of children and my views on what constitutes knowledge about them as research participants and subjects.

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of children's participation on shaping public policy and services and explore the factors that advance the influence of the children's forums on public policy or governance and the conditions that work to block or frustrate the children's influence. A list of possible research questions was generated with reference to previous research and theoretical scholarship. I prioritized questions to ensure a manageable and coherent research project, while acknowledging that these questions may require modification as the study progressed. The headline question the research was seeking to address was: How does children's participation (through deliberative forums established for that purpose) impact on the governance of public services? This was broken down to a series of sub-questions:

- What changes in public services have occurred as a result of children's participation in policy making and service development?

- How do children/support workers /managers/policy makers understand how children's views influence the design, implementation and evaluation of public services?

- What can be seen as enabling or inhibiting children's influence on public-decision-making?

4.2 Research design

Consideration of the most appropriate research design to employ was informed by a number of factors. Firstly, I was guided by the nature of the research questions, secondly, the learning from the review of previous methodological approaches to evaluating children's participation and plausible theoretical frameworks (set out in the preceding chapters) and thirdly, my own ontological and epistemological position and pragmatic considerations.

The research is a longitudinal, qualitative, multi-method case study design with four case studies. I was motivated to try to capture tangible evidence of the impact or changes that have resulted from children's participation in public policy development. As outlined in earlier chapters, in the political context in the UK, I believe evidence of the impacts of children's participation in public policy is needed to shape the financial and institutional support of children's 'public' participation. Increasingly in austere times, governments and donors are demanding what they see as 'hard' evidence of outcomes to support budget allocations.

However, the literature also alerted me to understand that 'all is not what it seems', that views on what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge is constructed in the social world serve to challenge the concepts of objectivity, of evidence and the very definitions of the 'impacts' that I wanted to assess (Hammersley and Atkinson,

1983). As I read, observed and understood more of the debate about what constitutes 'evidence' in policy research, the influence of values and positionality as well as the broader implications of structural and cultural factors in each of my research sites, I recognised the need to modify my original ideas about a suitable research design to fit more comfortably with my own ontological, epistemological, theoretical and ethical position.

The research was designed to enable the changes in policy and public services that the children in the forums said they wanted to see (their 'change objectives') at point A, to be contrasted with stakeholders' accounts of what changes had been brought about by the children's influencing activities, nine to 12 months later, at point B. Points A and B were determined by the forums' annual cycles, for example at Marlings - at the beginning and end of the school year. It was recognised that there will be a multitude of variables that could intervene and impact on policy outcomes between points A and B. Nonetheless as an exploratory inquiry this design allowed for a sense of appraisal of two points in time that might allow some inference about the content and nature of the impact of the children's forums on policy-making. Mid-point reviews afforded valuable opportunities to observe the forums and the interactions between the support workers and the children and gather reflections on the influencing activities the children were engaged in. It was not practically possible to visit India on more than one occasion and with ASHA, more ethnographic fieldwork was conducted over an intense three week period, rather than at two points in time.

The research design is one that aims to build understanding of the relationship between children's participation and policy or service change, by examining the participation and policy development processes as well as the impacts. Using participatory methods children were invited to assess the 'scope' or degrees of participation (using Treseder's model of 'degrees' presented in Figure 1, page 70) and the 'quality' of the participation with reference to a set of internationally agreed practice standards (Save the Children, 2007). The selection of four case studies enabled comparisons to be made across a range of different children's

forums and created sufficient space and time to use a multi-method strategy whereby data could be generated from many different sources and then triangulated. This involved comparing and contrasting differences in the data related to the perspectives and purposes of the accounts of the different research participants (Maxwell, 2006).

Other design strategies were considered. A large-scale survey, a more controlled experiment or a purely theoretical exploration of the issue, were alternative approaches that could have been justified. Although the case study design imposed limits on the generalisability of the findings and the extent to which the research could explore the different experiences of children as affected by gender, class and ethnicity, the strengths balanced these limitations. Focusing on only four settings or case studies allowed for a more rounded and holistic study than with other designs (Hakim, 1987) and the choice of depth over breadth enabled me to stay true to my view of childhood and create opportunities to explore children's own perspectives within an atmosphere of respect, openness and genuine intent to listen to children's views (Morrow and Richards, 1996). I worked to ensure that the process of adapting and refining the research design was systematic and reflective as well as, inevitably at times, informed by pragmatic considerations. I turn now to set out my standpoint, my ontological and epistemological perspectives and theoretical assumptions that informed my research design and choice of methods.

4.3 My standpoint

It is important for researchers to be reflective (Taylor and White, 2000). I understand this to mean that we should consider how our own personal experience shapes our ontological, epistemological and theoretical viewpoints and influences how we do research and the meanings we attach to what we discover about the social world. McCracken (1988) maintains that a detailed and systematic appreciation of the researcher's personal experience with the topic helps to identify cultural categories and relationships that influence the formulation of the research questions; prepares the researcher for the 'rummaging' that will occur during data

analysis and helps to distance the researcher. He continues:

> Only by knowing the cultural categories and configurations that the investigator uses to understand the world is he or she in a position to root these out of the terra firma of familiar expectation. This clearer understanding of one's vision of the world permits a critical distance from it….the investigators experiences and biases are the very stuff of understanding and explication (McCracken, 1988: 32).

Prior to describing the research design and the data generation methods selected for investigating children's participation in public decision-making, I set out below my standpoint – my interest in the topic, my motivation for undertaking the research, my theoretical assumptions (including my perceptions of children) and my political and ethical position and thus set the context for the methodological and ethical choices made in designing the research.

My own interest in this area stems from my work in the non-governmental and statutory social welfare sector in Wales advocating for children's rights and in particular, a child's rights to be listened to, to be heard, to be taken seriously and to participate in decisions about policies and services that affect them, as set out in Article 12 of the UNCRC. As noted in chapter three, progress in establishing structures and mechanisms to support pupil and civic participation in Wales has been particularly impressive, with a government funded national assembly for children and young people (Funky Dragon), a Children's Commissioner and a number of other structures and mechanisms to support the inclusion of children's views and interests in policy making. However, the foundations are still fairly shaky. Public funding for many of the national and local participation structures is not assured, there are few mechanisms to engage children under the age of 11 in policy-making or shaping public services and there have been few attempts to capture evidence of policy outcomes (Thomas and Crowley, 2007).

Having worked as a policy officer for an NGO to progress this agenda (since the National Assembly for Wales was established in 1999) and having seen the proliferation of opportunities for children's participation in policy-making under

successive Welsh governments, I was keen to reflect and enquire into whether policy makers and service planners were listening to children's views and taking these into account in determining policy and planning services.

Ontological and epistemological perspective

I view children as well as other key stakeholders as social actors in their own right, with their own understandings, motivations and ideas (Mason, 1996). I recognise that interactions take place within a cultural world that defines childhood as a time of dependency, protection and learning, as 'not-yet-citizens' rather than as a valued state of itself (Moosa-mitha, 2005). Epistemologically, I recognise that in my exploration of the impacts of children's participation, it is important to recognise that there is more than one 'truth', more than one impact and many different types of evidence depending on different experiences, perspectives and meaning-making (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

However, this study follows Miles and Huberman (1994) in the tradition of the 'critical realism' of Bhaskar (1989) which understands that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also objectively in the world and that some stable relationships are to found amongst them with regularities and sequences linking together phenomena (Miles and Huberman, 1994:4). As with Miles and Huberman (1994), I agree with interpretivists that knowledge is a social and historical product and affirm the importance of the subjective and the central role of meaning-making in the social world, but I also want to 'transcend' these processes and contribute to building theories that account for a real world that is bounded. But, I believe it is important to get beyond the social world as purely symbolic, of being only a 'construction' - albeit that we have to take into account the various interpretations and meaning-making by different stakeholders and indeed researchers themselves. Such a position suggests that it is possible to research and learn from social policies, programmes and initiatives in order to modify and improve their effectiveness (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). I want to conduct a piece of evaluation research which respects the duality of structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). Finally, as a feminist

researcher I am concerned with reflexivity and challenge the notion that any research can be value free.

Theoretical assumptions

The empirical study is theory led and theory building in design. I aim to test and further develop a conceptual framework that categorizes and attempts to define the impacts of children's participation on public policy (and how they can best be assessed) with reference to extant literature and previous research. The approach underpinning the research design is essentially abductive (Peirce, 1931-1958, cited in Manning, 2001:149), I adapted the conceptual framework developed by Kirby *et al.* (2004) as an analytic tool to explore possible patterns and categorise the impact of children's participation across three dimensions of change (see Figure 2). With abductive reasoning, Coffey and Atkinson (1996:150) note, there is movement between substantive and generic levels of analysis or what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term substantive and formal theory. The substantive analytic standpoint is focused on comparisons and interpretation growing out of the actual data. At every stage of the research process there was a weaving back and forth between the data and the theoretical models for measuring participation that I utilised. Thus the analytical process overall was cyclical and iterative rather than linear (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Figure 2: Children's participation: core dimensions of change

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: CORE DIMMENSIONS OF CHANGE

1. *Impact on services, policies and institutions*

- Children's views being heard leads to the improved quality/effectiveness of laws, policies and practice;
- Improved structures, institutional policies, resources and mechanisms for involving children more within decision making.

2. *Impact on children's personal development and well-being*

- Children's self esteem and self confidence is increased.
- Children acquire additional skills
- Children have positive experiences

3. *Impact on social and power relations*

- Children have greater influence on decisions affecting different areas of their lives;
- Enhanced dialogue and support between children and adults (including professionals, family, decision makers and wider community, as appropriate to each context);
- Enhanced dialogue and support between peers (if working in group setting) – including improved gender relations;
- Children develop greater self-efficacy (i.e. belief in their ability to affect the world).

Adapted from Kirby *et al.,* 2004

In addition to Kirby *et al.*'s framework of core dimensions of change, I utilised Lansdown's (2006) concept of the 'scope' of children's participation (which refers to the relative power of adults and children) using Treseder's (1997) typology of 'degrees' outlined in chapter three. I had hoped to explore patterns and relationships between the scope of the children's participation, the quality of the practice (against a set of international standards) and any impacts. However, the participatory methods I selected to gather feedback from children and support workers on the quality of the participatory activities yielded little useful data so this aspect of the original design was abandoned.

The view of childhood in this study positions children as an oppressed group in our society; a group who lack power because they have no franchise and who are especially vulnerable because of their dependence on public services (Franklin, 2002). My perspective is also influenced by theories of governance that seek to explain the nature of power and its exercise as fluid and multi-dimensional but also shaped by dominant adult-centric interests. As Pinkerton (2004:9) asserts, it is important when evaluating children's participation in policy development not just to focus on what has been done but also to place 'charting and analyzing the power relationships and interactions between stakeholders at its heart'.

My theoretical assumptions also include an understanding of the social construction of childhood which implies the separation of childhood and adulthood giving rise to an imperative to recognise childhood as an important state in its own right; not just a state of 'becoming' (Butler and Williamson, 1994:13). This perspective recognises that social phenomena and meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (including children) in their everyday interaction (Bryman, 2004). In my research I wanted to get at those meanings as constructed by children, by practitioners, service managers and by 'decision-makers', in order to get a full and rounded understanding of the phenomena I was investigating. I integrated this constructivist perspective in my research design by, as Yin (2003) suggests, ensuring that I relied on multiple sources of evidence, with data explored and cross-checked in a triangulated fashion. In addition, I continually reflected during data collection and analysis on what lay behind the construction of accounts I was hearing, reading and trying to make sense of.

Political and ethical dimensions of my research approach

Politically I am concerned that my research contributes to changes in policy and practice; changes that support more meaningful and sustainable participation for children and young people in Wales. As a feminist researcher I am concerned to hear and present the voices of those marginalised in society (Roberts, 1981), in this

case, children. I wanted children's voices and their understandings of participatory activity and its effects to be centre stage. Because of children's limited power and status, ethical considerations required me to pay careful attention to issues of power when conducting my research with children and marginalised communities (Alderson, 1995).

My biography makes it clear that politically and morally I come from a child rights and feminist perspective. I wanted to conduct the research in a collaborative and participatory manner. After careful consideration, I did not choose to conduct a classic participatory study (Holland, 2008) with children involved in all aspects of the research including the data generation and the overall research design. This was because I wanted to develop a design across a number of diverse settings and generate comparable data on indicators relating to more concrete and objective understandings of the concepts (albeit based on the understandings of children and other key stakeholders) across my four case studies, mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way (Mason, 2006:1). In order to have involved children fully in the research I would have had to do something much more small scale due to the time needed to involve children in design and analysis. Nonetheless, I took steps to put children's perspectives and experiences at the heart of the data collection.

My political and ethical viewpoints, along with the purpose of the research, set important boundaries for my research design which I have made explicit. Within these parameters then, I want to privilege my active involvement as a researcher, be reflective and open-minded and deliver findings and claims that closely reflect the social constructions of reality of my research participants (Cho and Trent, 2006).

4.4 Choice of settings and populations

Having committed to a multiple case study approach, careful consideration was given to the choice of the cases. The cases were selected in line with Flyvbjerg's 'critical case', that is a case that is of 'strategic importance to the general problem'

(2001: 78). The advice is to select a case that is 'most likely' or 'least likely'. I worked to select two cases (one in Wales and one international) where it was most likely that children will have influenced decisions and shaped public services and most likely that key stakeholders would be sensitised to the concept of that participation having an impact and two cases where this was 'least likely'.

My selection of the Welsh case studies employed other practical criteria including: the distance from my home and University, the willingness of the project manager to support the research and the likely prospect of being able to assess the impact of issues newly raised by children as a focus for their influencing activities during the timeframe of my study. These criteria and the initial research questions suggested a range of settings and populations, including: local authority youth forums; school councils; specialist forums for marginalised groups, e.g. young carers, looked after children, Gypsy/Travellers, young refugee and asylum seekers; and community youth groups. With advice and practical assistance from the national consortium for children and young people's participation in Wales, a search was conducted for initiatives in Wales that fitted these criteria. The Lamberton youth forum was selected because it was seen by the consortium as successful in terms of children and young people influencing decisions about service development and provision in local communities. The youth forum involved children and young people in public decision-making in a range of ways, incorporating a range of levels of decision making. It was not a unique structure and whilst not exactly typical, it was identified as fairly representative of local authority youth forums across Wales' 22 local authorities in a recent mapping exercise undertaken by the consortium (Save the Children, 2006).

The second case – a school council in a primary school was selected as the 'least likely' partly because of the young age of children and partly because it was a newly established forum. The participation of children under 10 in public policy is far less well developed in Wales than for older children and young people. Another factor suggesting 'least likely' was the history at the school which had recently come out of a difficult period under the leadership of a new headteacher. There were particular

challenges within this school which serves a young immigrant community with over ninety five percent of the pupils not having English as their first language. Figure 3 provides descriptive information on the two Wales case studies.

Figure 3: Wales case studies

WALES CASE STUDIES

Lamberton youth forum: A local authority youth forum for young people aged 11-25 in south Wales. About 100 young people are members of the forum, representing school councils, youth clubs and other youth support services. The forum meets bi-monthly and works to influence policy and services that affect young people. Issues to be worked on are selected at the annual AGM and sub-groups are formed to take the influencing work forward. The issues worked on by the forum during the course of my research included: the availability and accessibility of careers advice; the allocation of Educational Maintenance Grant (EMA); improving local tourist attractions to make them more young people friendly; improving the environment in poor communities (particularly finding better ways of dealing with litter/rubbish)

Marlings school council: A newly established school council in a primary school in south Wales. Members are aged between 4-11 years of age. Each year group elects two members to sit on the school council for the school year. The school council meets fortnightly and works on issues of their choice, although in reality they look to the support teacher to suggest a range of options. The issues worked on by the school council during the course of my research included: a Healthy Eating campaign; toys and equipment for the playground; fundraising for the Haiti earthquake.

While a large part of my motivation for conducting the study was to explore whether devolution in Wales has delivered more inclusive governance for children in Wales, I was aware from time spent working for an international non-governmental organisation and from the literature that there was a great deal of good practice taking place in the majority world and I was keen to maximise the potential for learning (Lansdown, 2006). The selection of my international case studies was far more opportunitist and pragmatic than had been the case in Wales and must be recognised as a convenience sample (Bryman, 2004). However, on reflection the two international case studies also mirrored Flyvbjerg's 'critical case' criteria. CHiP was an organisation I knew well and I was aware that the children's

advisory group had got off to a shaky start the previous year, so I expected this to be a 'least likely' case. ASHA and the NCPs it supported was recommended to me by an ex-colleague as an example of a community-based approach to children's participation in public decision-making that had achieved change in the living environments and provisions for marginalised children and was thus a candidate for the 'most likely' category. Figure 4 below provides information on each of the international case studies.

Figure 4: International case studies

INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES

CHiP: An advisory group of children who are beneficiaries of an international non-governmental organisation. The children's advisory group was established in 2008 and has 12 members. There are two young people from each of the six 'regions' of the world that the NGO works in. The advisory group meets annually in London and works intermittently through email during the year. The issues worked on by the group during my research included: an accountability charter; campaign against the closure of a programme in one country; establishing mechanisms to ensure that decisions taken by the board of trustees and the senior management team are informed by the views of child beneficiaries.

ASHA: Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) set up in 13 rural villages in Tamil Nadu, south India. The villages are Dalit – the lowest caste in Indian society. All children aged between 6 and 18 years are automatically members of the village NCP. The parliament elects ministers including a prime minister, an education minister and a health minister and others as required. The ministers receive training on child rights and their role and function. The NCPs meet weekly and are supported by older young people who also run a supplementary education programme. The issues worked on by these NCPs during my research include: the removal of an illegal liquor store in the village; replacing an approach road; the quality of teaching in school; the destruction of an insect nest.

Research participants

Within each study, I arranged to interview or undertake focus groups with a minimum number of participants from each stakeholder category (children, support

workers, managers, decision-makers, sponsors or governors). In some of the case study sites, there were opportunities to interview or hold a focus group discussion with additional participants and these were taken up where practically possible. In India the nature of the setting and of the fieldwork provided opportunities to interview a small number of parents and community leaders. Figures 5 and 6 set out the number and categories of interviews and focus group participants in each of the case studies. A total of 34 adults were interviewed across the four sites and 88 children took part in the focus groups. Focus groups were conducted with 17 additional adults including workers supporting the individual children in CHiP's advisory group (termed 'focal points'); the youth participation team members in Lamberton and representatives of NGOs who were developing NCPs with the support of ASHA.

Figure 5: Interviews

Case study	**Interviews**				
	Support workers	**Managers**	**Sponsors/ Governors**	**Decision-makers**	**Community**
ASHA	3	1	2 Representatives of the donor organisation	• Panchayat official • District Judge	• 4 parents • 3 community leaders
CHiP	1	2	Trustee of CHiP	• Service manager	-
Lamberton	3	3	2 Elected Members	• Manager, Careers • Co-ordinator 14-19 Network	-
Marlings	1	1	Chair of board of school governors	• Headteacher	-
Total	**8**	**7**	**6**	**6**	**7**

Figure 6: Focus group participants

. Case study	Focus group participants	
	Children (members of forums)	**Adults**
ASHA	48	6 representatives from other NGOs
CHiP	15	7 focal points (workers supporting individual members of the children's advisory group)
Lamberton	13	4 members of the local authority's youth participation team
Marlings	12	-
Total	**88**	**17**

Observation was undertaken opportunistically although I ensured that I critically observed at least three meetings of the forums in each setting. Other opportunities for observation presented themselves, for example attending a cultural event staged by an NCP in India and attending a local authority sponsored award ceremony for young people in Lamberton. The chapter now turns to consider the methods selected for the research.

4.5 Methods

The primary data collection methods selected were semi-structured interviews with adults, focus groups with children, observations of each of the forums in action and analysis of official documents relating to each of the forums. For the three UK-based case studies, data were collected at a point when the case study forums were selecting issues to work on i.e. the 'before' dimension. Approximately nine to 12 months later when the forum cycle was coming to an end, I returned to the field to explore what the children had achieved in terms of influence, i.e. the 'after' dimension. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with the participating children and the support workers at both the 'before' and 'after' stages. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers and governors or

sponsors (e.g. elected members in Lamberton) over the course of the study period and (in the 'after' stage), with policy makers or service planners who were the subject of the children's influencing activities (the 'decision-makers'). Fieldwork visits to these three case studies were also undertaken at a mid-way point to gain data on progress (from the children and the support workers) and to observe the forums. In the fourth case study in India, only one visit was possible and data were gathered from the same stakeholders over three weeks of intensive fieldwork.

In all four forums, data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups were augmented by observations of the forums 'in action'. I observed at least three forum meetings in each of the four case studies. Detailed fieldnotes were taken of these events and analysed alongside the participants' accounts. Documents, including the minutes of the forum meetings over the study period, policy statements and annual and other evaluative reports on the forums were also analysed. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:128) recommend taking account of written sources and accounts 'as a part of the social setting under investigation' and examining them for 'parallels and perspectives' (1983:131).

While recognising that official documents rarely document real life and they serve a number of purposes, extracts from the official documents are used in the analysis to contrast with other sources and explore:

- the stated purposes of the forum;
- the organisation's accounts of its reasons for establishing the forum;
- reported achievements, impacts or benefits of the forum;
- reported challenges, opportunities or lessons learnt with regard to policy influence.

Figure 7 (page 99) sets out the sequence of data collection in the three UK based case studies. In ASHA, a more ethnographic approach was adopted but with adaptations necessitated by the cultural and linguistic differences. However, the methods of data collection employed were broadly similar to those in the UK based

case studies. Each method generated different types of data although there were significant similarities and overlaps, for example between observation and focused discussions with the forum members. The combination of methods provided a rich data set allowing me to address my research questions from a number of angles and perspectives although at times the practical implications of integrating the methods proved to be a challenge (Mason, 1996).

Focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews were selected to facilitate access to practitioners, managers and children's own accounts in as open and un-prescribed way as possible while retaining focus on my chosen lines of inquiry (Mason, 1996). Semi-structured interviews were used to enable the flexibility and freedom to support generation and detailed representation of the practitioners' and managers' perspectives (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). I had learnt from previous research that the topic was complex and would not necessarily be clearly formulated in my interviewees' minds. Mason (1996) suggests this is a strong reason for selecting semi-structured interviews rather than using a more standardized approach to data collection. Ethically, semi-structured interviews gave my respondents more control and pragmatically it was unlikely that the data sought would be available in too many other forms. I was aware that the insights I wanted to gather were contextual, situational and interactional and this required this distinctive approach to excavate the complex assumptions and understandings of research participants and get at what I wanted to know (Mason, 1996: 41).

Focus groups were selected as a culturally and child-sensitive data generation method (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). They have a good track record for use with children, not least because children are generally more comfortable and familiar with the process of discussing matters in groups (Darbyshire *et al*., 2005; Goodenough *et al.*, 2003). Another key reason for selecting focus groups relates to a concern to actively address the imbalance of power between adults and children and the researcher and the researched. Jowett and O'Toole (2006: 455) maintain that focus groups allow the potential disruption of the power relationships within the research context because of the 'strength in numbers' argument. The big

disadvantage of using focus groups that I encountered was the practical difficulties of recording all of the discussion and interaction that took place (Bloor *et al*., 2001). While the sessions were recorded and notes taken, neither method captured all that was observed and it was important to take time to write extensive fieldnotes within an hour or two of the group discussion. Participatory techniques were used when moderating many of the focus groups with children and these were selected on the basis of the researcher's own experience of communicating with children and with the benefit of methodological insights from others (see for example: O'Kane, 2000)

Another method used which grew in importance throughout the study was focused observations that yielded detailed field notes (Hammersley and Aitkinson, 1983). Observation of the four forums and their respective sub-groups in action provided a crucial window on the patterns and rules of behaviour within each of the settings (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). In the Wales case studies in the first phase of the research I was able to attend and observe sessions where the forums choose what topics to focus their influencing activities upon and where they planned and subsequently evaluated those activities. In the final phase of the research I was able to observe the children reporting back to their peers on the influencing work undertaken and what had been achieved.

Observation assumed most importance in the ASHA case study as the interaction was in Tamil and I was reliant on an interpreter. I collected visual data (photographs and videos) of a number of forums meetings and a range of activities to augment my fieldnotes. It was not possible because of funding restrictions to undertake more than one fieldwork visit to ASHA and all data were collected during a three week visit in February 2010. Fortunately, it was possible to interview people who had been involved with the development of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCP) in Tamil Nadu since their inception and to review reports on the NCPs and their achievements written in English for the donor organisation and government

officials[1]. Other official documents relating to all four case studies were analysed including minutes of meetings of the forums over the study period, policy statements, evaluation reports, newsletters and records of influencing activities.

4.6 Negotiating access

The process of gaining access in the Wales case studies (Lamberton and Marlings) was relatively straightforward. It was acknowledged that access to the children would only be possible with the co-operation of a 'gatekeeper' (Cree *et al.,* 2002). The Lamberton youth forum management were keen to support the research as part of a broader, pan-Wales, strategic development as well as being eager to derive benefits from an independent investigation into the impacts of the project. As the research progressed, the co-operation of these two key gatekeepers in gaining access to support workers, managers, elected members, policy-makers and children in line with exacting ethical standards, proved invaluable. Copies of programme descriptions, details of the local context and policy framework, and annual reports were made available. Ethical dimensions of the research were discussed and agreement reached on levels of confidentiality, procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of children, the anonymity of all the research participants, procedures for gaining informed consent, and arrangements for feedback to research participants and the most suitable recognition arrangements. A short leaflet was prepared to introduce the research and myself and this was distributed in advance of my meeting with the practitioners and the children.

Negotiating access to the school council in Marlings was also very straightforward with a supportive headteacher. It proved necessary to convince the teacher who actually supported the school council that the research would not involve her in lots of extra work and once that was achieved, it all went very smoothly. The school organised parental/carer consent in a sensitive manner deemed appropriate to the

[1] English is widely used in the Indian civil service and in many formal and judicial proceedings in India (Rothermund, 2008).

cultural backgrounds of their pupils, adapting a short information leaflet that I produced.

Negotiating access to the two international case studies was more difficult. CHiP agreed to a request to evaluate their newly established children's advisory group but it took some time for this request to receive senior management approval. The support worker who facilitated the advisory group was committed to the research and responded positively to all requests for information, interviews and feedback. When the time came to conduct the final stage interviews, the senior management team had been reconfigured and the support worker was going on maternity leave. It then proved difficult to gain access to the chief executive or any of the trustees and eventually, it only proved possible to obtain a single interview with a middle manager in order to gather organisational perspectives on the advisory group's influence.

Some six months were spent exploring a number of avenues to acquire a research site in the global South. I wanted to include an example of good practice working with children in a more 'bottom up', social development context than was reflected in the Wales case studies. Through professional contacts ASHA was identified. Staff at ASHA and the German charity who supported the programme were helpful in facilitating access to all of the stakeholders and also in ensuring my safety, comfort and well-being during the research visit. ASHA also organised parental consent and sought children's permission, this was done verbally by the project director. The only difficulty arose when the project director agreed in advance to organise an interpreter (at my expense) but on arrival, I understood that the project director preferred to take on this role (he was wanting to be helpful). While his language and interpretations skills were good it meant that all of the information I received from the research participants was mediated via the project director. I was concerned about aspects of bias here and with his co-operation I took steps to interview three representatives of other local NGOs (also supporting NCPs) who spoke English, to test some of the themes and issues arising from the data from ASHA.

4.7 Data collection

As illustrated in Figure 7, there were three research phases with the three UK-based case studies. The following description outlines the main components of each of the phases. As previously explained, only one fieldwork visit was possible to ASHA India so all data collection there took place over a single period. More information on the approach taken in ASHA is described on page 105).

Figure 7: Outline data collection schedule

Before	During	After
• Focus groups with children • Observation of forums • Semi-structured interviews with support worker(s)	• Observation of forums • Documentation: minutes of meetings, reports on activities, policy documents • Focus group with children and support workers – to gather reflections on progress • Semi-structured interviews with senior managers, governors and sponsors	• Focus groups with children • Observation of forums • Semi-structured interviews with support worker(s) • Semi-structured interviews with those people the children were working to influence (service providers; senior managers; policy makers) • Documentation: minutes of meetings, reports on activities

First Phase – the 'before' dimension

Focus groups were organised with each of the children's forums at the start of the research. Appendix B contains the topic guide. The purpose of these 'before' focus groups was to generate data on the children's perceptions, understanding and experiences of participating in decisions about public services; to identify the key change objectives of the forums (at that point in time) and their plans to influence decision making in line with these change objectives. The focus groups started with a brief explanation of the research and a check with the children that they felt sufficiently informed and were in agreement to engage in the research. Introductory questions sought to set participants at their ease. All of the groups were pre-existing and participants were familiar with each other which was conducive to a productive discussion and seemed to work to help minimise the power differentials between the (adult) researcher and the child participants (Jowett and O'Toole, 2006). In line with their wishes, the focus groups with children at this stage of the fieldwork were undertaken with the support workers present. This, the children said, helped them feel more comfortable but inevitably influenced their accounts (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998).

Participants were asked to describe the sorts of activities they were engaged in and the value of the forums. They were subsequently asked about what it was the children wanted to change or influence and their plans to achieve their objectives over the annual cycle of the forum (nine - 12 months). Participatory methods were used to moderate many of the focus groups with children. These methods proved particularly useful with the children in the school council in Marlings who were aged between six and 11 years of age and in the NCPs in ASHA to augment verbal communication. With the younger children in Marlings, a puppet was used whose persona was a 'curious visitor' from another country wanting to find out about school council, how they work and what they can and do achieve.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with support staff, senior managers and sponsors or governors in this first stage of the research. The topic guides are

included in Appendix C. These participants were asked to describe what their role was in relation to the forum; what they understood to be the purpose of the forum; how the forums worked to influence public decision-making; and how respondents understood any impacts, benefits or drawbacks to this activity for services and policies and for children themselves.

The wording and sequencing of the questions were designed so that participants felt able to answer the questions on their own terms but with shared topics to allow for some comparability across all interviews and with the data generated from other sources. Impact was conceptualised in the interviews and focus groups as changes across the three dimensions of changes in the framework outlined in Figure 2 on page 86. The interview topics thus include: changes to policy, services or institutions; changes to children's development and well-being; and changes to social and power relations (between children and adults). Questions explored perspectives on the purpose of the children's forums and the motivations for setting them up. Accounts of *how* changes in public services were brought about by the children's forums were explored along with factors seen as enabling or inhibiting the children's forums' influencing policy. The sequence of questions is such that it is moving between non-directive and directive questions; the former to open out discussion and generate broad descriptions and the latter to clarify points, and/or expand and elaborate; to help to drill down on specifics relevant to my research questions (Spradley, 1979).

Interviews and focus group discussions were audiotape recorded with the permission of the interviewees and group participants and subsequently transcribed. After each interview or focus group I also wrote a reflective account including non-verbal aspects and considered how my positionality affected the responses and behaviour of my research participants. During this first phase of the research I also observed how the forums operated; how the participants interacted and how support workers facilitated the meetings; the interaction between these supporting adults and the children; and what the children seemed to enjoy and get animated about. I wrote up my fieldnotes as soon as possible and always within 24

hours of attending each of the forums to maximise the validity of the data (Hammersley and Aitkinson, 1983).

Second Phase – the 'during' dimension

At approximately half way through the research period (i.e. five to six months after the first phase), I was able to re- visit the two forums in Wales (Lamberton and Marlings) to get data on the 'progress' of the children's influencing activities (from both the children and the support workers) and to receive documentation from the support workers including minutes, newsletters and reports. These 'during' visits also provided another opportunity to observe the forums in action. The CHiP advisory group involves children from all over the world and convenes annually. Here, it was not possible to communicate with the children at a mid way point and during this phase of the research, I received an update from the support worker and copies of an evaluation report and correspondence between the forum members and CHiP's senior management team.

Third Phase – the 'after' dimension

Further focus groups were conducted with members of each of the forums at the end of the forum's cycle, which was approximately nine to 12 months after the first data collection phase. In Marlings this was the end of the school year, in Lamberton it was the annual conclusion of the youth forum and the election of the next which took place at the beginning of the school year in September. In CHiP, the cycle was concluded when the advisory group convened for their second annual meeting. The children were asked to describe what had been happening; to recall the influencing activities the forum had been engaged in since I had last met them and the progress they felt they had achieved in bringing about the changes they wanted to see. They were reminded of each of the change objectives and policy or service issues they had identified in the first phase of the research and asked for their account of what had happened in relation to each.

This was followed by more general enquiries about whether they felt their views were listened to and taken into account by those who were making the decisions they were trying to influence and what had led them to this view. Prompts were used to ascertain if children had received feedback from the decision-makers they had sought to influence. Questions were also posed about other impacts or benefits of their involvement in the forum and their participation over the preceding nine to 12 months - to themselves and/or other children.

Focus group discussion was also steered towards exploration of the things that helped the forum to have an impact on policies and services and the things that seemed to work against having an impact. Finally the children were asked to assess the quality of their participation 'experience' against internationally recognised quality standards of children's participation. These standards were developed by Save the Children and endorsed by the Welsh Government (Save the Children, 2007). The standards are concerned with the quality of the participatory *process* and reflect widely agreed principles of good practice including, demonstrating respect for children's views and adopting an inclusive approach to recruiting and engaging participants. The full set of standards is replicated in Appendix A. In the focus groups I simply read out the standards, one at a time and asked participants to signal a score of 1-10. The support workers were asked to rank practice against each of the standards during interview.

The children were also asked in the focus groups to determine what 'degree' of participation they felt had been achieved in the forum's deliberations with reference to Treseder's model (see Figure 1, page 70). A number of these questions were put to the children using participatory techniques, for example asking participants to stand on an imaginary line between two points indicating 'agree' and 'disagree' to reflect their views on a statement and then asking them to say why they had stood where they had stood. These types of activities were particularly useful with the younger children and in the international development case studies which involved children who had little or no English and I was reliant on interpreters.

Semi-structured interviews with support workers in this final phase of the research followed similar lines of enquiry. In the interviews there was time to ask follow up questions for clarification and to explore responses in more depth. In particular, there was an opportunity to get the support workers' perceptions of the obstacles to the forums influencing the particular policies and services the children had selected to work on and the strategies they thought had helped. In Lamberton it was possible to conduct a group interview with three members of the team that supported the youth forum and to interview the team manager. In this stage of the research semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with some of the 'decision-makers', that is, policy-makers and service managers that each of the forums had been working to influence over the study period. From these interviews I sought to understand how the recipients had received the children's case for change and what they had done in response. Questions were also asked to ascertain how the particular organisation developed and reviewed policy and public services and under what conditions such decision-making could be influenced by others (including but not exclusively children). The topic guides for all of the adult interviews are included in Appendix C.

Other opportunities for data generation at this final stage of research were used in some of the research sites. One particularly useful opportunity was observing the sub-groups reporting back to a meeting of the whole youth forum on the work they had been doing to progress the changes in policy and practice the youth forum had selected as their priorities. Over 100 children were present at this meeting and on the basis of what they had heard, I was able to ask them (via a questionnaire and using a 'voting' exercise) to evaluate the progress made against each issue as to whether they felt (a) listened to; (b) whether they thought their views had been taken into account and (c) to what extent they thought they had influenced the decision-making. This yielded very useful data both from the survey and from my critical observations and reflections. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

ASHA – India: a single phase

In India, I followed very similar lines of enquiry adapted to the setting, the language barriers and the fact that only one fieldwork visit was possible. Over a more concentrated fieldwork period, I visited four NCPs and interviewed members of the NCPs, parents and community leaders and members of the local, elected Panchayat Raja Institution (PRI)[2]. I observed the NCPs 'in session' and attended and critically observed a number of cultural performances staged by members of a number of NCPs. Semi-structured Interviews were conducted with the Director of ASHA and there were a number of opportunities provided for focused discussions and reflections with the core staff team and with representatives of other NGOs engaged with the NCPs who spoke English.

My enquiries focused on the perceptions of the same categories of stakeholders as in the UK-based case studies, that is, children, support workers, managers, sponsors and decision-makers. As with the UK-based case studies, interview topics included the changes that were seen to have resulted from the children's involvement in the NCPs; the 'change objectives' the children had selected; *how* the NCPs were seen to influence the provision of public services and facilities and factors that participants' thought helped or hindered such influence. The topic guides are contained In Appendix B which includes those used with children and Appendix C which includes those used with the adult participants.

I was supported to organise a full evaluation session of my choosing with one NCP. This 45 minute session relied on participatory, largely non-verbal, data collection techniques, for example, asking children to indicate their 'answer' to a multiple

[2] These positions are similar to that of a parish councillor in the UK context but with greater responsibilities. The Gram Panchayats are the lowest tier of the Panchayat Raj Institutions operating in much of rural India. India's Constitution incorporated a three-tier system of Panchayats in 1992 consisting of a village level or 'Gram' Panchayats; block level Panchayats and district level Panchayats. Panchayat Raj Institutions are seen as the 'grass roots' units of self-government in India following Mahatma Ghandi's visions of a decentralized form of government (where each village is responsible for its own affairs), as the foundation of an independent India's political system (Rothermund, 2008).

choice question (visually described) by placing themselves in a particular location. Follow up dialogue to explore the reasons behind the children's choices was facilitated by the Director of ASHA who acted as my interpreter.

The nature of the work of the NGO and the NCP model operating in ASHA (as well as the practical opportunities made available over an intense three week period of fieldwork) facilitated a more concentrated examination of the relationships between the various adult participants and the children than I had been able to conduct in the UK-based case studies. The operation of the ASHA model gave me unique opportunities to hear and observe accounts of the connections between the children's forum (the NCP), children's everyday lives and other civil society structures. I critically observed many of the other community activities supported by ASHA such as supplementary education programmes, the village task force, the self-help women's groups, the youth groups and participated in NCP-led environmental campaigning and awareness raising. It was also possible to meet with NCP members, parents and community leaders in projects supported by five other NGOs working in other parts of the District, three of whom had English speaking staff.

On these visits, as well as observing a number of different NCPs and having opportunities to interact with the children, I was also able to conduct interviews with the NGO staff to gather data on the operation of the NCPs; the links between the NCPs and other local capacity building mechanisms; the perceived benefits of NCPs and to capture their reflections on the development process and what helped or hindered. It was also possible to observe and interact with child participants at two training events. One was a training day for new NCPs ministers to learn about their roles and responsibilities and the other was an event where members of a number of NCPs in the region were trained in cultural performances that aimed 'to raise awareness of children's rights'. Finally, I interviewed two 'decision-makers', an elected official from the local Panchayat and a District judge.

4.8 Data analysis

Some 40 hours of interviews and 14 hours of focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Sense was made of children's and adults' accounts by repeated reading of the data and using a number of data analysis techniques set out by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). For example, questioning the data to try and identify the *function* of what and how I was told certain things and questioning how I was interpreting and representing the accounts and motives. NVivo was used to aid analysis of the focus group and semi-structured interview data and selected fieldnotes. NVivo provided the opportunity to categorise the data in many different ways and explore and quantify patterns and relationships across a large amount of data efficiently and transparently (Bryman, 2004). The transparency aided reflexivity. Data were coded against the emerging key themes, with accounts compared and contrasted to explore relationships and emerging theories.

Patterns that emerged from the data were related to the literature and the literature in turn informed the research gaze. For example, I used a number of analytical tools derived from the literature to interpret the data including, Kirby *et al.*'s (2004) core dimensions of change; Lundy's (2007) concept of 'voice' and 'influence'; Treseder's (1997) wheel, Cornwall's (2004) concepts of participation 'spaces' and a set of recognised practice standards (Save the Children, 2007). I sought to analyze the relationships and interactions between stakeholders through a pluralist understanding of power as diverse and dispersed. A policy network analytic framework as described in chapter two, was employed to explore linkages between the different actors and interest groups and consider concepts of resource exchange and bargaining. The analysis also explored examples in each of the four case studies of how control was exerted from the top and influenced the 'what' and 'how' of policy making and children's participation therein.

Other possible typologies were considered and alternative links and deviant cases actively searched for. Data from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were read literally but also interpretively (Mason, 1996). In interpreting the data,

consideration was given to the temporal dimension, what happened before the interviews/focus groups, what was anticipated by the key actors and how these factors might be influencing the accounts generated. In making sense of the data, consideration was given to how people's identities and patterns of social relationships (including the low position of children in society) affected their accounts (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). As analysis progressed I focused down on ordering and patterns in the data to develop grounded 'insights' into the impacts of children's participation in public decision-making across the three dimensions of change.

The data were then considered as a whole. Strategies were employed to triangulate information from different sources, gathered through different means. Triangulation was used to confirm (or contradict) patterns in the research. Contradictions prompted further explorations suggesting new lines of inquiry and directions for my research (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). I adopted a reflexive, iterative and systematic approach to data analysis with triangulation as a key strategy for enhancing the validity of my research. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to help build rigour into the analysis. Being reflexive required making explicit the decisions taken at every stage of the research including what counts as data and how children's accounts and understandings were interpreted. The choices made were questioned and justifications examined, especially in areas where my biography or viewpoint might bear upon the analytic process unduly (Taylor and White, 2000).

4.9 Ethics

Ethical considerations were integral to the design in particular paying careful attention to issues of power because of children's limited status in society (Alderson, 1995). Ethical approval was sought and granted from the School of Social Science Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. A copy of the application for ethical approval is contained in Appendix D. The British Sociological Association's *Statement of Ethical Practice* (2002) was used to guide the research alongside

Alderson's (1995) useful checklist of ethical considerations for research with children.

Alderson (1995) highlights ten key topics including consideration of: the purpose of the research; the costs and benefits of research which involves children; privacy and confidentiality; which children will be included/excluded; funding and payment of participants; the need for flexibility and reflexivity; information for children, parents/carers; informed consent; dissemination; and the implications of the researcher's model of childhood. Most of these considerations apply to research with any participants but key differences include enhanced power imbalances, child protection and complex consent issues. All the issues in Alderson's checklist were considered in the design and application of this research. The design aimed to maximise the benefits for the children involved. This included opportunities to engage participants in enjoyable activities as well as taking steps to disseminate the research findings to those who can effect change. Strategies used to break down the power imbalance between the adult researcher and the children and to encourage the children to communicate and explain their social worlds included the use of focus groups and participatory techniques (O'Kane, 2000).

As previously described, access to children was negotiated through key gatekeepers. Children were given information about the research and asked for initial consent by the local project worker who was someone they knew and trusted (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Informed written consent was obtained from the children and for those under 16 years of age from their parents/carer. At the beginning of the meetings with children and support workers, the purpose of the research and the format for the session was explained. I made it clear that they did not have to take part if they did not wish to do so, that they could opt out at any point and that I would check back to see if they were in agreement for any potentially controversial responses to be included. It was explained that no names would be included in the research and potential identifying information would be excluded.

Matters concerning privacy and confidentiality were central to ethical considerations to help break down the power imbalance between children and adults, researchers and the researched (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Factors such as when and where group interviews take place, who is present, and who will be told will all have an effect on what children will talk about (Solberg, 1997). Whilst measures were put in place to safeguard confidentiality and the anonymity of participants, the limits of confidentiality were made clear. While the nature of the topics seemed unlikely to provoke disclosures of a personal nature, arrangements were nonetheless set up to ensure that if children raised issues of concern, advice and support was available to them (Alderson,1995).

Morrow and Richards (1996) emphasise the advantages of reflective and responsive research methods in facilitating efforts which seek to equalise power relations between researchers and children. A detailed diary was kept throughout the research and time was taken to review notes and reflect on my decisions, justifications and the implications of the choices made and to consider as problematic, the things that I was blind to (Mason, 1996). Having 20 years experience of working with children in contexts that relate closely to is helpful but can also be a hindrance. Strategies including that of envisaging myself as a 'curious visitor' and attempting to maintain reflexivity were employed to counter familiarity and to support an open-minded approach and receptiveness to different ideas and understandings (McCracken, 1988).

4.10 Validity

The research design privileged regular opportunities for reflection and systematic consideration of the role of the researcher in the research. I reflected on the impact my presence and mood had on the setting and on research participants and the influence of my biography and values on the data analysis and representation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). A research diary was used throughout the study and proved invaluable as an aide to this process and the development of analytic categories and constructs (Silverman, 2000). The impact of the researcher cannot be

eliminated but awareness of the possible effects and taking these into account during fieldwork and data analysis were an important part of the approach adopted in the research (Mason, 1996). The range of data collection techniques employed and the cross referencing of data and analytic categories within and across focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations, documentary analysis and my reflective account also helped to address a range of challenges to the validity of the research (Silverman, 2000).

The broad question of the rigour and validity of the research design and the findings generated were considered with reference to Maxwell's (2002) typology. Maxwell conceives reliability and generalisability as two aspects of validity and similarly, Mason (1996:21) argues that reliability, validity and generalisability:

> are different kinds of measures of the quality, rigour and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles.

The purpose of the research design was not to generalise findings to other cases or populations, rather it was to explore themes and connections and patterns relating to the impact of children's public participation in four different settings and elicit factors that enabled or inhibited impacts on policy and service development. Attempts were made to reduce the most obvious validity threats by putting in place strategies to strengthen all types of validity as illustrated in Figure 8. These strategies taken together worked to mitigate the most obvious sources of threats to validity and enhanced the rigour of the research design and its implementation.

Figure 8: Strategies employed to reduce threats to validity

Type of validity	Strategies employed
Descriptive: the factual accuracy of the account	• Include notes on behaviour (e.g. silences, laughter) in recording of focus groups and interviews; • Use the accounts and behaviour of my informants as a source of data; • Compare and contrast accounts of the same events/ situations and explore differences related to the perspectives and purposes of the accounts for the different stakeholder groups; • Check for omissions – what's not been said as well as said; • Reflect on my impact as a researcher.
Interpretive: understanding from the participant's perspective - what does it mean to the participant	• Choice of methods and style of moderating focused on generating interpretive data; • Consider how accounts are constructed, how they relate to the person's social location, what purpose they serve and whether they were solicited or unsolicited; • Make explicit my assumptions and test emerging ideas on patterns and connections using negative/deviant cases.
Theoretical: the theories the researcher brings to or develops during the study	• Understandings of the concepts (and possible relationships) drawn from a review of relevant research and tested and throughout data generation; • Develop and test out new ideas on constructs and relationships as data generation and analysis continues, comparing and contrasting cases and amending emerging themes.
Generalisability: the extent to which the findings can be generalised to a wider population	• No claims are made toward generalisability to wider populations although I took steps to test out some theoretical propositions (Eisenhardt, 2002) sequentially with each of the case studies.
Evaluative: making judgements about the subjects of study	• Be cautious about making evaluative claims about research subjects

4.11 Concluding comments and methodological reflections

As was noted in chapters two and three, research on the impacts of children's or indeed adults' civic participation has been limited by methodological challenges. Some of the more significant conceptual, methodological and practical challenges to researching the outcomes of public participation identified by Burton (2009) also proved difficult for me to overcome. For example: disentangling the complexity of the 'intervention' and the different cultural meanings associated with civic participation; and the inherent difficulties of measuring variables 'relating to the quality of decisions made or the legitimacy of decision-making structures' (Burton, 2009:281).

Data analysis revealed that notwithstanding the very real challenges of collecting data when the researcher does not speak the language of the research participants and is reliant on an interpreter who was not independent of the setting, the ethnographic, more immersed approach to researching participation processes adopted in India provided rich data of more density than the other case studies. The mixing of methods in all four case studies, however, did allow data to be collected through methods that best suited the different stakeholders. For example activity based discussions with children, semi-structured interviews with supporting staff, managers, governors, sponsors and a number of decision-makers the children's forums set out to influence. The mixing allowed for a breadth of data to be collected and for data triangulation which was essential to challenging the developing interpretations emerging from multiple data sources (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

The time spent in the case study sites enabled familiarisation with the institutional contexts within which the actor-orientated processes of change occurred and to note the significant bearing of these contexts on the participation dynamic. Prior knowledge of the UK based institutional contexts proved to have advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, this meant that I entered the field with a basic understanding of the hierarchies, relations, culture(s) and the governance

arrangements – of a local authority, a school and an international non-governmental institution (INGO). I had for example, an understanding of the different roles of Elected Members and officers in a local authority and of the positioning of the participation support workers within the corporate hierarchy.

This familiarity helped me to quickly focus my explorations with research participants on the dynamics operating in the particular school (Marlings), local authority (Lamberton) and INGO (CHiP). However, the familiarity also made it difficult for me to see the things I took for granted and work hard to keep a 'critical, analytic perspective' as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 102) advise. In India I was at a disadvantage in not knowing much of the governance arrangements and felt very much at times during the fieldwork, an 'acceptable incompetent' (Lofland, 1971`) but the advantage was that this 'strangeness' meant I could critically observe behaviour or interactions that I might not have even noticed in the UK context and ask related and pertinent questions to test out and explore my assumptions. On reflection, the more intensive period of fieldwork in ASHA gave me a more comprehensive understanding of the power relationships and interactions between children and adults that Pinkerton (2004) asserts is at the heart of children's public participation (although at the cost of being unable to investigate contemporaneously, changes over time).

There were other limitations to the methodological process adopted and some adaptions had to be made throughout the research. Collecting and analysing data on participation processes and linking them to policy outcomes was difficult. Processes were not linear and the reasons why policy change did or did not occur were rarely self-evident. The accounts of the various stakeholders provided only a partial illumination of these dynamics. In this sense I understand that a qualitative enquiry can never reveal the 'whole' story and this research can only provide a 'snapshot' in time, space and place. Comparisons across Wales and the international case studies and consideration of the policy and practice implications of the findings for the UK context were treated with some caution and I took steps to test out the feasibility of applying some of the lessons learnt from the operations

of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in India with reference to the team of support workers in Lamberton during the course of the research and with reference to the literature.

Reflections on the strengths and limitations of the methodological approach selected for this enquiry suggests that an ethnographic approach may have been more effective for exploring the complex processes in policy making in all of the case studies. However, I acknowledge that there is still a need to develop less resource intensive methodologies that can be used more routinely to collect data on the impacts of children's participation (Lansdown, 2006). Efforts to ensure that public expenditure is focused on improving priority service outcomes have increased now we have entered a long period of financial austerity and there is a real risk to the sustainability of the new participative structures for children's participation in Wales and across the UK, if they cannot articulate or evidence outcomes and thereby confer some security upon their futures.

Given what was learnt about the time it takes to influence policy in the Wales and UK context and the serendipity of the process, the time span of the study was limiting. On reflection, it would have been useful to have built a third stage data collection point whereby feedback could be gathered a further six to nine months on, on any further developments relating to the policy change objectives selected at the start of the process. Finally, in terms of reflections on the research design and methodology, as will be seen in the next section of this thesis, the typology of change dimensions, Kirby, *et al.* (2004) used to frame the changes that had occurred as a result of the children's participation (and the indicators of the occurrence of these changes) proved useful in discerning and capturing the impact of the children's forums relating to: (i) policy change, (ii) changes to social and power relations between adults and children and (iii) changes in the children's personal development - across all four case study sites. The thesis now turns to examine the findings and key themes to emerge from the research with reference to the data. The first empirical chapter, chapter five, explores the 'doing' of children's public participation in each of the four sites.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 5: 'Doing' participation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of four chapters presenting findings from the analysis of data generated from the interviews, focus groups, observations and a review of relevant official documents. This chapter explores how the concept of 'children participating in public decision-making' is understood and played out in each of the four case studies. Subsequent empirical chapters will explore: the changes that were seen to have taken place as a result of the children's participation (chapter six); understandings in each of the case studies of how children's voices are turned into influence and what factors help or hinder that process (chapter seven); and lastly, an exploration of the tensions that have to be navigated in public decision-making involving children (chapter eight).

This chapter fulfils two important functions. Firstly it introduces the reader to the *modus operandi* of the four deliberative forums that were the focus of the study, describing the structure of the forums and how children come to be members before outlining the activities that the forums were engaged in over the study period. Secondly, the chapter provides an essential starting point for the examination of the impact of the children's participation by considering what the data reveal about the intentions of, and motivations for the 'participation' as described, in the different sites and within and between different actors and interest groups. The literature claims that the link between the intentions and stated purposes of children's participation and the actual outcomes of that participation is particularly pertinent with Cockburn (2010:310) claiming that the best precondition for deliberative projects to have an impact is 'clarity about the kind of decisions participants are able to make'.

The approach chosen to understand and make sense of the accounts of the 'participation' given by the children, supporting adults, lead managers and the

political or financial sponsors of the four forums in the sample was informed by the definitions and models contained within the literature including the 'degrees' of participation in Treseder's (1997) schema (see Figure 1, page 70) and the quality of the participatory practice as reflected in internationally recognised quality standards for children's participation (Save the Children, 2007). Understandings of the power relations between adults and children operating in the case studies were informed by broader considerations as to how dominant constructions of childhood influence the process of children's participation in policy matters (Wyness, 2009; Prout, 2003).

The structure of each of the forums are explored in section 5.2 below with section 5.3 considering the strategies that the organisations that support the forums use to try to ensure a reasonable representation of different interests. Section 5.4 explores what 'doing participation' entails, reflecting on the activities the forums engage in, the scope of the children's participation and the quality of the process. Section 5.5 considers the motivations of the organisations who have established the forums and those of the participating children and reflects on the stated objectives and the shared understandings of the purposes of each of the forums. Finally, section 5.6 concludes the chapter by summarizing the key findings and considering their implication for this enquiry into the impact of children's participation.

5.2 Structure of the forums and the recruitment of members

All of the forums included in the study were set up and established by adults as formal structures. The Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) in India (ASHA) and the advisory group of the international NGO (CHiP) were set up by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The youth forum (Lamberton) and the school council (Marlings) in Wales were set up by statutory public bodies (a local authority and a school respectively). Children were then invited to join through various means with attempts made to ensure representative and inclusive membership. The NCPs (ASHA) and the youth forum (Lamberton) broadly replicate the (adult) state and local governance structures in their respective contexts. In all of the forums many of

the rules and arrangements had been agreed before the children got involved. However, lead managers in each of the supporting organisations suggested that the way the forum worked did and would, evolve over time and that children were and would be enabled to influence that process.

It is important to note from the outset that these accounts describe the perceived operation and structure of the four forums at a particular point in time. The stage of development varied from forum to forum and they cannot and should not be seen as a fixed representation of static deliberative bodies. At the time the fieldwork commenced the Lamberton and ASHA forums were relatively well established having been in operation for over six and three years respectively, whilst the CHiP and Marlings forums were relatively new. CHiP's children's advisory group was in its second year of operation and Marlings school council was newly established only a few weeks before the fieldwork started. Lamberton and ASHA, as well established forums, appeared to be more engaged in trying to affect public decision-making, than the forums in CHiP and Marlings. As the following data extracts illustrate, managers and support staff in CHiP and Marlings understood that they were still inducting the forums' membership and finding their way in determining how the forums might best be engaged in governance decisions:

> *Support worker CHiP*: It's really all still very new. Since the advisory group first met just over a year ago there has been a lot of progress including the piloting of different ways of communicating with the advisory group members and their focal points [the CHiP staff from the home countries who support and accompany the individual members of the advisory group] in between and in preparation for, the annual meetings of the group. Now we know what works. Nobody had been reading what I sent out – some children have no access to a telephone let alone a computer but communication with the focal points in the run up to the second meeting of the advisory group and since has been much better.
>
> *Support worker (Marlings):* There was a school council set up a few years ago but it fizzled out. Now we have a new headteacher she wanted to start one up again. I've just come back from maternity leave and have been given a bit of time to support the school council so we've just had the elections and had one meeting to decide what it is they want to do. I

took along a few suggestions and they are going to work on the healthy schools stuff – promoting healthy eating.

An outline of the structure of each of the deliberative forums as understood by the supporting adults, managers and children in 2009 is set out below.

ASHA

The structure of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) in ASHA follows a prescriptive model developed originally by the Barefoot College in the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) located in Rajasthan and subsequently replicated in other parts of India[3]. The programme of NCP development instituted by ASHA (a local, secular NGO) in 2005 in the Cuddalore District of the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India was supported financially by a German charitable institution (linked to a broader post-Tsunami re-development programme). The structure of the NCPs mirrors in essence, the state and federal representative structures in India. Each NCP elects its own ministers including prime minister, home minister, health and public works minister, legal and information minister, education and sports minister, and finance minister. Some of the NCPs have chosen to create additional ministerial positions – including in one NCP - a war minister, although it was not very clear what this minister's role and function actually entailed! The elections of the NCP ministers I observed were taken very seriously and on election, ministers take an oath in the presence of members of the Panchayat Raja Institution[4], the Village Task Force (VTF) and the village community.

ASHA supports NCPs in 13 rural villages in the Cuddalore District of Tamil Nadu. Most of the NCPs have six or seven ministers and each minister has a committee which is in effect a sub-group of the NCP who help the minister fulfill his or her role. All newly elected ministers receive training on their roles and responsibilities and

[3] The development of the NCP model by SWRC was part of a larger community-led development project in Tilonia a poor rural area of Rajasthan. The history and development of the 'barefoot college' in Tilonia links the education of men, women and children to community and economic development within an environment of participatory decision-making between SWRC workers and the community.

[4] The lowest level of government in rural India.

the NCP procedures. I witnessed much of this training during the fieldwork and received feedback on it directly from child participants, support workers and the trainers.

Interviewees stated that the NCPs meet regularly (at least monthly but usually weekly) to discuss issues of concern and to undertake their influencing work. Each NCP has around 30 members. All children in the village or neighbourhood who are aged between 6-18 are technically members of the parliaments but the majority of 'activists' are, I was advised by the Director of ASHA, aged between 10 and 15 years. This claim was borne out by my observations of the NCP meetings. I observed that all meetings of the NCPs are assiduously recorded with minutes detailing all of the decisions taken as well as a very neat and beautifully written list of attendees.

One of the most powerful features I observed with the NCPs was the way they were integrated with a whole range of capacity building structures and mechanisms supported by ASHA in each of the villages and neighbourhoods. These included a Village Task Force (VTF), a supplementary education programme (SEP), an adolescent girls group and other youth groups, a micro-finance scheme and a self-help women's group. As shall be further explored in chapter seven when considering what the data reveals about enabling and inhibiting factors, the data suggest that the links between these structures was a crucial factor in the success of the NCPs. In particular the link between the SEP and the NCPs seemed to be of particular significance. The NCPs work to influence the local Panchayat (village council) and sometimes the higher, Block and District levels of government (the latter broadly equating with a local authority in England and Wales).

Young people from the local community are trained and supported by ASHA to teach and run the supplementary education programmes and to support the NCPs.

One of the young teachers at one of the SEP centres explained the role of ASHA and how the SEP works:

> ASHA provided training for the teachers, a timetable for the tuition centre, teaching materials and a building. They give impetus to SEP students' personal hygiene, discipline and volunteering. They took steps to promote the NCP as a platform to raise awareness relating to children's rights and their social commitments. We have witnessed gradual increase in the numbers of students in the SEP and their attendance because of the NCP Ministers and members tracking absentees.

This teacher is 19 years old, the last child of four in a poor family who are illiterate and work as agricultural labourers. He himself was a former pupil of the SEP.

Lamberton

The structure of the youth forum in Lamberton mirrors the structure of the local council. This 'shadow' council model is common across Wales and England (Turkie, 2010; Wyness, 2009). Members of the youth forum are a mix of elected representatives from school councils, colleges, youth clubs, special interest groups and community regeneration sub-groups. The documentation describing the youth forum indicates that its structure and operation has evolved since it was first established in 2003 and claims that the forum has been developed 'in an inclusive manner, in partnership with young people and at their pace' incorporating new 'remits of other Welsh Assembly Government directives'. These new remits include the introduction in 2006 of a statutory requirement on schools to establish school councils and new guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2009 to encourage the involvement of children and young people in community regeneration under the Communities First programme (see chapter two for more details of these national policy developments).

There are around 100 members of the youth forum, who meet together bi-monthly. A chair, vice chair, social secretary, charities officer and the forum's representative on the national assembly for children and young people in Wales (Funky Dragon)

are all elected by the youth forum members at an AGM held in October where decisions are also taken about the youth forum's 'priorities for action' over the coming year. Two topics are selected for each of the two, six month periods. Sub-groups (named after the council policy portfolios, such as education and regeneration) are set up to work on each priority. All members are invited to join the sub-groups which meet weekly. The sub-groups also make efforts to continue doing some work on previous priorities when support workers alert them to relevant new opportunities to effect change but this is limited because of the staff and sub-group membership capacity. Despite the provision of free, door to door transport, sub-group membership over the study period was low. About 6-10 children attended the sub-groups with some children involved in more than one sub-group. The meetings of the youth forum and the sub-groups are minuted and the sub-groups formally report back on their influencing activities and progress at the full youth forum's bi-monthly meetings.

The documentation states that while the youth forum is billed as a 'participative mechanism' for young people aged 11-25 to 'have a voice on issues that affect them and to become actively involved in local decision-making' the majority of young people that engage in the youth forum are aged 11- 18 years. Support staff indicated that the youth forum engages regularly with Elected Members of the council but there are fewer opportunities to engage with officers of the council and when this does happen it is usually at the youth forum's request. The bi-monthly meetings of the youth forum are held in the council chamber and are attended by at least one Elected Member who is the youth forum's elected 'youth champion' within the council. The youth forum is supported by three full time staff.

In Lamberton, the youth forum is not formally linked to capacity building structures and mechanisms supporting the engagement of adult citizens – other than through the council itself, although one of the support workers indicated that representatives of the youth forum had, in the past engaged in an 'inter-generational sustainable development forum' in the local authority which had been regarded by Elected Members and children alike as an 'example of good practice'.

CHiP

CHiP is an international non-governmental organisation (INGO). It established a children's advisory group in 2008. The group had met only once before the fieldwork commenced. The group comprises 12 members from the six regions of the world where CHiP works. The advisory group is convened and meets annually with the senior management team and the board of trustees annually in CHiP's London headquarters. Where possible, communication continues throughout the year by email and telephone conferences. During the 18 months of this study, the support worker reported considerable difficulties in communicating with the advisory group members outside of the annual meeting despite the use of social networking forums and Skype. Some of the children have only very limited access to the internet or telephones in their home situations (e.g. the jungle in northern Columbia; the steppes of northern China).

All members of the panel are seen as equal and there are no functional positions such as a chair. The panel of six boys and six girls are aged between 11 and 18. They are not elected but selected by adults working in the country or region as 'good' representatives of the children CHiP works with. When they reach the age of 18 advisory group members are obliged to step down. The older age of the children involved has meant that the turnover of members in the three years the advisory group has been in existence has been very high.

Apart from the prescription that the advisory group has to include two members aged under 18 years of age from each of the CHiP regions and that once a year they will meet with the trustees and the directors of the organisation, the way the group operates is largely determined by the support worker working within specified resources and pragmatic constraints. The support worker aims to work participatively with the advisory group members but in reality much of the programme for their week long annual meeting in London has to be pre-arranged. The support worker reported that there was little scope for the children themselves to influence the activities they were to be engaged in over that week. This issue is

compounded by the previously reported difficulties in communicating directly with the children outside of the annual meetings.

Marlings

Marlings school council is an elected body. The council comprises two representatives from each of the six year groups in the school. Elections are contested and a secret ballot is held with each pupil in the school having a vote. Members are in office for one year but can stand for re-election as often as they like. Meetings are held regularly; the frequency of school council meetings increased over the period of this study from two in the first term to fortnightly meetings in the third and final term of the school year.

All the interviewees reported that the school council elects a chair, treasurer and secretary from its number who serves for the school council's term of office. My observations of a number of the council meetings indicated that the children elected to these positions take their responsibilities very seriously. The school council is supported by a nominated teacher who reported that two hours a week of her time is specified for her school council duties.

This structure in Marlings school council follows the guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government with representative mechanisms in place. There were no obvious links between the school council and adult governance structures either within or outside the school. The council does not meet with the school governors and meetings with the headteacher are, interviewees reported on an 'as and when' basis. Both school council members and the headteacher reported that they could request a joint meeting when they wanted one and that those requests, while mediated by the support worker, were always granted. Despite this, the headteacher reported that the then school council had been involved in her appointment to the school two years earlier and she was planning to include this new school council in recruitment processes 'as soon as it is properly established'. It should be noted that this isolation of the Marlings school council from the school's

other governance arrangements and civil association more broadly, is seen as a weakness with school councils across the UK according to recent research (Whitty and Wisby, 2007: Tisdall, 2010).

In summary, the arrangements made by the supporting organisations to structure each of the deliberative forums varies according to context, policy drivers, perceived examples of good practice, resources and not least, the many practical considerations. All of the supporting adults reported that the structures were and would be subject to development and improvement as resources and other constraints allowed. With the exception of CHiP, the forums all ape adult political structures, but they draw on very different populations. In Marlings the whole school has opportunity to vote for their representatives. In Lamberton, there is a pragmatic mix of elected and non-elected representatives from a number of interest groups and constituencies and in ASHA the whole child population of an area (the village) is technically a member of the NCP. In CHiP, accounts from the supporting adults indicated that the members of the forum are selected by adults in the organisation based on a number of explicit and implicit criteria. This was seen by the central support worker as a weakness of the CHiP forum and was explained as a pragmatic response to the lack of structures and mechanisms to support children's participation in governance decisions at lower levels of the organisation.

Cornwall and Coelho (2007) set out a number of requirements for participatory institutions to be inclusive and effect change. The fulfillment of these requirements, Tisdall (2011) suggests, could help to address the oft-cited problem of tokenism leveled at youth forums and school councils in the UK (see for example, Turkie, 2010 and Alderson, 2000). One of Cornwall and Coelho's (2007) requirements is that 'Representative claims must be considered critically and mechanisms to be representative must be in place' (2007:9). The next section now turns to consider in more depth the strategies employed by the organisations supporting the four forums to enhance representativeness.

5.3 Strategies to enhance representation

All of the workers supporting the forums reported employing strategies to try to ensure the maximum level of representativeness that was possible in the varying circumstances. In the two Welsh forums (Lamberton and Marlings), interviewees reported that children usually became involved in participatory activities via the professionals who worked with them. The idea to become involved was usually, it was suggested by both support workers and children, presented to children by teachers in school, youth workers, or social workers. This finding confirms previous research into similar deliberative bodies which reports that professionals are key gatekeepers and facilitators to children's engagement in youth forums and school councils (see for example, Kendall, 2010). The children involved in the Lamberton youth forum tended to be recruited via existing groups, for example youth clubs or community groups. One of the support workers in Lamberton noted how important such groups were in recruiting a wide range of young people to the youth forum:

> *Support worker (Lamberton):* Through our work in Communities First areas with the youth sub-groups [of the adult partnerships] we get young people involved in the youth forum who never normally would get involved in this type of thing. We have a really good mix of young people with particularly good representation from the more disadvantaged areas of the borough.

In Marlings, school staff and managers expressed a strong commitment to an inclusive approach across the whole of school policies. Teachers in the school were able to provide examples of promoting and raising awareness of school councils amongst pupils, for example, running sessions on 'what school councils are' and 'what they do'. While the rules on elections to the school council demanded the selection of one female and one male representative per year group, my observations of the school council deliberations indicated that the boys commandeered a much greater percentage of the 'talk time' than the girls. When this observation was followed up with the support worker, she explained this was a typical scenario that permeated lessons and school play time as well. She advised

that it was an ‘unwelcome by-product of the traditional cultures and homes where these kids live which we as teachers have to continually try and challenge’.

An issue of concern identified in previous research into school councils is whether schools actively recruit from a broad enough range of pupils or whether school councils just privilege small articulate elite (Alderson, 2000). A more recent study of the effectiveness of school councils in England and Wales, however, suggests that school councils are likely to be more inclusive than they were, especially those in primary schools (Whitty and Wisby, 2007).

Youth forums in England and Wales that replicate local authority, adult political structures have also been criticised in the literature for being too exclusive (see for example: Macpherson, 2008; Cairns, 2006). This previous research links elitism in formal youth participation mechanisms in the UK (such as youth forums and school councils), with a focus on promoting ‘future’ citizenship. Macpherson (2008) argues that such a focus can obscure the more immediate concerns of young people, leading to further disengagement by disadvantaged young people as their frustrations grow at the lack of attention given to their current social and environmental concerns. The data in my research unfortunately did not reveal sufficient detail on which to base a judgement as to the representativeness of the Lamberton forum. However the profile of youth members indicated that over a quarter of the 100 members lived in areas of the highest deprivation within the local authority and the membership included a roughly equal number of boys and girls.

For CHiP, there were considerable obstacles to ensuring representativeness within the children’s advisory group. CHIP’s goal in this regard was described by the support worker as ‘bringing together a group of young people who are broadly representative of the children we work with around the world’. There was no expectation that members of the advisory group represented a specific constituency of children. Indeed a weakness of the advisory group was seen by the support worker as ‘lacking in systems for group members to feedback to or gain a mandate

from, other young people'. Essentially, as the support worker and lead manager admitted, the advisory group members represented themselves. The majority of members however, expressed awareness of their privileged position and felt a responsibility to try and represent the experiences, if not the views, of other children they were in contact with within their countries. For some members, this was easier than for others. One of the advisory group members was also an active member of a 'working children's forum' in Bangladesh. She met regularly with other working children through this forum in Dhaka and took it upon herself to profile what she understood to be their 'priority issues of concern' to the managers and trustees of CHIP, as this extract from the data illustrates:

> *Girl, aged 15 (CHiP):* I want to tell them about the issues that children in my country are facing – the drugs, the violence, the prostitution. So they know.
>
> *Interviewer:* How do you find out what these issues are?
>
> *Girl, aged 15 (CHiP):* I talk to other children in the working children's forum that CHIP supports and ask them to tell me what are the most important issues for them so that I can make sure I tell people about them when I come to this meeting in London.

In contrast, another advisory group member explained that while she was not active in any deliberative or representative forums back in Scotland, she had been concerned to raise issues with CHIP managers and trustees that she and her friends had problems with 'like bullying, exam pressure and homelessness' .

In ASHA, the integration of the NCPs with other capacity building structures and mechanisms in each of the villages or neighbourhoods; the manageable, local base; the inclusive approach (all children above a certain age are members) and the constructive use of peer pressure all contributed to making the NCPs the most successful of the four forums at ensuring representation of a wide range of interests. However, ASHA also experienced problems in getting certain children along. There were problems reported in getting young girls to attend the NCP meetings after they reached puberty. The Director of ASHA stated that many

families feel cautious about allowing their daughters to go out to attend the NCP meetings in case it jeopardises their safety and marriageability. Older boys too were less in evidence and I was advised that boys aged 16-18 are invariably too busy studying or were away working for a large part of the week. ASHA project workers did make efforts to re-assure families and encourage them to allow their daughters to continue to attend the NCP and worked with the sexes separately to allay parental concerns.

In summary, all of the organisations reported varying degrees of difficulties in ensuring the forums are inclusive and able to represent the views and experiences of a broad range of children. The findings in the two Welsh case studies (Lamberton and Marlings) confirm previous research in the UK (see for example, Macpherson, 2008 and Molley *et al.,* 2002) that has shown that ensuring that formal participation structures such as youth forums and school councils are representative of all children is challenging. However, the analysis also reveals an acknowledgement of the short-fall by each of the organisations and a stated commitment to reflection and working at improvements.

5.4 Doing participation: An overview of activities

The literature strongly supports the claim that the participation of children (and civil society more generally) in policy making is best seen as a process rather than an event (see for example, Lansdown, 2006 and Hart, 1992). Nevertheless, in each of the case studies it was possible to discern that the child participants were involved in a wide range of discrete activities within the deliberative forum. This section presents an analysis of those activities and considers the degree or scope of the participation and the quality of the process as ranked by children and the supporting adults.

There were a range of activities across the four case studies which can be seen as sharing similar objectives although the nature of those activities varied according to

the context. Figure 9 illustrates the objectives common to all four case studies and notes briefly, examples of the related activities.

Figure 9: Doing participation: examples of activities relating to common objectives

	Examples of related activities in each case study			
Objective	**ASHA**	**CHiP**	**Lamberton**	**Marlings**
1. Raise awareness of children's rights and children's perspectives	Cultural performances with child rights messages.	Produced Youtube film on children's priorities for CHiP to present at a G20 summit.	Produced and distributed DVD about bullying and children's proposed solutions.	Gathered pupil's views on playground equipment and use of space.
2. Peer to peer support	NCP members support school drop outs back into school.	Sharing examples of good practice and ideas for promoting children's rights.	Members of the youth forum shadow elected officers of the forum who also mentor new members.	Buddy scheme. School council recruits, trains and monitors school buddies
3. Improving the circumstances of others. Contributing to the common good. Global citizenship.	Advise on community strategies for tackling child trafficking.	Meet with politicians to lobby for increased investment in tackling child poverty around the world.	Fundraising for their charity of the year (*Help for Heroes*).	Encouraging healthy eating by fellow pupils. Fundraising for the *Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund*.
4. Demonstrate to the community, that children are willing to take on responsibilities.	Undertake clean-ups of the village on India's Independence Day.	Show-cased films of the work of individual members in their home communities.	Clean-ups in local communities.	Organizing a litter pick up in the local park (one-off activity).
5. Ensure the children have fun and enjoy themselves	Organise sports days.	Multi-cultural drama and dance evening.	Craft/Hobby workshops for members at the youth forum meetings.	Provide ideas for the school's Eid celebrations.
6. Improving public services (or holding public service providers to account)	Meetings with decision makers. Petitions, letter writing, protests.	Meetings with high level decision-makers. Drafting a charter on accountability.	Letter writing. Surveys of other young people to get views. Report writing. Presentations.	(Not present)

There were further similarities between the types and functions of activities across the forums in Lamberton, CHiP and Marlings. The children in these three forums participated in consultation exercises (requested and organised by adults) in an attempt to provide, what was described by one of Lamberton's support workers as, 'a quasi-representative view' from children on a local, national or international government policy or proposal. For example, during the study period, children engaged in consultations on: the role of school nurses (Lamberton); fundraising strategies (CHiP); and children's priorities for playground equipment (Marlings). The forums in ASHA, Lamberton and CHiP all took up issues identified by children as a problem or concern and through a variety of activities such as, writing letters, organizing petitions, attending meetings, training and (in the case of the NCPs) organizing protests and marches – sought to influence public decision making. The activities undertaken under this typology and the progress made towards the children's 'change' objectives are the particular focus of this thesis.

ASHA and Lamberton forums were most likely to be working on issues relating to the children's immediate environment or community. The NCPs (ASHA) ran local campaigns and undertook community action to bring about improvements in their immediate environment. For example, I was shown photographs of children undertaking a village clean up campaign on India Independence Day and I observed members of a number of NCPs taking part in a tree planting exercise during a federal government sponsored climate change campaign. Lamberton youth forum campaigned for more rubbish bins on what they called 'litter-blighted' housing estates. While the children claimed to enjoy taking part in these activities, these examples also serve to demonstrate to the community that children are willing to take on responsibilities and contribute to the common good.

The analysis of activities across all four case studies identified that the Lamberton and CHiP forums also undertook a significant number of activities designed to showcase and promote the image of the corporate body. For example, presentations to donors (CHiP); and hosting a visit of the European Youth Forum

(Lamberton). This corporate, promotional role did not feature so strongly in ASHA and did not feature at all, in Marlings.

I noted in my fieldwork diary how ASHA were the strongest promoters of children's moral and legal rights to both protection and to 'being heard'. The members of the NCPs (ASHA) regularly engaged in what were described as 'cultural awareness performances' in the villages to raise awareness of child rights and the problems facing children. The community is called upon to address violations of children's rights such as child trafficking and early marriage and to help to protect children. I observed a number of these cultural performances and spoke with the participating children and some members of the adult audiences (via an interpreter). I could see how, through these cultural performances, community leaders and parents also learn about the capacities of their children and the importance of respecting and safeguarding children's rights within the home and village.

Even though some commentators have criticized the use of children's participation as performance in the Asian context (Theis, 2007 and West, 2007), I speculated on how this unique feature of the NCPs related to the specific cultural context, and whether something of it might be transferable to the UK context. The potential for sharing positive practice across the four case studies is explored further in chapter seven when considering what the data reveals about enabling and inhibiting factors for children's participation in public decision-making. The following sub-section of this chapter explores the scope and quality of the participation in each of the deliberative forums as ranked by the children and supporting adults.

5.4.1 *Scope and quality of the participation*

The review of previous research and theoretical perspectives in chapter three identified a number of different frameworks for assessing the scope or degree of children's participation, i.e. the extent to which activities and projects are adult-led, collaborative or child-led. The model developed by Treseder (1997) that sets out a number of 'degrees' of participation across a non-hierarchal spectrum seemed more

appropriate to this study than Hart's (2002) ladder which emphasises an overall goal of children's control. The children involved in the forums selected for this study will not get (and do not want) complete control over the policy-making process or the governance of any of the organisations. Children and support workers in each of the forums were asked to assess the approach across the spectrum of positions illustrated in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Degrees of participation

Position 1 Consulted & informed	***Position 2*** Assigned but informed	***Position 3*** Adult initiated, shared decisions with children	***Position 4*** Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	***Position 5*** Child-initiated and directed
The project is designed and run by adults, but children are consulted. They have full understanding of the process, their views are taken seriously.	Adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project, they know who decided to involve them and why. Adults respect children's views about decisions and actions	Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered but children are involved in taking the decisions	Children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for young people to consider	Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is going to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.
Power moves to adults ---------- Power moves to children				
Adapted from: Treseder, P.1997. *Empowering children & young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making.* London: Save the Children and the Child Rights Development Unit.				

Children's assessment of the 'degrees of participation' operating in ASHA and Lamberton was placed on a cusp covering Position 4 (Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults) and Position 3 (Adult initiated, shared decisions with children). Children typically said it depended on the activity, as the following data extract illustrates:

> *Boy, aged 15. Chair of the youth forum (Lamberton):* Sometimes we decide what we want to do and what issues we want to work on. Other times we're asked if we can give our views on something the council wants our views on. It depends. It works out to be a bit of both.

Overall, in Lamberton and ASHA there was an overlap between the views of the Lamberton and ASHA' support staff on the degrees of participation (Position 2-3) and the children's (Position 3-4) with children generally feeling that they have more control than the practitioners think they do. All respondents expressed general satisfaction with this range.

In Marlings the children reported that generally it was the teacher who supported the school council (the support worker) who made suggestions about what they might do. The children said the teacher would discuss with them ideas of things that the school council could choose to work on. For example: how to encourage their fellow pupils to eat healthily or quality assuring a playground 'buddy' scheme designed to reduce bullying. The children reported that Position 2 was the most accurate description of the degree of participation in their school council. Members of the council reported being very happy with this arrangement as the following data extract illustrates:

> *Boy, aged 9 (Marlings):* Miss suggested we could do something on healthy eating. We get people to bring in healthy lunch boxes. We give them a sticker. It works good.

The support worker in Marlings agreed with the children's judgment of the degree of their participation, as 'assigned but informed' (Position 2) and described how she took ideas along to the school council on what they might like to work on at the beginning of the school year. The worker explained that she thought the school

council needed to be given some ideas of things they could do as the council was only newly elected and she thought it would take them a little while before they understood the role of the council and what was possible. The support worker also acknowledged that there was an 'unwritten rule' that the school council would work on things that fit in with the school's priorities albeit if she encouraged them to do so in 'their' way. However, there was one occasion during the study period when members of the school council brought forward their own idea and put it into practice. The example I observed was to propose, and then organise, a toy sale to raise money for the victims of the Haiti Earthquake.

In CHiP because, as previously noted, the programme for the annual advisory group meeting in London was organised in advance when it was difficult to communicate with the children, the support worker and the children assessed the degree of participation as either a position 1 or a position 2 depending on the activity and the reception the children felt they received from the managers and trustees they met with. The framework for conceptualizing the scope of children's participation illustrated in Figure 10 and used for this analysis, reflects differences in the sharing of power between the adults and the children (Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997). Across all of the four forums, the 'balances of power' between children and adults as reflected in the framework, varied according to different activities or projects. However, the default position for ASHA and for Lamberton was around position 3 with occasional forays into position 4. The default position for the majority of participants in the CHiP and Marlings forums was position 2 with occasional forays into position 1.

The quality of the participatory activities was assessed using a set of practice standards for children's participation (Save the Children, 2007). The full set of standards are replicated in Appendix A but in brief they are concerned with: children being informed; voluntary participation; inclusive practice; respect for children and benefits for participants. In this research, during focus group discussions with each of the forums, the standards were read out to the group, one at a time, explaining what they meant and asked participants to discuss and agree a

score of one to 10 along a horizontal axis on the floor. In each of the forums, the children scored their respective forums very highly on all seven of the standards (a nine or a 10). Discussion in all of focus groups on reaching a consensus was illuminating especially when compared and contrasted. But it was difficult to engage the children in any critical comment. I noted in my fieldwork diary that the children may well have been pre-occupied with showing their forums in a good light to an 'outsider' but all seemed genuinely very appreciative of the way the supporting adults worked with them.

The support workers were also asked to rank practice against each of the standards during interview and they were a little more critical. In discussing the standard on discrimination which relates to all children having a right to have a say on things that matter to them and for efforts to be made to involve children from many different situations, the support workers in CHiP and Lamberton mentioned a number of challenges. They referred to the strategies they employed to try and ensure the best possible representation on the forums and to make them as inclusive as possible that were described earlier in section 5.2. Support workers in Lamberton also explained that feeding back to the children was sometimes difficult because they were dependent on others to provide the information and despite their best efforts to chase up the people responsible, this did not always happen.

This section has explored an analysis of the types of activities the four forums were engaged in and briefly considered the scope and quality of the participatory processes as judged by the children and the supporting adults. All of the forums are seen by their respective participants as spaces where deliberation occurs. That is, as spaces where 'ideas are presented, argued for and against, alternatives considered and agreement is arrived at, possibly through compromises' (Cockburn, 2010:308). The next section of this chapter turns to consider the purposes of the four deliberative forums and the motivations for supporting them, as understood by the managers and sponsors, the support workers and the children involved. This leads the thesis directly into the focus of my enquiry, placing a spotlight on what changes or impact the various actors hoped would result from the children's deliberations.

5.5 Motivation and purposes

This section explores the motivations and purposes of the four deliberative forums as stated by the supporting organisations and by the children involved. The data on this topic was gathered through interviews with staff, focus groups with children and a review of relevant documentation provided by all four organisations. Identifying the reasons why the organisations seek to involve children in decision-making about public services and why children become involved and their respective objectives for the process, provides useful insights into what impacts or benefits were expected.

5.5.1 *Organisations*

The data suggest that the organisations' motivation for investing in the deliberative forums to support children's participation in policy-making and service development, focused on beliefs in:

- the moral or legal rights of children and young people (all case studies but strongest in CHiP and ASHA)
- strengthening citizenship and democratic processes (all case studies but strongest in Lamberton and ASHA)
- the importance of organisations being accountable to their beneficiaries (CHiP)
- improving public services, making them more effective and sensitive to users' needs (all case studies)
- improving the (school or community) environment (ASHA, Lamberton and Marlings)
- empower children and develop their capacities so they can improve their circumstances/lives (ASHA and Lamberton)

These beliefs are reflected in the literature which identifies a number of key drivers for involving children and young people public decision-making, from the perspective of welfare agencies and organisations (see for example, Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Cleaver and Kerr, 2006; Sinclair, 2004). These motivations align with those identified by Tisdall (2010) and outlined on page 75, including the promotion of children and young people's rights; the strengthening of democratic processes; school/organisation and community improvement; and participation being seen as a means by which children and young people can learn new skills and improve their well-being. The section now explores in turn the motivations of each of the four organisations in this study and the stated purposes of each of the forums.

CHiP

CHiP managers and the children's advisory group support worker indicated that the organisation had been working for some time, to establish sustainable mechanisms to support the participation of child 'beneficiaries' in the governance of the organisation. Following an audit, a number of discussion papers and policies designed to improve children's participation in the governance of the organisation had been produced but the lead manager advised in interview that with no additional resources and weak leadership from senior managers, work on including 'children as stakeholders' (the name of the corresponding policy) across the organisation had stalled. He estimated in 2009 that the number of country programmes having any kind of mechanism to support children's participation within the organisation had significantly declined since the audit of 2006.

The data suggest that the motivations behind CHiP establishing its children's advisory group in 2008 were based primarily on external drivers. At that time, major donors including the UK government and the United Nations were expressing concerns about the governance of humanitarian aid agencies and wanted to improve the extent to which such organisations are accountable to the people they aim to benefit (the beneficiaries). User-participation, listening to the voice of and

getting feedback from beneficiaries are judged to be key elements of a strong organisational framework of accountability (HAP, 2010).

Interviews with the two lead managers and the support worker indicated that other external factors were also in force including pressure on CHiP as an international child rights organisation to be seen to be complying with its own standards on child rights. The relationship between the externally driven motivations for establishing the children's advisory group and what the support worker saw as the limited impact of the children's advisory group on CHiP's polices and the way it worked were, the support worker suggested, only too evident:

> *Support worker (CHiP):* When the children's advisory group met with the trustees and the senior management team [in March, 2009] the adults were really taken aback by the idea that the children could question their decisions. It was a very difficult meeting – they didn't expect to be taken to task over the closure of the [country] programme. I think they'd thought of the children's advisory group as something they could 'wear as a badge of honour' and get their input into promotional and marketing materials. As you know they've [the children's advisory group] been doing all sorts of stuff – making videos, meeting with donors. The children love this sort of stuff but even so, there's a lot of it in the week they are here in London.

The children's advisory group had thus been instituted in 2008 as part of CHiP's emerging strategy to improve the way in which it could be seen to be being accountable to its beneficiaries. Its position within this context attracted some organisational resources to bring the advisory group together but it struggled with the fact it was a 'top level' advisory group with no resonance at other levels of the organisation. This meant that those supporting the advisory group had few representative structures on which to draw. Thus as noted in Section 5.2, the majority of the 12 children selected from the six regions were hand-picked by adults and had no mandate from a wider group of children or beneficiaries back in their countries or regions.

ASHA

In India, the motivation for setting up Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs), was (the Director of ASHA and the German donors advised me), to introduce another capacity building mechanism to complement those already in existence (such as the Village Task Force, the Supplementary Education Programme and the women's group). The aim of all these initiatives was to empower poor, rural Dalit villagers so that they might improve their economic and social conditions and well-being. I was informed by the Director of ASHA that the specific objectives of the NCPs were:

> *Manager (ASHA):* to ensure children's participation at all levels of the community and in campaigns against child rights violations, irrespective of caste, creed and disparities. We want to develop the capacity of under privileged and differently-abled children and ensure that systems are in place in communities for the protection of children. It's also about ensuring children get a decent education. But the most important objective is (reading) 'To develop meaningful democratic process by providing scope for children's participation in development and children to become good citizens'.

As previously acknowledged (section 5.2), the NCP model is one that was developed in Rajasthan as part of a larger community development programme for poor rural communities (Srinivasan, 2006). ASHA thus symbolises what it describes as an 'empowerment, community development' approach and as such, can be seen as reflecting a more 'bottom up' approach than the deliberative forums in the other three case studies.

Marlings and Lamberton

The Welsh case studies (Lamberton and Marlings) comprised formal structures set up at least partly because the local authority and the school were required to establish youth forums (for 11 -25 year olds) and school councils (for 3-18 year olds) respectively, by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG, 2006). There were however other motivations at play. In Marlings a new headteacher was seeking to

turn around a struggling school. This was a school that faced considerable challenges because of a high percentage of students whose first language was not English (96%) and a catchment area that was socially deprived. The headteacher and the chair of the school governing body saw the setting up of the school council as an important part of the improvement agenda particularly for a school such as theirs with such a wide range of diversity as the following data extract illustrates:

> *Chair of School Governors (Marlings):* This school has had a lot of difficulties and having a mechanism where children can have a voice is very important in terms of engendering ownership in the improvement plan.

When the headteacher was asked about her hopes for the school council and what she would like it to achieve she said she saw the school council as a means of helping to progress the school improvement priorities as well as a forum for children to express their views and to participate in the running of the school:

> *Headteacher (Marlings):* The school has priorities that it wants to address. I think as adults, yes, obviously we know what we want the outcome to be, but often there is a way that if you go through the children to achieve that outcome and you get their viewpoint, often there are aspects you haven't thought of, but also you actually get them on board so there's more ownership. And actually it's probably more successful because the children understand it better and they want it to work……I think there are two angles, aren't there? That the school council actually says, well, we want to do something about these things, often the immediate things that their friends raise. For example, 'I don't like the fact that the boys are always playing football there'. It's serving a purpose of giving the children a route into the management of the school and to the teachers to say, this is how we feel about….. (whatever it is). It's important the school council does things that are important to them but I suppose if you were to really tie it up, you would say, well, we've got - what is it? Six or seven school priorities. I want the school council to have an involvement in each of those. I suppose that really would be the ultimate.

The purpose of the school council as articulated in this data extract reflects (secondary) teachers' responses to a Welsh and English survey by Whitty and Wisby (2007). In this survey of nearly 1,000 teachers, respondents were asked to give their views on the purposes of school councils or other forms of pupil participation. As Tisdall (2010: 323) reports only three percent of teachers in the survey identified moral or legal rights as the top purpose for pupil consultation with the most popular purposes of pupil consultation identified as improving the school's environment and facilities (27%) and developing pupils social and emotional skills (21%). Teachers then, seem to feel more comfortable with an improvement agenda rather than the rights based agenda more to the fore in ASHA. Although it should also be noted that the quote above also illustrates that the headteacher at Marlings displayed a real expectation that the children should and would have an input into the management of the school.

In Lamberton, while the local authority-led strategic partnership had received some funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to establish a youth forum or council to support the participation of 11-25 year olds in public decision-making, the youth forum in Lamberton was identified in a mapping exercise as particularly well resourced compared with those in other local authorities in Wales (Save the Children, 2006). The local council (Elected Members) and senior officers in the education department reported making a firm commitment to taking steps to strengthen citizenship and improve democratic processes. There was a clear desire to get young people involved in decision making at the local (authority) and community level. The director of education said she saw the purpose of the youth forum as:

> *Director of education (Lamberton)*:…..about engaging the young people of the borough in what we do, so that they understand democracy and the democratic process really and how they can influence and change things in their community.

The Elected Member with responsibility for linking with the youth forum (known as the 'youth champion') saw the purpose of the youth forum as helping young people to learn about democracy and becoming good, active citizens in their communities. The local authority's participation strategy states the purpose of the youth forum as follows:

> The youth forum is all about 'Young People Having a Say' it provides opportunities for young people in Lamberton county borough to have a voice on issues that affect them and to become actively involved in local decision-making.

The staff team directly supporting the youth forum spoke of their commitment to young people's rights and entitlements and specifically young people getting their voices heard in relation to services that affected them and in their communities. External pressures and demands (both nationally and locally) to consult with children and young people were also recognised as a key influence on the development of the youth forum.

In summary, the stated motivations and purposes of the deliberative forums are around: promoting and protecting children's rights; the improvement of public services through service user involvement; addressing democratic engagement; and enhancing the well-being of children. In keeping with Tisdall's (2010) typology. ASHA and CHiP are more focused on children's rights and legal and moral requirements. The accounts from the Welsh public bodies in Lamberton and Marlings, suggest that even though their documentation implied the deliberative forums are underpinned by the legal and moral rights of children to participate in decisions about matters affecting their lives (in line with the UNCRC), in practice they are most concerned with improving services and with improving the skills and well-being of children. Lamberton was also focused on addressing what was seen as the democratic deficit. With the exception of ASHA, another key driver for the organisations, acknowledged by the support workers and managers during interview, was that their organisations had 'to be seen' to consult with children in line with government or donor directives and expectations.

The motivations of organisations are seen in the literature as key to what actual outcomes result from children's participation in public decision-making (Cockburn, 2010). The penultimate section of this chapter (Section 5.4) returns to considerations of the motivations of the organisations in this study with reference to the prevailing understandings of the nature of childhood and related issues of power and control, but first consideration is given to what the data reveals about the motivations of the children involved in the four case studies and an exploration of how they differ from those expressed by the organisations.

5.5.2 *Children*

Children's motivation for getting involved in the participation initiatives in each of the four case studies centred on a desire to:

- get their voices heard (all case studies);
- make a difference (all case studies);
- ensure services better meet their/other children's needs (ASHA, Lamberton's & CHiP);
- change the image of young people within their community (ASHA and Lamberton).

The following data extracts illustrate some of these points:

> *Girl, aged 9 (Marlings):* I wanted to join [the school council] because I wanted to make a difference to the school.
>
> *Girl, aged 14 (ASHA):* I wanted to be involved to make a difference to the community, I feel I can make a difference it makes me feel happy.
>
> *Boy, aged 15 (Lamberton): ….*being involved in the youth forum helps me to get across to people that we're not all 'hoodies', that we don't have two horns and a tail. They don't think we can be responsible, like….

The next data extracts illustrate how children appreciated the social aspects of the participation structures, including meeting with friends and making use of opportunities to take part in activities that they would not otherwise have. For example, making a DVD (Lamberton and CHiP) and taking part in a summit on the environment and climate change and cultural performances (ASHA).

> *Girl, 12 (ASHA) through an interpreter:* I really enjoy the parliament. It is joyful to be able to speak out and to put on our cultural performances in our communities.
>
> *Girl, 16 (CHiP):* It was so cool to do the video of the G20 summit. We had such a good time. What I think I like most about [the advisory group] is the friendships. I came here [to the meeting] on Monday and made friends with everyone – they are all so inspiring, then we became a family and now we are one.

Analysis of the accounts given by children, support workers, managers and political sponsors illustrates the different emphasis on the *purpose* of children or young people's participation that different actors have and something of their respective motivations and the hoped for outcomes. The data suggests that, generally, the children were more concerned with affecting the social and power relations between adults and children and 'making a difference' although they were also concerned to improve public services and to meet friends, socialise and participate in new and worthwhile experiences.

As previously noted, the motivations and purposes that organisations invest in deliberative projects strongly influences what is expected and achieved in terms of impacts. But what influence do children's motivations have, if they are different to those of the adults? As Sinclair (2004) suggests, clarity of purpose, motivation and a shared understanding of the objectives of children's participation, is essential and is strongly linked to power:

> Only when the purpose of the participation is clear can adults be honest with themselves and with children about what can be offered in terms of power sharing and a realistic assessment of the likelihood of the project or activity effecting change. (2004: 111).

The penultimate section of this chapter builds on this exploration of motivations and purposes to consider issues of power and the role that children's participation can play as a mechanism of social control or socialization which some theorists have criticized for rendering children as too passive (see for example, Prout, 2005).

5.6 Participation as a means of empowerment or as a means of control?

This dichotomy is presented as a means of drawing out analytic points rather than to suggest an either/or situation. As this thesis will highlight, both perspectives are valid interpretations. The tensions between these positions are at the heart of this research. Data from all sources suggest that traditional understandings of childhood are influencing the perceived objectives of children's participation. This was particularly noticeable in the Wales case studies. In Lamberton, the Elected Member with responsibility for linking with the local authority's youth forum and championing their cause saw the objectives of the youth forum as helping young people to develop into responsible, active (even politicised) citizens, as this data extract from the interview illustrates:

> *Elected Member, Lamberton*: It's about giving them experiences, helping them to see what it's all about – they can learn how it works….I hope they become active in their communities, they try and make a difference and if I'm honest – they get involved in politics, like I did.

This Elected Member was very committed to the youth forum and the idea of young people having a voice and worked hard to champion their views and opinions and indeed the youth forum's very existence amongst his more sceptical fellow councillors and the cabinet members. But even so, the idea that the youth forum might have a role in informing the council about the wishes and feelings of service users and thereby help them design and deliver more effective services or that the youth forum might have a role in holding the council to account was to him something that was a long way off:

> *Interviewer:* Do you think the Youth Forum has a role in holding the Council to account?

> *Elected Member (Lamberton):* (laughs) No not really. We're a long way away from that. It's about changing attitudes, about getting other councillors to see that young people have something to contribute. I arranged for 'Take Care' – the anti-bullying DVD that the young people produced to be shown at a full council meeting. Councillors could see that young people weren't all devils with tails, that they had difficulties and that they were responsible in helping each other. It's a slow process changing attitudes but these sorts of things work.

These last data extracts from Lamberton emphasise that young people might be seen 'at risk' or 'a risk' and in need of controlling in these uncertain times (Parton, 2006). In the other Welsh case study (Marlings) a school council in a primary school, the chair of the school governors expressed her view that one of the primary objectives of the school council (and why she thought it a good thing and supported it) was to help children to learn about taking responsibility, negotiating, problem solving etc.

> *Chair of school governors (Marlings):* It [the school council] really helps them to learn about how to solve problems, raising money and even how to influence decision-making. It's all good stuff and many of the children don't get those opportunities at home, especially the girls.

These responses struck me as strong manifestations of an attitude that sees children as 'little-people-in-the-making' (Qvortrup, 2003). Or as Prout (2000) described as, 'the way that modernity has emphasised childhood as a period in the life course oriented towards the future' (2000: 305). These views were shared, albeit less strongly, by many of the support workers and to some extent by the children themselves, who in their respective accounts, emphasised the positive benefits to children of becoming active and informed through membership of the youth forum. So for example, the support worker commenting on the achievements of the youth forum in Lamberton reported:

> *Support worker (Lamberton):* I think if you look at the things that the youth forum have achieved some of the most brilliant things have been raising awareness and they have successfully raised awareness. They get to enjoy themselves, learn new things, get more confident, learn about taking responsibility, problem-solving and working with other people

> but the changed policy or practice is far fewer than the raising awareness.

This comment from the support worker resonates with Wyness's (2009) analysis of the contradictory role of adult support workers in youth forums and school councils in England, where children's *place* in the structure of society and as a vision of the future, comprises the participation *space* (Moss and Petrie, 2002). For Prout writing in 2000, this strong emphasis on the futurity of children is about control with current UK policy concentrating on children as a means of shaping societal future. Prout subsequently suggests:

> ….the desire to control the future of children seems to be intensified even as modernity's project of rational control meets its limits and as a new mood of uncertainty, risk (Beck, 1992) and ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991) replaces the more rigid motions of identity, authority and morality that characterised the earlier part of the 20th century (2003:18).

Late modernity, Prout (2000) claims, has seen the emergence of new patterns of family life, marriage and divorce, labour market participation, work and global economy. The child may also act as a repository for nostalgic longings for stability and certainty (Jenks, 2005), as a figure of redemptive possibility (Popkewitz and Bloch, 2000) but a primary significance of this, Prout suggests, is that 'in a world seen as increasingly shifting, complex and uncertain, children precisely because they are seen as especially unfinished, appear as a good target for controlling the future – and perhaps, therefore a target that still retains a wide societal credibility.' (2000:306).

Similar points about the potential for participatory mechanisms to serve as a means of social control are made by Milbourne (2009) studying work with disengaged young people at a community level in the UK; Taylor (2007) who looks at participation in community development; and Kothari (2004) in relation to participatory approaches in international development. From this perspective, participation is about taming, socialising children and young people to behave in

particular ways. In reality, as Milbourne (2009) notes, in the 1990s and 2000s under New Labour while there was lots of rhetoric in the UK about de-centralisation, there was also much more central control via the use of performance management, targets, grants and therefore less room for manoeuvre. In these circumstances the 'space' for citizens (of any age) to influence at the local level is squeezed (Newman *et al*., 2004). The next chapter explores further how these more subtle purposes for children's participation can be seen to be influencing the impacts that result and provide a new explanation for the lack of concern expressed about the impact of children's participation on public services in favour of concerns about the impact on the well-being of the children involved which have to come to fore (McNeish *et al.,* 2002).

5.7 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a review of accounts describing the 'doing' of participation in each of the four deliberative forums and considered key features of the forums in relation to their stated purpose and their structure, membership, representation and activities. The three UK based case studies represent examples of what Cornwall describes as 'invited' spaces as opposed to the 'popular' spaces that children and young people more freely associate in (Cornwall, 2008). The links between the forums and the children's own everyday lives and experiences was far from clear from the data, as will be further discussed in chapter eight when considering the tensions characterising children's participation as reflected in my case studies. ASHA is more of a hybrid in this respect, children are 'invited' to take part in a formal institution established by adults but the meetings take place in the villages where children live, in the 'popular' spaces they regularly inhabit.

The findings discussed in this chapter with regard to the motivations of organisations and children and the explicit and implicit purposes that the organisations invest in these forums reflect the findings of previous research (see for example Tisdall, 2008). But differences were noted across the case studies. The purposes of the forums in Wales were expressed more in terms of children's needs

rather than their moral or legal 'rights' and while, as Tisdall (2010) recalls, children and young people do report their appreciation of the skills they gain from participation, they also report frustration if their participation in school councils and youth forums is tokenistic or ineffective with no impact on results (Cockburn, 2010; Alderson, 2000).

There was also an element in the Welsh case studies and in CHiP of what Tisdall (2008:347) terms 'participation as performance' with organisations keen to be seen as consulting with children. This Tisdall (2010) continues, has been criticized in the Asian context but is something we should worry about in the UK context too with the demands for children's participation, on local and national governments bringing about an increase in more technocratic and formal approaches which can be more successful in attracting funding, as well as more easily captured and portrayed positively in the media. The motivation of being seen to be doing something was less in evidence in ASHA perhaps because of the lighter touch governance arrangements more evident in the Indian context.

Previous research identifies the importance of the motives of those who take part in civic participation, especially the state actors. Cornwall and Coelho (2006) conclude that much depends on these motivations and list them as a requirement for participatory institutions to be inclusive and effect change. The data suggest that in Lamberton and Marlings, despite the official policy emphasis in Wales on children's rights to participate, there is little investment as yet, in developing a rights-based approach. Rather there is a benign focus on training up 'future' citizens, improving the school environment as well as on participatory projects that are designed to encourage adults to value and respect children's contributions. This is in contrast to the approach taken in ASHA. The NGO supported forums (CHiP and ASHA) advocate more of a rights based understanding but, in CHiP, arguably this is very narrowly defined in relation to accountability and the organisation's own needs (to be seen to be accountable) rather than in relation to the participation rights of the children.

Having explored the motivations and purposes of the deliberative forums, the next chapter examines understandings of the impact of the activities and deliberations the children's forums were engaged with over the study period with reference to the specific policy change objectives selected. This inquiry into the impact of children's participation on decision-making now focuses down on the actual changes in public services that were seen to result from children's participation, in each of the four case studies.

Chapter 6: The Impact of Children's Participation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the changes that were seen to result from the children's participation using data generated from children, support workers, managers and some of the decision-makers the forums were trying to influence. In line with my research questions, the focus of this analysis is on changes in public services. Following this introduction, Section 6.2 identifies the changes in public services and facilities that the children said they wanted to see happen (termed the children's 'change objectives'), while section 6.3 concentrates on exploring what changes in public services were seen to have resulted from their influencing activities at the end of the forum cycle. Data relating to the impact on policies and services is also analysed in section 6.3 alongside the organisational motivations and 'degrees' of participation identified in chapter five.

As well as in some cases having an impact on public services, children and adults identified a number of other impacts or benefits of children's participation. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 of this chapter explore, respectively, the impact of children's participation on children themselves and the impact on the social and power relationships the children enjoy with adults. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings and reflects further on the relationships between organisational motivations and policy outcomes. In the following chapter (chapter seven) the analysis explores in greater detail just *how* children's voices are turned into policy 'influence' (Lundy, 2007) and the factors that work to enable or inhibit this process.

Before discussing the findings relating to the impact of the children's participation in each of the case studies, it is important to remind the reader of the understandings of 'impact' that informed this enquiry and how these understandings shaped the research design and the choice of methods.

Making sense of impact

The concept of impact is contested and careful consideration was needed when designing this study to allow for the various and multiple understandings of impact and how 'impact' is actually defined. As described in chapter four, fieldwork was conducted in three of the four case study sites at the start of a cycle – at Point A (for example, the school year) to ascertain the purpose of children's participation and the expressed 'change objectives' the children wanted to achieve. These data are explored in section 6.2. Approximately 9-12 months later, the 'after' data were gathered at Point B – the end of the forum cycle, with the purpose of examining what had been achieved in terms of influence on public services. At this final stage of the research, as well as conducting interviews and focus groups with the participating children, the support workers; managers and sponsors, interviews were conducted with some of the decision-makers who had been subject to the children's influencing activities to ascertain a greater understanding of how the children's views had influenced their decision-making. These data are explored briefly in section 6.3 of this chapter and in more depth, in chapter seven. Mid-point reviews were also undertaken with the Welsh deliberative forums and CHiP to gather reflections on the influencing activities that the children were engaging in.

With the fourth case study (ASHA), all of the fieldwork had to be undertaken during one visit owing to funding restrictions. Fieldwork was conducted over an intense period of three weeks, data were generated from exactly the same category of actors as in the other case studies but participants were asked to recall the changes resulting from the work of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) over the proceeding 12 month period. Additionally at ASHA there was opportunity to observe a number of NCP meetings; training and influencing activities; and to interview some parents and community leaders. Basic records of activities across all four case studies were provided by the support workers.

The focus of this chapter is on what is understood by the stakeholders in each of the case studies to have been the impact of the children's participation over the study

period. While the central research questions this study seeks to address are concerned with the impact of children's participation on public services, children and adults across the case studies identified a much wider range of impacts or benefits for children themselves, with few drawbacks or negative effects. Consideration of these other impacts was incorporated into the data analysis using the Kirby, *et al*. (2004) typology of the dimensions of change that the authors judge (on the basis of previous research and their own empirical work) to be central to most participation work with children. The dimensions of change and the indicators selected are outlined in Figure 11 below. Further information on the typology can be found in chapter four.

Figure 11: Children's participation: dimensions of change

Dimension of Change	**INDICATORS**		
Impact on services, policies and institutions	Children's views being heard leads to improved services, policies and practices		
Impact on children	Acquisition of skills and knowledge	Enhanced self-esteem and self confidence; improved well-being	Greater rights awareness
Impact on social and power relations	Improved structures, institutional policies, resources and mechanisms for involving children in decision making	Children have greater influence on decisions affecting different areas of their lives	Enhanced dialogue and support between children and adults

Having explored how the concept of impact is operationalised in this study, the discussion now turns to consider the perceived impacts of children's participation across each of three dimensions of change outlined in Figure 11, using the indicators prescribed. The next section reviews in turn the policy and practice 'change objectives' the children identified in each of the forums.

6.2. Impact on public services (policy and practice): The changes the children wanted to see

INDICATOR
Children's views being heard leads to improved services, policies and practices

The starting point was to establish the changes (in services, policies and/or institutions) that the children in each of the four forums were seeking to effect. The process for deciding on issues to work on and the clarity with which the goals and objectives of the influencing activity were articulated by both children and support workers, varied across all of the case studies, as did the category of 'decision-maker' they were targeting. Figure 12 sets out a summary of the main policy and practice change objectives that the children and support workers said the forums were working to influence over the study period. Marlings is not included in the analysis in Figure 12 because the newly established school council did not select any change objectives related to governance or school policy.

Figure 12: Children's policy and practice change objectives

Case study	Issues and change objectives			
ASHA	The need for an approach road to the village	Elimination of an illicit arrack (liquor) shop	Accessing resources for a Balwadi (pre-school nursery)	Destruction of a insect nest
CHiP	Making the INGO more accountable to its child beneficiaries (via an accountability charter)	Strengthen networks in the countries of advisory group members (to ensure that the group is able to represent a broad constituency of beneficiaries)	The work programme of the INGO reflects children's concerns	-
Lamberton	Careers advice - making it more widely available	Access to courses in colleges of further education in Year 10 - making it a fairer system	Educational Maintenance Allowance available to more young people	-

Category of change objective and the influence of adults

The category of the change objectives selected by each of the forums is of interest. The change objectives of CHiP's advisory group relate primarily to changes in the way the organisation is governed to make it more accountable to children (reflecting the purpose of the children's advisory group as set up). The Marlings school council's change objectives were primarily targeted on changing the behaviour of other children – their peers. As noted in chapter five, the actual selection of issues that the forums in CHiP and Marlings choose to work on was strongly influenced by organisational imperatives and the fact that both forums were relatively new structures. In ASHA the children were working to get new, basic services provided or a threat to their well-being removed. For Lamberton the children were concerned to bring about changes in the ways in which certain, existing services were targeted and delivered, notably careers advice and guidance, access to further education colleges and eligibility criteria for Education Maintenance Allowances. Policy and practice concerning these three public services was not determined by the local authority that sponsored the youth forum. The youth forum's influencing targets were thus located elsewhere and seemed poorly understood by both the children and the support workers.

The overt influence of adults on the selection of issues seemed to be weakest in Lamberton. I noted in my fieldwork diary that the youth forum in Lamberton might have benefited from some guidance from adult policy 'experts' to help them select as priorities the change objectives that were most likely to be realised. For example, the criteria for awarding the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) paid to children from low-income families who stay on a school post-16 in Wales was an issue the youth forum selected to make representation on. At the time, the EMA eligibility criteria worked across both England and Wales and were designed in Whitehall. Any proposed changes for Wales would have to include discussion with Whitehall officials as well as those in Cardiff. The UK Government, especially in the context of devolution, is a distant body that is much less likely to be influenced by

the views of a few young people in Wales than the Welsh Assembly Government or the local education authority (Chaney, *et al*., 2001).

ASHA provided just that type of guidance to the NCPs, with support staff encouraging the children to focus their efforts on changing things that were within the remit of more accessible, government officials and elected representatives operating at the lowest Panchayat level of governance and the next, District level - rather than trying to affect changes on policies determined at the more distant, state or federal level of governance. As Cockburn (2010:306) reminds us in his analysis contrasting 'from above' spaces for children's participation with those 'from below', children's participation operates in the 'increasingly complex and differentiated nature of both global and local power relations' and there are tensions between mechanisms that on the one hand reside in public policy and service delivery and on the other hand in the life worlds of children and young people (Clarke and Percy-Smith, 2006). The research suggests that embedded relationships with key adults that can help children to negotiate these tensions, bridge the divide and turn their collective 'voice' into influence, over time, can be significant. I will explore in the next chapter what the data have to say about the actual mechanics of turning children's 'voice' into 'influence' in public and formal decision-making and consider in more depth, the key role of the supporting adults in these processes.

Returning now to consider the change objectives the different forums selected and the role of the supporting organisations in determining those choices, it is important to note that in the CHiP advisory group 12 children were brought together from widely varying contexts. The CHiP group had not met together prior to their week long advisory group meeting in London and were expected to have a wide range of different concerns given their different contexts, experiences, ages and traditions. The difficulties this situation posed for determining common change objectives amongst the group were considerable. In any event, the support worker argued, the primary, expressed purpose of the advisory group legitimised the prior selection (by the organisation) of issues they wished to get the children's advice on. However,

mindful of the imbalance of power and the ethics of 'meaningful' children's participation, the support worker was keen to ensure space within the programme for the meeting to enable children to bring their own concerns and issues to the attention of what she termed 'high-level' decision-makers.

The data reveal that it did indeed prove a real challenge for the CHiP advisory group to identify common change objectives; the children's experiences were so diverse. For example, the two children from Bangladesh were connected to a project working with street children in Dhaka. They wanted to see CHiP do more of this work in other parts of the city and in other cities across the region. The two children from Brazil were particularly concerned with children affected by violence in the favelas of Rio de Janiero, while the child from Glasgow wanted CHiP to do more to support children with substance misusing parents and to help tackle unemployment amongst young people in the UK.

Perhaps as a consequence of the lack of a common, programme related agenda, the issues that the children's advisory group settled to work on during the five days they had to prepare for their meeting with senior managers and trustees related primarily to the key issue put forward by CHiP, that is:

> *Agenda, children's advisory group (CHiP) March 2*009: Advising the organisation on how it can make it itself more accountable to children. What processes; structures and mechanisms do children feel need to be put in place? What would children like to see and what advice can they give CHiP on the practical challenges and how these might be overcome.

The children's advisory group developed proposals for strengthening the participation of children across the whole organisation and drafted an accountability charter to present to CHiP's senior leadership team and trustees on the penultimate day of their week long meeting. The group also had some time ahead of the meeting with trustees and directors to prioritise some of the issues they wished to raise concerning the plight of children in their own countries and what they wanted CHiP to do in response. However, when it came to the meeting

with the senior decision-makers in CHiP, one child in the advisory group refused to be confined to a pre-set agenda.

Noi, a boy of 15, had learnt on his journey from [country] to London for the advisory group meeting, that CHiP were to close down its programme of work in [country] within the next three months. He had been informed by the member of staff who accompanied him. The member of staff advised me that the staff team in [country] had only been informed of this decision a few days earlier. The irony of attending a meeting to support children to participate in governance decisions within an organisation that had just taken a far-reaching decision that affected thousands of children without any recourse to the children or indeed, the staff working with the children, was not lost on Noi. When the children's advisory group met with the senior managers and trustees, the space set aside for children to raise their own concerns was totally dominated by Noi's plea for the organisation to re-think their decision to close the [country] programme and for Noi to complain bitterly about how children's views had not even been sought when CHiP had made this decision, let alone listened to. Consequently, the time set aside in the meeting for a more orderly presentation on the varying (programme related) concerns of the whole of the advisory group was effectively filled with Noi's specific demands.

The change objectives selected by the forums in Lamberton and ASHA are more obviously concerned with changes to policy and practice across public service delivery (see Figure 12). Both of these forums represent structures that have been established for a number of years. In both these case studies I observed, children themselves prioritised the issues they wanted to work on from a longer list of collective concerns. My contemporaneous fieldnotes contain a description of how Lamberton's youth forum went about selecting the issues the youth forum would work on for the coming year, at their annual general meeting (AGM).

> *Youth Forum AGM, October 2008 (Lamberton) Fieldnotes*: At the AGM of the Youth Forum, the children work in smaller groups (8-10 children per group) to identify two or three issues that they think the forum should be working to change. The groups broadly follow the borough council's

> portfolios, that is education; environment etc. After the group have about 30 minutes to discuss their ideas, young people get up, one by one to talk about each issue - what the problem is, what they'd like to see changed. Some put forward ideas of what the Youth Forum could do – doing some kind of peer survey to find out what lots of other young people think is a popular suggestion! Then the young people that are present (about 100 today) vote to decide upon the six issues they are going to work on for the year. Three are for the first six months and another three are for the second six months.

In Lamberton, the process of selecting issues to work on was based on democratic principles with the youth forum (the children) as the decision-making body. I observed that the support workers made few obvious interventions to influence the children's choices. This was a deliberate decision, the support team advised me, because they wanted the decisions about the work of the youth forum to be first and foremost, the children's own. As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the consequences of this approach was that the youth forum focused on trying to bring about changes in public services that were largely outside of the local authority's control and therefore, by their own admission, less accessible and less well understood by the support workers.

By contrast, in India (ASHA), I was advised that while the issues selected by the NCPs reflected children's own concerns and priorities, the final selection process was strongly influenced by guidance from ASHA's director on what change was possible and in selecting the most promising level of governance for channelling the children's influencing activities. Such adult guidance, as will be explored further in chapter seven, was seen by ASHA's director and NGO partners to enable the NCPs to target their influencing activities where they had most chance of success. The suggestions and guidance from ASHA's staff seemed to be welcomed by the children.

> *Interviewer:* How does the children's parliament decide what issues it's going to work on?
>
> *Girl, aged 12 (ASHA):* We talk about the things that are bothering us and decide what to do. Write a petition, make some posters…put on a show - we do lots of different things.

Interviewer: Do you get advice from (name ASHA Project workers)?

Girl, aged 12 (ASHA): Yes and from (names peer educator). We decide together what's best and what the priorities are for children.

To summarise, this review of the policy and practice change objectives selected in the case studies (as defined by the children and support workers) has highlighted the various ways in which issues were selected. The issues the forums in CHiP and Marlings focused on were largely determined by the supporting organisation but these agendas could be disrupted by the children as the examples of the closure of the [country] programme (in CHiP) and the issue of fundraising for the Haitian earthquake (in Marlings) testify. In Lamberton the children decided their change objectives via a democratic prioritisation process. In ASHA, while the children also said they decided on their change objectives democratically they received explicit direction and guidance as to the issues they finally selected, from a supporting adult (ASHA' director).

The analysis has highlighted some possible relationships between the motivations of organisations and the ways in which change objectives are selected (and by whom). These will be considered further alongside the subject of the next section, the changes in public services that were seen to result from the children's participation.

6.3 Impact on public services (policy and practice): The changes in public services that were seen to result from the children's participation

This section explores the changes in public services (policy and/or practice) that were seen to result from the children's participation in the three forums that selected change objectives of this type, ASHA, CHiP and Lamberton. Marlings' school council is largely excluded from this analysis as no policy or practice change objectives linked to school governance were identified by the newly established school council. In Marlings, the change objectives were (as previously noted) largely focused on changing the behaviour of fellow pupils and improving the well-being of the children involved in line with Welsh Government policy on the promotion of

healthy eating (WAG, 2008). They were not concerned with affecting changes to school policy or school governance, rather they were concerned with the *implementation* of national policy and the school improvement agenda. This remained the case throughout the study period and there are no findings to report on the changes to public services that might or might not have been achieved in Marlings.

Lamberton

When comparing what the children in Lamberton set out to achieve by way of influence (i.e. a more flexible, drop in careers advice and information service; changes to the system of allocating further education college places; and a re-distribution of the EMA) with the situation 12 months later, it was hard to discern any resultant changes in policy or practice. This is not to say that the activities of the forum in Lamberton did not have any impact. As will be seen later in this chapter in section 6.4, the impact on children themselves of their participation in the quasi-representative structures of the Lamberton youth forum (and the school council in Marlings), in terms of confidence boosting, skills development and horizon widening was frequently reported and observed in this study as it has been in much of the previous research into the benefits of children's participation (see for example, Halsey *et.al*., 2006; NFER, 2006; Davies, 2004; Kirby with Bryson, 2002).

Because of my own previous experience of trying to influence public policy in the Welsh context, I noted that I should however consider that the impacts of the Lamberton forum's influencing activities might become evident outside the time-frame of my study, i.e. 15 months. This consideration was of relevance to all of the case studies. Influencing policy from the outside of government or the management of the institution, or even through insider groups and policy networks takes time, not least because policy making is not a rational, linear process (Grant, 2000). As noted in chapter two, change is most likely to take place during what Kingdon (1984) defines as short lived 'policy windows' where the problem stream, the policy stream and the political stream all come together. The significance of this temporal

dimension in children's participation in public decision-making will be further explored in chapter seven, when I reflect on what the data reveals about factors that work to enable or inhibit children's voices being heard and taken into account by decision-makers.

In Lamberton there was a sense that while the local authority respondents presented as very committed to children having a voice, they seemed rather defeated by the complexity of the policy-making processes and naïve to the numerous opportunities (and threats) to effect policy change (including the existence of 'policy windows') within multi-level governance arrangements (Rees and Chaney, 2011). One of the support workers in Lamberton, frustrated by the lack of involvement of officers from the local authority in the work of the youth forum, explained how they were reliant on these officers for up-to-date policy expertise if they were to know how to best to proceed:

> *Support worker (Lamberton):* We just can't know about everything that's going on policy-wise….how do they think we can do that. We're reliant on people in the local authority and beyond telling us and getting involved.

ASHA

By contrast in India, the NCPs were reported to have had a discernible impact on a number of priority issues of concern they had brought to the attention of the local council and relevant District-level government departments over the preceding 12 months.

I was appraised of many successes that the NCPs had had in taken forward issues of concern and getting positive responses from decision-makers. I was aware that I needed to be mindful that in ASHA, because of the different way in which my data was generated, my own unfamiliarity with the context and the researcher effect, I should treat some of these claims of success with caution. I took steps to strengthen the validity of the data by enhancing my observations of the NCPs with photography

and video; by continually reflecting on the data and the purpose such claims serve; and rigorously comparing and contrasting different accounts (Coffey and Aitkinson, 1996).

In one village, the NCP reported pushing for an approach road for their village to enable them to get to and from school more easily by bus. The NCP had submitted a petition to the relevant government official and after six months they started building the new road. Other issues took longer to resolve, for example, gaining resources for a Balwadi[5] in one of the villages. Some resources were secured within a few months to enable the Balwadi to be run by volunteers but efforts were still in hand to attract further government funding to support staffed provision. A petition to the local fire station to get an insect nest removed was dealt with promptly with the insect nest removed two days after the NCP petition was submitted. The request to have the illegal liquor shop closed down was also responded to quickly. The director of ASHA claimed that this was because, in this instance, the District judge (a keen supporter of NCPs) had intervened. When asked how long it has taken to get the many positive responses NCPs have generated on the issues they have raised, the Director of ASHA reported:

> *Director (ASHA):* It depends on the issue and who is responding. If the official is well-disposed and at what level (of governance)….depends on their relative power and how sensitised they are to children and children's rights.

There was definitely a preference in ASHA for the supporting staff to encourage the children to focus their influencing activities on local issues within the remit of local officials and elected representatives. This preference, I was advised by the project director, was based on an explicit understanding that raising issues with the local Panchayat is likely to have the most chance of change compared to raising issues decided upon at the state or the federal level of governance.

[5] A pre-school nursery

Children in all of the NCPs I visited told me that generally they did feel listened to by the people they were taking their concerns to. Many children made reference to a particular response that informed their judgment. This response from a member of one NCP was typical of the responses received from children across the different NCPs when asked whether they felt the views of the NCP were listened to by the government or other relevant decision-makers:

> *Girl, aged 13 (ASHA):* Yes, I do feel we are being listened to - even the Electricity Board listened because they came and fixed the broken wire immediately.

It proved difficult to get a firm understanding of the practice of local government in the District of India where the NCPs are located, e.g. how budgets are spent and the full range of responsibilities of the different tiers of governance. However, it seemed that there was generally less centralized control of local public services than in the UK. The Gram Panchayat seemed to be more akin to a parish or town council in the UK context – with elected representatives and very few paid officials, but with more responsibilities for maintaining the local environment than a UK parish or town council. The Director of ASHA advised that the Gram Panchayat was able to respond directly to local demands and needs on many 'local' (that is, village or neighbourhood level), issues.

CHiP

There had been no change on the CHiP decision to close the [country] programme when I returned to meet with the advisory group, 12 months later in the final phase of the research. CHiP closed the programme in [country] as planned in 2009 although it was reported to me by a senior manager that another INGO had continued the programme of work. However, whilst the children had had no influence on this decision, all stakeholders agreed that Noi's passionate account of his grievances had really helped the high-level decision-makers to understand what

children's participation 'was all about', as this data extract illustrates

> *Senior Manager (CHiP):* You can write all the concept papers you like and get sign up but it was so good that the closure of the [country] programme was challenged. They [the directors and trustees] needed to learn just what this all means – they have to give up some of the power.

This event in the children's advisory group meeting in March 2009, the manager claimed, contributed to the organisation deciding to introduce revised institutional policy on how children should be supported to participate in the governance of CHiP. More importantly, as far as the manager was concerned, it also contributed to the board and senior leadership team's decision (taken in December 2009) to make major new investments in establishing structures and mechanisms to support children's participation at a country programme level (from April 2010). While the decision on closing the [country] programme was not re-considered by the senior leadership team or the trustees in response to Noi's concerns, within six months of the meeting, CHiP's management had agreed a new policy on children's participation in the governance of the work of the organisation at the country programme level and to invest £750,000 (representing a 10 fold increase to existing funding for children's participation in governance) to establish country level structures and mechanisms for children to participate, as part of its strategy to enhance accountability across all levels of the organisation. When asked (15 months after the meeting in 2009) what had been the impact of the children's advisory group since its first meeting in March 2009, the lead manager claimed:

> *Senior Manager (CHiP)….*there's more consciousness around the issue of children's voices and how we're getting those into the organisation as well as just using the external advocacy. And I think it's been part of an overall push, it's not just the children's advisory group itself but it's been part of the overall push to get accountability on the agenda, and we've now got that into the 2010-13 strategy as one of the *Policy Breakthroughs* being resourced in the next three years you know. So where we put next-to-no money into this - despite the *Change for Children Strategy* last year and the *Children as Stakeholders Policy* – a few years ago - now there's a new policy (on accountability) which for the first time provides some central resources to support children's participation in CHiP. It's worth £250,000 a year for the next three years.

At the end of the study period in June 2010, the lead manager and support worker in CHiP were thus convinced that the children's advisory group's meeting with the trustees and senior managers work in March 2009 had directly contributed to the decision to introduce new and resourced institutional policies on involving children in governance decisions at the country programme level.

Figure 13 summarises the impacts on public services reported in each of the relevant case studies alongside the original change objectives the forums selected to work on. In addition, the analysis re-introduces the primary organisational motivations explored in chapter five in order to see if any patterns or possible relationships emerged between motivations, change objectives and influencing outcomes.

This analysis suggests that NGOs are more likely to privilege a concern with children's moral and legal rights as might be expected and that such organisations were more likely to be able to demonstrate changes in policy and practice as a result of children's participation. Motivations, Arnott (2008) suggests, go some way to explaining division over the relative importance of *outcome* or *process.* When Marlings is included back in the analysis, the data suggest that where there is a greater concern with process and the 'developmental effects' of children's participation, the likelihood of public policy change resulting from the children's deliberations is reduced. As noted previously, this message has emerged from previous research and theoretical considerations leading Arnott (2008:364), to conclude:

> ….understanding both the motivations and outcomes associated with policy developments that seek to 'extend the areas in which children are constructed as policy participants' is complex and leads to considerations of theoretical issues such as the individual's (both adult and child) relationship with the state and civil society.

Figure 13: Primary motivations, change objectives and perceived changes in public services

	Primary Motivations (in order of priority)	**Change objectives**	**Changes in public services that resulted**
ASHA NGO	Empower, develop capacity, improve circumstances Moral and legal rights	The need for an approach road to the village Elimination of an illicit arrack (liquor) shop Accessing resources for a Balwadi Destruction of a insect nest	Approach road built Arrack shop closed down Some resources acquired but more needed - ongoing Insect nest destroyed
CHiP INGO	Being seen to be accountable Moral and legal rights	Making CHiP more accountable to its child beneficiaries (via an accountability charter) Strengthen networks in the countries of advisory group members (to ensure that the group is able to represent a broad constituency of beneficiaries) The work programme of the INGO reflects children's concerns	New, well resourced policy on children's participation focused on lower levels of governance Aforementioned resources targeted on strengthening arrangements in countries of panel members No changes reported in the study period
Lamberton Local authority	Strengthen citizenship and democracy Empower, develop capacity, improve circumstances	Careers advice - making it more widely available Access to courses in colleges of further education in Year 10 - making it a fairer system Educational Maintenance Allowance available to more young people	No changes reported in the study period No changes reported in the study period No changes reported in the study period

The patterns and possible relationships between the data represented in Figure 13 will be further explored later in this chapter and in the next; meanwhile the discussion now turns to consider evaluations of the influencing work the forums engaged in, from the perspectives of the children and adults involved.

Evaluating the influencing process

Although there were no tangible policy or practice changes resulting In Lamberton from the children's participation, when the children in the youth forum were evaluating their achievements at the end of the year, most were very pleased with the results of their influencing activities on Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMA) and felt their views had been listened to, respected and taken into account. They had written to the Minister for Education in the Welsh Government asking that consideration be given to all young people getting EMA rather than just targeting the allowance on those young people from low income families. The Minister had written back a long letter to the youth forum explaining why this was not a feasible idea. The young people accepted this and welcomed the Minister's letter and its tone.

In the youth forum's evaluation of its own influencing work – at a full forum meeting with 100 members present, 25% felt they had had lots of influence over the EMA issue even though all that had happened was that they had received a well written, well thought out, respectful letter from the Minister telling them why their ideas could not be implemented and the rationale for the existing system. A further 50% of the members present thought they had at least had some influence on the issue. A focus group discussion with members of the relevant youth forum sub-group and my observations suggested that for the children - getting respect, accessing facilities, getting opportunities to take part in interesting things and enriching their skills and capacities, via their membership of the youth forum, was sufficient.

The majority of the children that I was able to speak with in CHiP and Lamberton were satisfied with the influence on policy and practice development their deliberations had had over the preceding 9-12 months even though in Lamberton there seemed to have been no changes in the policies and practices the children wanted to influence, and the influence the children in CHiP had was, at that time, seen by many of the children, as limited. Children in all four of the forums studied (ASHA, CHiP, Lamberton and Marlings) prioritised the respect they were afforded by those adults they sought to influence and by those professionals who supported them. They all enjoyed being members of their respective deliberative forums and felt that on a personal level they benefited from the opportunities they got through the forums to make positive contributions, to take responsibility, learn new skills, meet friends, have fun and gain confidence.

Outside of my case studies some children in Wales with clearer and more narrowly focused personal objectives (for some based on some of their own very poor experiences of public services) are expressing their frustrations at the lack of change that is brought about as a result of their engagement and in particular the lack of feedback they receive (Funky Dragon, 2008). Criticisms of children being asked their views and never receiving feedback have also been made in Scotland (Tisdall and Davis, 2004). These responses echo Sinclair's (2004) concerns that young people will quickly become disillusioned with being asked for their views and opinions if these are not seen to be taken into account by those with the power to make the relevant decisions.

While the support workers in Lamberton seemed (under the glare of the research microscope) embarrassed by the absence of any policy or practice impact as a result of the youth forum's influencing activities, they reported being generally satisfied with the way the youth forum was working. The following excerpt from a focus

group discussion with members of Lamberton youth forum support team, illustrates the sentiments:

> *Support worker (Lamberton):* I think if you look at the things that the youth forum have achieved some of the most brilliant things have been raising awareness and they have successfully raised awareness. They get to enjoy themselves, learn new things, get more confident, learn about taking responsibility, problem-solving and working with other people but the changed policy or practice is far fewer than the raising awareness….

The support workers in ASHA reported being very satisfied with the influence they saw the NCPs as having on public decision-making. The Director of ASHA was at pains to point out in interview that the success the NCPs enjoyed in this respect was because issues were carefully selected 'by the NCP' so that they could be taken up with the Panchayat and acted upon. The issues selected, he thus maintained 'had a good chance of success' and the Director confirmed in response to questioning that this was a deliberate strategy which he saw as a 'key unwritten feature of the way that ASHA works'.

In CHiP the support worker was initially frustrated at the lack of influence she saw the children's advisory group having on 'high level decision making within the organisation' which had been illustrated for her by the way 'they just didn't know how to handle the points Noi was making'. However, she acknowledged in interview during the final phase of the research, that the advisory group had had a strong influence on a decision taken by the senior leadership team (some nine months after they met with the children's advisory group), to introduce a new organisational policy on children's participation (in the context of accountability) with additional resources to set up mechanisms for listening to children's views at the country programme level of governance.

In summary, section 6.3. has considered the changes in policy or practice that resulted from the influencing activities of three of the forums (ASHA, CHiP and Lamberton) by comparing what the children set out as the changes they would like

to see (their change objectives) with the policy or practice changes that were seen as resulting from the children's participation and influencing activities. No substantive data from Marlings was included in this analysis because such changes were not the focus of this newly established school council. Changes relating to public services or facilities were widely reported in ASHA as a result of children's participation and the influencing activities of the NCPs. Changes to the policy and practice of involving children in the governance of CHiP, were seen by the support worker and lead manager, as a direct result of the children's advisory group's meeting with trustees and the senior leadership team. In Lamberton no policy or practice changes were identified. However, in Lamberton as in all the other case studies, the majority of children were very satisfied with the impact of their influencing activities. They reported feeling that they had been listened to and their views respected.

Chapter seven explores in more depth what the data reveal about the turning of children's voices to policy influence and the factors that can be seen to help or hinder that process. For now, the following two sections of this chapter turn to briefly explore the other impacts or outcomes of children's participation as identified by research participants using the other two dimensions of change in Kirby *et al*.'s typology, that is, the impact on children's personal development and well-being (Section 6.4) and the impact on social and power relations (Section 6.5). Impacts on these dimensions are not the primary focus of my research but the data throw further light on the motivations of those involved and the divisions between an emphasis on *process* (and the individual child) over policy *outcomes* and the concept of children being a legitimate group in the policy development process (Arnott, 2008).

6.4 Impact on children's personal development and well-being

INDICATOR

Acquisition of skills and knowledge, enhanced self-esteem and self confidence; improved well-being

The impact on children themselves of their participation in all of the forums was widely reported as positive by the children and by the adult support workers. In particular, research participants talked about how children's confidence was boosted and the new skills they learnt with regard to negotiating and 'speaking out'. Such benefits are widely reported in previous research, for example: Halsey *et al.,* 2006; Chawla *et al.,* 2005; Kirby with Bryson, 2002; and Hannam, 2001. Here as with previous research, these claims are made largely on the basis of self-report data. For example in the Hannam study, eleven schools indicated that increased participation led to improved self-esteem with 97% of students reporting a sense of pride in their role and achievements, and resulting improved self-confidence.

The children across all my case studies welcomed the opportunities the forums afforded them to meet new friends, try out new experiences and to learn and develop their own capacities. Members of the Lamberton youth forum identified the best things about the youth forum as:

- Making new friends
- Feeing you've achieved something
- Getting to go places

An evaluation session with the children's advisory group in CHiP indicated that the children had thoroughly enjoyed their week-long meeting and its culmination in a formal dialogue with the directors and trustees of the organisation. The children reported gaining a huge amount of confidence from their experiences and the adults supporting the children, agreed. The majority of the ten advisory group members from overseas had never visited the UK before; half of them had never been outside their country of birth. The children were accompanied by members of

staff whom they knew well (the aforementioned focal points) and interpreters were provided for all the working sessions. Sightseeing and shopping trips were organised in London which the children (and accompanying staff) welcomed.

In all of the case studies, children spoke of the increased confidence they felt to speak out, as illustrated in the following data extracts:

> *Boy, aged 14 (*Lamberton): I feel very confident now in speaking out.
>
> *Girl, aged 15 (ASHA):* Now, we can say what it is we think should happen.
>
> *Girl aged 9 (Marlings):* In the school council I am the secretary and take all the notes and write all the letters (laughs). I like it very much – I feel proud of what I do with the school council.
>
> *CHiP field notes:* When asked to score the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I am more confident and have learnt new skills as a result of my involvement with CHiP's advisory group' – the children strongly agreed with the statement. One boy of 15 from the UK added: 'I've learnt new skills on how to talk to decision-makers. I've got more confident in speaking out. I've been listened to. I've learnt so much more about poverty that I can feedback to people in my country. I've learnt how it's similar across the world and I've met some amazing people.

Certainly I saw much evidence of the pleasure and pride that the children had in their endeavours when I observed each of the four forums in action. Whilst undoubtedly the children worked hard on their influencing activities they also spoke of the fun they had. I observed this, for example when the children were playing games or taking part in cultural performances (ASHA); making films about issues affecting children (CHiP and Lamberton) and in creating a colourful notice board to inform their peers about the work of the school council and the school council members (Marlings).

Some of the best things about the NCPs in India (ASHA) identified by children were about 'everyone having the chance to contribute and everyone listening and respecting everybody's views'. Other 'best things' children reported were about

working co-operatively, in a systematic and disciplined way, getting on better in school; learning how to speak out and other social and life skills.

One girl of 12 recounted how her involvement in the children's parliament had, six months ago, helped her to get back to attending school and to deal with bullying that had caused her to drop out of education. The children's parliament facilitators, themselves young adults from the community and supplementary education programme (SEP), had visited her parents and helped them to do more to help their daughter to learn 'good habits and stay motivated with her education'. When telling her story, the girl very emotionally praised the support she had received from the other members of the NCP and repeatedly commented on how much better her life was now in all sorts of ways.

Children from each of the forums told me how they are acquiring new skills in keeping records, how to run meetings, how to negotiate and how to work with others. Some children in the forums in ASHA and CHiP also reported that they are pleased to be learning about important values of equality, respect and unity reflecting the expressed commitment of these two NGOs to an approach concerned with human rights. But a concern with equality was also reflected in the data from Marlings where the organisation did not explicitly privilege children's moral and legal rights over the school improvement agenda. The chair of the school governors suggested that the school council gave girls an important opportunity to take part:

> *Chair of school governors (Marlings)*: A lot of the families with children in this school, many are not first language English speakers – the girls don't get much chance to be heard or even to take part. Some of our parents won't even give permission for their child to have a photograph taken. So for the girls I think it's [the school council] especially important.

Children recognised that they were learning to take responsibility through their involvement with the forum. One child involved in the NCPs in India said:

> *Boy, 13 years (ASHA):* I am the health minister in this parliament and I have learnt to take responsibility, recording all our decisions and setting a good example.

Adults too, including parents and community leaders in India (ASHA), support workers in all four of the forums, and some of the elites the children were trying to influence spoke of children's increased confidence, their acquisition of new skills, and what they thought the children had learnt about democracy and taking responsibility. In ASHA the adults also spoke of the children's increased awareness of children's rights and their mobilisation of others in the community to safeguard and protect children from rights violations. The reflections of the District judge, who was presented to me by the Director of ASHA as a 'senior level target for NCP influence', were very supportive:

> *District judge (ASHA):* They have been doing wonderfully well. The leadership quality, the way they have been developed to deal with inferiority complexes and face the public is wonderful, simply wonderful.

To summarise this section, the impact of children's experiences of participating (in decision-making about public services) on children themselves was viewed very constructively by all stakeholders in all of the forums particularly in relation to increasing children's confidence and skills in speaking out. There had been no systematic evaluation of the impact on children themselves in any of the forums but in line with much of the previous research (see for example, Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Hannam, 2001), the impact on the child participants' personal development and well-being was seen by all as very positive. The accounts of children very definitely link this outcome to the respect they feel is afforded to their views and opinions by the forums' support workers and the *quality* of the process of participating in decision-making within the forums. These findings echo previous research which

reports on the enormous value children place on feeling respected and having their views taken seriously (Percy-Smith, 2007 and Drakeford *et al.,* 2009).

These findings go some way to explaining the high levels of satisfaction amongst children with their experiences of their 'public' participation as recorded in section 6.2., above, despite the fact, that in the Welsh forums (Lamberton and Marlings) no policy influence was seen to have been achieved (or arguably, desired) within the timeframe of my study. The findings also highlight relationships between those priorities associated with the *process* of participating and those associated with policy *outcomes* and the possible tensions between these priorities that have been noted in previous research (see for example, Arnott, 2008). I return to consider the tensions between these two perspectives and how they might best be navigated to maximise opportunities for policy influence in chapter eight of this thesis. The next section of this chapter now considers the impact of children's participation on the third dimension of change within the Kirby *et al. (*2004) typology: social and power relations.

6.5. Impact on social and power relations

All other impacts identified by stakeholders can be categorised as impacting on the social and power relations between children and adults as conceptualised by Kirby *et al.* (2004). It would have been too difficult to map the full complexity of children's relationships with adults across all aspects of their lives and there was no access to parents or to people living in the children's communities in CHiP, Lamberton or Marlings. The interrogation of the data here involved triangulation, that is comparing and contrasting the data generated from the different actors (for example, the children and the support workers) and cross-checking data generated in different ways (for example, interviews and observations) to arrive at an understanding of the impact of the children's participation on social and power relations (Bryman, 2004).

The data were explored using the following three indicators of change for the 'social and power relations' dimension, outlined in the Kirby *et al*.(2004) typology:

1. Improved structures, institutional policies, resources and mechanisms for involving children in decision making.
2. Greater influence on decisions affecting different areas of their lives.
3. Enhanced dialogue and support between children and adults.

The analysis now considers the most salient issues emerging from the data analysis relating to each of these indicators in turn.

INDICATOR

Improved structures, resources and mechanisms for involving children more within decision making

There was limited evidence of improved structures, resources and mechanisms for involving children more within decision making in ASHA or in Lamberton, the two well established children's forums in the sample. In India, the Director of ASHA advised that government were reluctant to take responsibility for establishing mechanisms or structures to hear children's voices or providing resources to ASHA or other NGOs to promote and support the operation and further development of Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs). This is despite the fact that the NCP model has been in operation in the district of Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu for three years and was seen by all research participants to be a valuable addition to a successful community development programme.

With the children's advisory panel in CHiP, as previously noted, I observed a difficult process when one of the advisory group (Noi) confronted CHiP's senior managers and trustees about the decision to close their programme of work in his country. The managers and trustees reacted defensively, clearly surprised at the implications of supporting children to participate in decision-making processes. Some of the senior managers and trustees subsequently admitted to seeing children's

participation in the governance of the organisation via the children's advisory group as happening on their terms, i.e. children being asked their opinions on prescribed proposals such as the delivery of a particular campaign. As one senior manager put it: 'I think that we are not clear whether they [the children's advisory group] are influencing decision making or providing an input'. CHiP's lead manager and support worker stressed, in the final stage interviews (conducted in July 2010), a strong correlation or link between what had happened at this meeting in March 2009 and the decision by the organisation to invest resources in establishing new structures and mechanism for 'involving children more within internal decision making' (announced in December 2009).

There was limited evidence that in Marlings the school council had led to improvements in the structures and mechanisms for involving children in decision-making or to increased resources for this purpose. Over the course of the study period in Marlings (September 2009 to July 2010) the frequency of the school council meetings increased from bi-monthly in the first term to at least monthly by the third term. The head-teacher reported allocating more staff resources for the operation of the school council from September 2010 onwards acknowledging the difficulties the support teacher had had in organizing the school council during the 2009/10 school year as well as all her teaching and classroom responsibilities.

It was however difficult, in this case, to separate out the impact of the school council in this regard with the impact of the research. I noted in my fieldwork diary on more than one occasion that I felt that that the teacher that supported the school council and sometimes the headteacher at Marlings had, during interviews and conversation, told me what they thought I wanted to hear (Coffey and Aitkinson, 1996). Possibly, and more positively, the space afforded by my research interviews might have caused them to reflect on the functioning of the school council and feel motivated to improve its functioning. With CHiP, I judged the influence of the researcher as less problematic given that the improvements in structures, resources and mechanisms reported by the organisation were based on

decisions made by senior managers and trustees, all but one of whom had no direct exposure to this research.

:

INDICATOR

Children have greater influence on decisions affecting different areas of their lives

In India (ASHA) a number of children reported that they were having more of a say in decisions within their families as a result of their involvement in their NCP. They felt they were respected more within their families. One girl told me she was no longer 'beaten' by her parents since she joined the NCP.

> *Girl aged 12, (ASHA):* Yes I am listened to more by my family. My parents have stopped beating me and now the community people [others from the village] come to the NCP. Children now are much better respected here since the NCP.

Social and power relations within the state of Tamil Nadu are influenced by many factors including gender, caste and socio-economic circumstances (Rothermund, 2008). The methods used by the NCPs and their successes in influencing the decision makers in the Panchayat and District level of government certainly do seem to be persuading adults that children have more capability then they had thought previously, although once again it was important to reflect as Coffey and Aitkinson (1996) suggest, on the possible functions of the claims that were made. I was alert to the fact that members of the community may well have perceived the researcher (as a white European) as linked to ASHA German donor and to have been concerned to present a positive image. These villages were unused to visits from 'white westerners' and a high proportion of photos I was shown of celebratory events featured the (white, German) head of the donor organisation as a guest of honour. Indeed, I found myself placed in such a position on a number of occasions during my time with ASHA, when I was asked for example, to present certificates to successful students or sit on the 'top table' at a celebratory, village event.

Notwithstanding, the need to incorporate reflections on this influence in my data analysis and to consider this specific 'research effect' in the ASHA case study, the members of the village task force (VTF) that I spoke to in three of the villages seemed very proud of the NCPs achievements. They reported being both proud of the NCPs for getting improvements to the village environment and local facilities and also taking pride in the way the children conducted themselves. Many people commented on how responsible the children were and the good work and community actions they were undertaking such as clean ups of the village and environmental campaigns.

In Lamberton, many children reported having a greater awareness of their rights to be heard in decision-making as a direct result of their membership of the youth forum but some pointed out that this did not always lead them to actually have a greater influence on decisions elsewhere. As one youth forum member recounted:

> *Boy, aged 15 (Lamberton):* They respect us, it's like they listen to what you're saying and yes it makes me feel that I can also do more talking out in school. But the teachers don't listen.

For the children who were members of CHiP's advisory group and the school council at Marlings, it was difficult to discern whether children were having a 'greater influence on decisions affecting different areas of their lives' for a number of reasons. Access to the families and the communities of the children at Marlings was problematic. The headteacher advised that the largely Muslim community was very closed and reportedly suspicious of outsiders. There may well be cultural stereotyping underpinning the headteacher's assertion here; however, I had insufficient resources to give due consideration to the problems and how they could be addressed. With the children's advisory group at CHiP, most of the members' families and communities were many thousands of miles away from my base in the UK.

INDICATOR

Enhanced dialogue and support between children and adults (leading to a general belief that children should have a say about decisions in their lives)

Enhancing the dialogue and support between children and adults was a major focus for the youth forum in Lamberton. Much of their work was designed to challenge negative stereotypes of children or 'youth' and demonstrate to adults that children could be responsible, active citizens, contributing to the common good. Youth forum members were regularly involved in clean-up campaigns in their local communities, civic celebrations, environmental projects and volunteering. Support workers were regularly involved in helping the youth forum to make use of opportunities to profile all the good work that the forum did and to publicise images of young people as responsible, active citizens who 'are part of the solution rather than the problem in their communities' (Lamberton, support worker).

The Elected Member with responsibility for the Lamberton youth forum and for 'championing their cause' reported going to great lengths to facilitate opportunities where children could demonstrate to Cabinet and other Elected Members 'how they really do think rationally and can offer really useful ideas on some very important issues'. This, the Elected Member believed would 'help to break down barriers and help councillors feel less fearful of allowing children to have a say in their communities and on the council'.

The youth forum meets at a central location some miles from the children's local communities and there was no opportunity to ask parents or community leaders about any 'enhancement in dialogue between children and adults' that they thought might be linked to the youth forum. The children indicated that in some communities, where local children's groups had been established to work with regeneration committees (operating as sub-groups of the local authority-wide youth

forum), dialogue (between children and adults) has been enhanced to good effect:

> *Girl, 15 (Lamberton)*: In our area we did like a summer activity scheme thing because we didn't have a summer scheme and we were too old to go to the one in the community centre. We took that to the partnership and the youth forum workers helped us put a proper proposal together with it and we got some money from the partnership to do it.

But children suggested that in regeneration committees in some of the other communities, some adults 'didn't want to know young people'. One child explained that it depends on who they spoke with:

> *Girl, aged 17 (Lamberton):* We like asked [names person on the local partnership board] on the Partnership for a grant or stuff. He said he would give it to us if we asked him. But there are other people, on the partnership like, who wouldn't….. Some are alright but some just laugh at us.

In ASHA, children, parents, community leaders, support workers from ASHA and representatives of other NGOs who were developing NCPs across the District, reported enhanced dialogue and support between children and adults. Observations on the visits to the villages suggested the prevalence of good dialogue and mutual support between the generations. I had thought that maybe the adults would be resentful that the children's parliaments had achieved results where they had not, for example, in the case of the destruction of the insect nest. On the contrary, the adults seemed very pleased at the success of the NCP and the fact that their lobbying worked so quickly. The Village Task Group (VTF) members in one village described the children as 'an inspiration' to them.

At least part of the reason for this appeared to be the key role of the 'knowledge workers' and supplementary education programme (SEP) teachers. These are young adults who have previously been pupils at the SEPs who work as teachers and peer mentors as well as facilitators of the NCPs. They seem to help bridge the gap between the older and younger members of the community. But overall it is the integration of all the different elements of the capacity building programme, the NCPs, the VTF's, the adolescent girls groups and the SEP, the emphasis on

participatory appraisal and collective planning and action, as well as the continual re-enforcement of the key values of diversity, respect, equality, unity by the ASHA staff, that seemed to work.

For CHiP and Marlings 'enhanced dialogue and support between children and adults' in the community and in children's everyday lives was not possible to discern for a number of reasons. As previously explained, access to the children's families and communities was problematic in both cases. Additionally with CHiP, it was difficult for the children or the support workers to identify the particular effects of the children's membership of the advisory group on dialogue with adults because of the children's prior involvement in other participatory forums in their own countries.

Overall, the impact of the children's membership of the forums on the broader social and power relations between them and adults outside of the institutions where the forums were based (e.g. the local authority or the school) proved particularly difficult to assess. The key findings relating to change under this dimension are: a) the reported impact of CHiP's advisory group on improving the resources, structures and mechanisms within CHiP for children's participation; and b) the apparently wide-ranging impact of the NCPs in ASHA on broader adult child relations in the villages and communities. The link between the latter and the NCPs success in effecting changes in public services will be further explored in chapter seven when the factors that enable or inhibit policy change are considered. A summary of the key impacts of children's participation as understood by stakeholders across all four of the forums is presented below in the concluding section of this chapter.

6.6 Summary of Impacts and conclusions

To summarise, this review of the data on the impact of children's participation on the three dimensions of change in Kirby *et al's*. (2004) typology indicates that all stakeholders in all of the case studies including children, support staff, senior

managers, sponsors, governors and (in India) parents and community leaders, understand that there were a wide range of positive impacts or benefits of children's participation over the course of the 15 month study period. No negative impacts were identified. There is considerable variation in what those impacts are perceived to be. In India (ASHA), the NCPs are reported to have had considerable success in bringing about change and improvements to public facilities and public services that impact on the children's day to day lives. This, the ASHA' director insisted, was aided by his 'expert' guidance that helped the NCP to target the selection of its change objectives and its influencing activities to best effect.

The CHiP advisory group is reported to have contributed to changes in policy, that is, a decision made by senior managers and trustees to revise its institutional polices and invest substantial additional resources in structures and mechanism to support children's participation in the governance of the organization. There were, senior managers in CHiP agreed, other organisational drivers, including a new imperative in the humanitarian aid sector to strengthen organisational accountability in light of a number abuse scandals including the 'food for sex scandal' in West Africa (as reported by the Humanitarian Practice Network in 2003). The juxtaposition of children's voices with other factors that determine policy influence, that was reflected in the CHiP data, seemed to enable the children's advisory group to, unwittingly, maximise one of Kingdon's (1984) 'policy windows'. How children might join their influencing efforts with other interest groups and networks and make best use of such windows to bring about policy change is further explored in chapter seven when I consider what the data reveals about the factors that work as enablers and inhibitors in children's voices being heard and acted upon.

In Lamberton, the youth forum had no discernible impact on the policies and practice it set out to change, but generally, the children felt listened to and respected. Senior managers, support workers and often the children themselves, were more focused on the benefits to children and on altering the social and power relations between children and adults through challenges to the negative attitudes

that some adults were to seen to harbour towards children and young people. Data from Marlings were not included in this examination of policy outcomes because no policy change objectives were identified by the school council. The school council was, the support teacher explained, was very new and was 'feeling its way' about the sorts of issues they were able to discuss and influence.

The organisational motives for supporting children's participation in public decision-making identified in chapter five were also introduced into the analysis of data relating to the impact of the forums on policies and public services. The intention here was to explore relationships between the expressed motivations and purposes of each of the forums; the selection of change objectives and the changes in public services that were seen to result. Critical factors in affecting change seemed to be timely policy and governance advice and guidance from supporting adults, independent of the relevant decision-makers or advocacy targets, and, the presence of other pressures or incentives to change (Smith, 2009).

The analysis suggests that as NGOs were most likely to privilege motivations associated with supporting children to claim their moral and legal rights, the forums supported by these organisations seemed more able to demonstrate changes in policy and practice as a result of children's participation. These findings are supported by the literature, reviewed in chapters two and three of this thesis, that highlights the relative importance of process over outcome in civic participation and the linkages between the relative privileging of each of these two priorities and the achievement of policy outcomes (see for example, Arnott, 2008).

The majority of stakeholders in each of the case studies commented on the benefits of 'public' participation to children's personal development and well-being in terms of gaining new skills, confidence, learning about taking responsibility, as well as having an enjoyable time, making new friends and accessing positive and varied opportunities they would not have otherwise had. The issue of trust and the respect

the children felt they received from the support workers and also from some of the decision-makers loomed large in the children's accounts.

Finally in this chapter, the analysis turned to consider the impact of the children's participation on the third of Kirby *et al's.* (2004) dimension of change, social and power relationships. The positive impacts on attitudes towards children and children's rights and inter-generational relationships were highlighted in ASHA as were the increased provision of resources to support children's participation in CHiP. There was some limited evidence of changes on this dimension in Lamberton and Marlings but it proved difficult to fully explore this because of the isolation of these deliberative forums from adult participation mechanisms and community life. This, it was noted, would be a fruitful line for further research. Relationships between impacts on social and power relationships (between children and adults) on the one hand and impacts on public services on the other that is suggested by the data, is of interest and is subject to further examination in chapter seven as is the powerful role of adults, suggested by the data, in turning children's 'voice' into 'influence'.

To examine these and other potential enabling and inhibiting factors more closely, I turn in the next chapter to consider in more detail how impacts on public services are seen to come about. I use as my starting point, Lundy's (2007) conceptual model which separates out a child's right under Article 12 of the UNCRC, to express a view or to have a 'voice' with, the child's right to have that view 'given due weight' and to have 'influence' (UNCRC, 1989).

Chapter 7: Turning Voice to Influence: Enablers and Inhibitors

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the impact of children's participation as perceived by actors in each of the four case studies. The analysis particularly focused on addressing the study's central research question and identified changes in public services that were seen to have resulted from children's participation. This chapter builds on that picture and considers in more depth, the processes by which children participating in public decision-making actually influence public services. The analysis here is concerned with the two secondary questions that the research is seeking to address. Firstly, *how* children's views are seen to influence the design, implementation and review of public policy and secondly, what factors can be seen as enablers or inhibitors in these processes.

The first section of this chapter uses a conceptual model developed by Lundy (2007) to explore how in each of my case studies, children's 'voice' is turned into 'influence'. The analysis considers the opportunities that children in each of the four forums had to express their views to decision-makers (the 'right of audience') and then explores how the children's views were seen to be considered and acted upon by decision-makers (their 'influence'). The second section of the chapter outlines the factors that can be seen to be prominent in translating children's voices into policy influence by comparing the approaches in ASHA and CHiP where such influence was seen to have been achieved, with the approaches in the Welsh case studies, where by and large, it was not.

As noted in chapter four, explorations of the processes by which children influence public decision-making have to involve considerations of power and the power relations between adults and children (Pinkerton, 2004) My analysis will also therefore consider issues around power using Foucaultian understandings (outlined

in chapter three) that see power as diverse and dispersed rather than just simply concentrated in the hands of institutions and certain classes of people. The reality is indeed (as the findings of this study confirm) much more 'messy' (Gallagher, 2008).

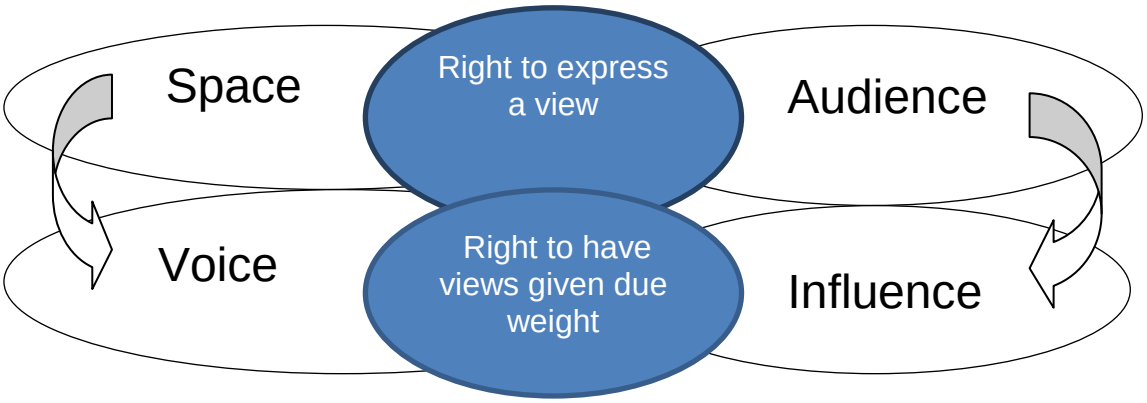
7.2 Turning Voice to Influence

Lundy (2007) is one of a growing number of academics and commentators who are becoming increasingly uneasy with the discourse of 'children's voices', children's 'right to be heard' and in educational circles, 'the pupil's voice' (Mannion, 2010). She argues that the use of such terms misrepresents the meaning behind Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). For her, 'cosy' conservative readings of the UNCRC mean that sometimes children's right to be heard is seen as a gift of adults where, 'what matters' can be constrained by adults. She advocates a foregrounding of three additional features beyond merely the facilitation of children's views and 'voice', namely:

- Space: Opportunities provided for children to express their views
- Audience: Opportunities for children's views to be listened to
- Influence: How children's views have been acted upon.

The model as illustrated in Figure 14 reflects the fact that these elements are interrelated, in particular the overlap between 'space' and 'voice' and between 'audience' and 'influence'. The model also reflects the explicit chronology reflected in Article 12. Although Lundy stresses that decision-making processes are rarely static and that 'once the child is informed of the extent of influence, the process may begin again' (2007: 933), it is important to note here, that (as will be seen in the following) sections the forums in my study illustrate a more complex, circular process than Lundy's model implies.

Figure 14: Lundy's Conceptualisation of Article 12



Notwithstanding the limitations of this conceptual framework for aiding understanding of what Gallagher (2008:404) describes as the 'messy, fraught and ambiguous processes of children's participation', this conceptual framework was useful as a starting point for in depth data analysis around *how* children's views and opinions can be seen to be influencing public policy decision-making. In this stage of the analysis additional data gathered from some of the 'decision-makers' that the children in each of the case studies were trying to influence was included. These people included: a development manager in the careers service and a co-ordinator of education for 14-19 year olds (Lamberton); the school's headteacher and the chair of the board of school governors (Marlings); the local councillor and a district judge (ASHA); and a senior manager in CHiP.

Lundy's (2007) concepts of 'voice' and 'space' correspond to the structures and mechanisms and opportunities for children to express their views in each of my case studies. These were outlined in chapter five and in chapter eight I explore further the nature of the specific participation 'spaces' that the children in my study were 'invited' into. This chapter explores the processes that led to children's views impacting on public decision-making in each of my four case studies, so here I am particularly focusing on Lundy's concepts of 'audience' and 'influence'. These two concepts are now explored in turn, in the chronological order proposed by Lundy (2007).

7.2.1 *A 'right of audience'*

Article 12 of the UNCRC requires children's views to be given *due weight* (subject to the age and maturity of the child). Implicit within the notion of views being given due weight is, Lundy argues: 'the fact that children have a right to have their views listened to (not just heard) by those involved in decision-making processes' (2007:936). Lundy goes on to suggest that children should have a 'right of audience' which she defines as 'a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with responsibility to listen' (2007:936).

In the research, CHiP's children's advisory group had a definite 'right of audience' with the senior leadership team and the trustees of the organisation; in this case study there was 'an identifiable body with responsibility to listen' (Lundy, 2007: 937). Unusually, according to much previous research (see for example Alderson, 2000 and Cairns, 2006) the group the children had audience with were an executive body who were seen as those with the ultimate power to make governance decisions in CHiP. The school council in Marlings had no 'right of audience' as such with either the headteacher or the board of governors who were the key decision makers in the school but they did meet with the headteacher on a number of occasions over the course of the school year. They did not however have an audience with the board of governors who in law are responsible for the running of the school. My interview with the chair of the board of governors at Marlings suggested that the governors had no direct contact with the school council although they received sporadic updates on what the school council were up to, from the headteacher:

> *Chair of the board of governors:* [laughter] I'm absolutely ashamed to say, the school council runs itself. I have met them, but I don't meet them on a regular basis, and they probably wouldn't know me from... Well, they probably know me, they would know my face because I'm around the school a lot….But I don't. I should meet them, I always mean to, but there's a thousand other things because, you know, we've been through difficult times here and we're now coming out and it was

> appointing the new head, you know, She keeps me in touch with what the school council are doing, gives the governors updates.

The youth forum in Lamberton had a 'right of audience' with the Elected Members of the local authority but limited opportunities to express their views to officers of the local authority. It seemed that they had no 'right of audience' with the people who had the designated power over the decisions they wished to influence during the course of the study period. For example, decisions on the manner of delivering careers advice to young people were seen to reside with the local careers service provider and the individual school (both of whom in principle are independent of the local authority). Decisions on the provision of places in further education (FE) colleges for year 10 pupils were seen to reside with the individual school and the FE institution. The people the youth forum had 'audience' with on these two issues, a development manager from the careers service provider on the first and the co-ordinator of the 14-19 network in Lamberton on the second, were, they reported, not in a position to bring about the changes the young people wanted to see. As this data extract from the interview with the 14-19 network co-ordinator illustrates:

> *Co-ordinator:* In order to try and sort of address this [the issue the youth forum raised about access to FE college for Year 9s , we, well, I arranged a careers convention here, a few weeks ago, and I had youngsters coming up to me saying, but my teachers have told me I can't do that. And this is, you know, exactly what we're fighting against.
>
> *Researcher:* So, in that sense, the issues that the youth forum raised were issues you were already aware of.
>
> *Co-ordinator:* Oh, absolutely. And, you know, we've told the heads, we've told the deputies that they must make sure their staff are not sort of saying, you can't do that, you can't do that but it's not easy we can't make them do it.

In both of the cases cited above, the 'audience' agreed to pass the youth forum's views on (along with the views of other children) to the people who were in a position to respond and they fed back to the youth forum that that was what they proposed to do. The youth forum received no further responses to the issues they

had raised during the research period. Notwithstanding our understandings of power that acknowledge its dispersed nature, it is clearly important that children have a 'right of audience' with the people who have at least some nominal, power to make the decisions (Tisdall and Davis, 2004)

In ASHA, the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) received advice about the audiences they should target from the Director and support staff at the supporting NGO (ASHA). The NCPs were encouraged by ASHA staff to select issues and policy change objectives to work on that were seen to be within the power of those at the lowest, most accessible level of governance, i.e. the Gram Panchayat. The NCPs spoke to both elected representatives and to local government officers associated with the Panchayat. The Director of ASHA advised that sometimes these meetings between the NCP and local government representatives were formal (for example to discuss a particular issue that the NCP wished to raise), but there were also, he said, opportunities for informal discussions in the village and neighbourhoods:

> *Director, ASHA:* Sometimes members of the NCP meet with the Panchayat directly; sometimes they send petitions or letters. It depends on the circumstances. But the local councillors are very involved in the lives of these villages – they attend the VTF meetings and the cultural events the children put on….You saw today how the local councillor supports the NCPs – he came along and opened the event and joined in the activities.

The more informal meetings and events, the Director concurred, served to develop relations between the children and the decision-makers and sensitise the Panchayat to both the children's concerns and their capabilities. The Director advised that staff from ASHA were also in attendance at these meetings and events and that parents and community leaders were often involved. Part of the function of ASHA staff was to support the children to play by the 'rules of the game' and the traditional routines that are largely framed by, and taken for-granted by public officials or government actors (Taylor, 2007).

As the data extract above illustrates, local government officers and councillors were also invited and (as I observed during my fieldwork) attended, the civic activities (for example, the village clean-ups) and the celebratory events and cultural performances that the NCP organised to raise awareness of children's rights and their work. I noted in my fieldwork diary that it seemed that the government representatives fulfill some kind of dignitary function at these events (such as awarding certificates or receiving a petition) with a photographer on hand. Elected representatives in particular were pleased to be seen to be engaged with the children of their electorate. Where necessary, ASHA provided children from the NCPs with practical support, for example with transport and preparation tasks, to help them to engage in these types of civic events and to 'present a good account of themselves' (Director, ASHA).

These data from ASHA shed light on the complexity of the power relations and the interdependency of policy actors (Rhodes, 1997). The analysis presented above can be seen to be what Rhodes (1997) describes as an example of an 'exchange relationship' – the children, the NGO and government officials are exchanging their respective resources. Power is not evenly distributed and the government actors are privileged through entitlement and status, but neither is it a 'zero sum game' in which a fixed quality of power is asymmetrically distributed (so that there are winners and losers). Power is productive and cumulative (Prout and Tisdall, 2006: 244). Data from the other case studies also suggests that concepts of relationality and power are deeply implicated in the process of children's participation, as Prout and Tisdall (2006) have argued. The decision-makers the children had audiences with in each of the case studies were seen by the children as 'important' and the children were universally pleased to be afforded opportunities to meet with people whom they saw as powerful and prestigious. As the following data extract from Lamberton illustrates, the children felt a great deal of pride and gained a sense of

their own importance and of value when they reflected on these meetings:

> *Girl, aged 13 (Lamberton)*: We met with the lady at the Welsh Assembly who was in charge of school nurses; she was so nice. We had to go through the security thingy and get badges down in Cardiff. She gave us tea and cakes and listened to what we had to say. It was really good.

Ironically, the Lamberton youth forum never heard from the 'nice lady' again, despite repeated attempts by the youth forum support worker to contact her to get feedback on how the children's views had been taken into account in the development of the Welsh Government's new policy on school nursing. However, the fact remains that this child felt that her views had been valued and respected because of what she saw as the personal, respectful attention they (and she) had received. In chapter six, I noted a similar satisfied response from members of the youth forum in Lamberton when a Minister of the Welsh Government had written back to the forum explaining the main reasons for not changing the eligibility criteria for Educational Maintenance Allowances in line with the concerns raised by the forum about what they saw as the unfairness of the existing system. Even though the children had not achieved the policy change objective they had wanted, the respect they felt the Minister had afforded them in the tone and style, as well as the content, of her letter was what they appreciated.

Data from Marlings and Lamberton highlights the dispersed nature of power operating in the new governance spaces in Wales and the consequent need for those trying to influence public decision-making to have opportunity to discuss their views with a wide range of different 'audiences'. In Marlings and Lamberton, the school council and the youth forum had access to one type of powerful person (the headteacher and Elected Members respectively) but not others (the board of governors and local authority officers). On reflection, support workers acknowledged that the children required audiences with both senior managers (employees) and the nominal decision-makers (Elected Members and the board of governors) to really effect policy change. The data suggests that in the Welsh 'new governance' context, a number of audiences are required.

Similarly, in CHiP, while the more formal, annual audience that the children's advisory group had with those with ultimate responsibility for the running the organisation, reflected CHiP's concern with children's participation fulfilling a key accountability mechanism for the organisation, here too, the directors and the trustees recognised that they were not necessarily the right people that the children should be having 'audience' with, as this extract from CHiP's own review of the meeting indicates:

> *Extract from CHiP Review of the Children's Advisory Group meeting in March 2010*: **The right people in the room?** In hindsight, other management staff could have been invited to this meeting and would have been able to respond to the children's views in more detail. Trustees and Directors have a good overview, but managers leading on specific strategies are actually the people to make final decisions on how we work in these areas.

A decision was subsequently taken by CHiP to enable the children's advisory group to meet with senior operational managers (of programmes, campaigns and fundraising, for example) at their next annual meeting in 2011, as well as with a sub-group of directors and trustees. This it was hoped would provide for the right kind of audiences – where children could directly influence the planning and review of the work of CHiP. Experience in ASHA, where policy change was reported to have been effected by the NCPs, suggests that with the support of independent adults to advise on strategy and tactics, audiences should be carefully chosen and prepared. Meetings or 'audiences' with people who have the nominal powers to make these changes can be seen as most effective when it is part of a wider, on-going, mutually beneficial relationship between the children and those responsible for developing and providing services and facilities.

Such tactical relationship building was not possible in the CHiP model – or at least it was severely restricted given the physical distances between the children and the decision-makers for the majority of the year but would have been possible in the Welsh forums (Lamberton and Marlings) if the forums were able to access

appropriate, expert guidance. The next section of this chapter now builds on these ideas about the importance of 'expert' guidance and support in securing and maximising the policy influence of deliberative forums with considerations of the domain that Lundy (2007) links to audience, that of influence.

7.2.2 Influence

Continuing this exploration of the key actors' understandings of how children's views influence the design, implementation and review of public services, the analysis now turns to consider Lundy's (2007) concept of the extent of 'influence' in each of the four deliberative forums. Influence in Lundy's conceptual model (like the concept of 'audience', discussed in the above section) is aligned with the second chronological part of Article 12, that is, that children's views having been expressed, children have a right to have that view given due weight (in accordance with their age and capacity). At some point, Lundy argues, from a socio-legal perspective, 'attention needs to focus on the extent of influence; what constitutes the 'due' in 'due weight'' (2007:937). Lundy acknowledges the complexity of assessing the 'extent of influence' when judgements on the qualifier of 'subject to age and maturity' are usually dependent on adults' perceptions of children's capacity.

The analysis in chapter six highlighted the apparent influence of the children's advisory group in CHiP (on policies pertaining to the structures and resources for children's participation in the context of strengthening the organisation's accountability mechanisms) and the reported influence of the NCPs in ASHA (in getting an approach road built, in getting an insect nest destroyed, in upgrading their primary school and in getting an illegal liquor store closed down). I return later in the chapter to consider in more depth the prominent factors that can be seen to have helped the children in these cases to have been influential but the fact that both of these forums had in common: a) a 'right of audience' with the people who had power over the decisions the forums they were trying to influence and, b) the support and guidance of adults in making that happen, can be seen as key.

The exercise of power over policy decisions rarely resides in one individual or group as previously noted, but, in Lamberton, the people the children had 'audience' with were people who had very limited influence to shape the key decisions on the issues the children were raising. The adults supporting the youth forum in Lamberton seemed to lack the knowledge or inclination to guide the children on selecting appropriate 'audiences' or even, to recognise where the power resided. Rather, as the data extract below illustrates, the adults deliberately encouraged the children to self-determine their policy influencing activities in line with the adults' belief that they should relinquish power to ensure that these activities were genuinely child-led.

> *Support worker, Lamberton:* I think we should have steered them away from the EMA thing and the careers stuff was not something the local authority could do anything about. We've talked about this before, you know whether we should stick to the stuff the council does. But it's hard….. if that's what the young people want to do. That's what the youth forum is here for, to help the young people to have a voice and they decide their priorities very democratically.

In line with Article 5 of the UNCRC, adults have a key duty to provide 'appropriate directions and guidance 'in a manner consistent with' the evolving capacities of the child' (UNCRC, 1989: unpaginated). The experience in ASHA showed that supporting adults can act as powerful gatekeepers and are in a unique position (between the children's forum and the decision-makers) to facilitate the turning of children's voice to influence (Wyness, 2009).

Lundy (2007:938) suggests that while 'influence' cannot be guaranteed, one safeguard is to ensure that children are told how their views are taken into account. The analysis now examines the incidence of feedback that each of the forums in the research were seen to receive. Data were collected on this aspect of the process during the final meetings with the forums and the support workers as well as in the interviews with those decision-makers, the forums had sought to influence. The data once again challenged the concept of engagement in deliberative forums and policy influence as being a linear process. The data reveal that feedback might well

have been given at a particular moment in time by a person the forum had 'audience' with but often other feedback was required from other decision-makers, actors or 'audiences'. The children's understanding of the feedback they received was often cumulative and their reception of it always mediated by the manner in which it was delivered. If the way in which the feedback was given indicated to the children that their views had been respected and listened to, they were content, even if the feedback revealed that they had little or no influence on public decision-making.

The children's advisory group in CHiP and the NCPs in ASHA reported receiving prompt feedback on how their views were being taken into account. In CHiP, I noted that the children's advisory group received a written response on the issues they had raised with the senior leadership team and the trustees within two months of their meeting in March 2009. This written response was translated into the children's languages and distributed to the children via emails to the focal points who worked for CHiP in the children's home countries. It was not until nine months later that the new policy on children's participation and the additional resources for 2010-2013 were agreed but this too was communicated to the children in writing and discussed at the next meeting of the advisory group in March 2010. In ASHA the feedback to the NCPs was, I was advised sometimes written, sometimes verbal and 'was there for the children to see'. Sometimes, the Director of ASHA indicated, the NCP did not get prompt or full enough feedback and he had to keep 'nagging the officials' but usually he said, good feedback came through in what should be considered 'a reasonable time'.

In Lamberton, as previously noted, the youth forum received feedback from the Welsh Government's Minister of Education on the issue of Educational Maintenance Allowance in the form of a detailed letter setting out why the government thought it was not a feasible option to do as the children asked, i.e. distribute the Allowance to more children. However, with the issues they raised about the delivery of careers advice and placements for Year 10s in local, FE colleges, the youth forum struggled

to get feedback on how their views were being taken into account within the six months that the youth forum allocated to working on these issues.

The Lamberton youth forum had had audiences with people who had to have audiences with other people if the proposals the children wanted considered were to be listened to and responded to. Temporal considerations are significant here and should, my research suggests, be a stronger consideration for those working to support children's collective participation in public decision-making. The tension between the length of time children tend to be involved in the formal participation structures (e.g. before they become adults or move on to education/work or other interests) and the length of time it takes to affect change in public services along with the concepts of incremental and radical shifts in policy are discussed further in chapter eight (Tisdall and Davis, 2004).

The next section of this chapter considers the factors that can be seen to play a key role in translating children's voices into policy influence by comparing the approaches in ASHA and CHiP where such influence was seen to be achieved with the approaches in the two Welsh case studies where the stakeholders were unable to identify specific policy changes resulting from the forums' influencing work in the preceding 9-12 months. The reasons for these differences are explored and consideration given to the factors that work as 'enablers' and 'inhibitors' in children's voices influencing policy outcomes.

7.3 Enablers and Inhibitors

This section of the chapter addresses one of the secondary research questions, that is, what can be seen as the enabling and inhibiting factors in turning children's voices to influence? To assist this analysis, the section starts with a brief reminder of the influence the deliberative forums were seen to have had on public decision-making. There follows an exploration, through selective data analysis, of three broadly categorised factors that can be seen to have worked to enable or inhibit the children's policy influence. The implications of this understanding of the enabling

and inhibiting factors for policy and practice and the areas for further research they suggest, will be discussed in chapter nine.

As noted in chapter six, when comparing what the children in the Welsh case studies set out to achieve by way of influence on policy or services with the situation nine to 12 months later (at the end of the annual cycle established by the forums), it was hard to discern any resultant changes in policy or practice. The impact on children themselves of their participation in the youth forum and the school council in terms of confidence boosting, skills development and horizon widening was frequently reported and observed but in the time-frame of the research, the policy or public service 'change objectives' that the children were pursuing were not achieved. For example, the ways in which careers advice was delivered did not (it was reported) change in Lamberton. In Marlings, no policy change objectives were identified or pursued. Decisions about new playground equipment and its use and the use of playground spaces which the school council were to be invited to participate in had not been brought to the school council by the time the school year ended and my fieldwork concluded.

In Lamberton, those with the apparent power to make decisions about services that directly affect the children presented as very committed to children 'having a voice', but, as noted, they appeared rather defeated by the complexity of the policy-making processes and naïve to the numerous opportunities (and threats) to effect policy change within multi-level governance arrangements. By contrast, in ASHA, the National Children's Parliaments (NCPs) had, I was advised, had a discernible impact on a number of priority issues of concern they had brought to the attention of the Panchayat or local council and the relevant District-level government departments operating at the next level of governance in the state of Tamil Nadu. Issues taken up by the NCPs included:

- The need for an approach road to the village
- Elimination of an illicit Arrack shop
- Accessing resources for a Balwadi centre

- Upgrading of a primary school
- Destruction of a insect nest

In all these cases, I was advised that positive changes and improvements were achieved. Of particular interest here is that the NCPs are encouraged by the adults who support them, to work on issues they have a chance of affecting and to target decision-making at a very local level of governance. The children and community leaders interviewed all praised the achievements of the NCPs.

In CHiP, I noted that while the children's advisory group had not yet been able to influence the actual work programme of CHiP, not least because the children's advisory group itself did not have a set of common objectives in this regard, the group was seen by the lead manager to have had a direct influence on procuring more funding to support new policies around participation structures and mechanism at all levels of the organisation. The support and guidance the advisory group in CHiP received from the support worker (who was not, perhaps importantly, independent) did not seem to have been as strategic or tactical as the guidance that the NCPs in ASHA received (which as previously noted was independent of the influencing targets). However, the data suggest that the 'outside' voices of the children's advisory group and the messages they had given to the senior leadership team and trustees about the importance of strengthening children's participation as an accountability mechanism *throughout* the organisation were used by managers on the 'inside', alongside other drivers, strategically and tactically, to effect policy change and more importantly in this case, a big change in the relevant resource allocation.

The CHiP lead manager's careful alignment of the messages from the children's advisory group with the increasingly prominent (by this time) organisational imperatives on accountability and a new funding opportunity can thus be seen to have maximised the 'influence' of the children's advisory group. But additionally, the data suggest a much more subtle combination of 'insider' and 'outside' strategies to affect policy change (Taylor, 2007). The following data extract from the

final interview with the CHiP lead manager sets out how he feels the children's advisory group sensitised or 'softened up' the senior leadership team and trustees of CHiP, to make them more pre-disposed to agreeing a new proposal on the level and direction of the organisation's support for children's participation in governance:

> *Lead Manager, CHiP*: It's been a real battle to get the resources over many years. The children's advisory group has been part of raising the profile and getting it on the agenda and working through on that, so I think it would have been a much harder battle had it not been for children's advisory group.
>
> *Researcher:* Can you say, I mean I know this is a hard question but can you say a bit more or be more specific about what you think has been the children's advisory group role in making this happen?
>
> *Lead Manager, CHiP*: for the last two years we've been working on accountability with the advisory group. They had direct contact with the board for two years and they really helped the board to understand what accountability meant – their views on it and how, they you know, feel and it's had that exposure……and the meeting when the closure of the [country] programme dominated last year- that had an effect too….. So when we went through it, the policy document with a proposal and it goes through to the board, they have a much better understanding, it's not a completely new discussion and they realise they have got to deal with it.

The lead manager's assertions here can be seen to reflect the perspective of social movement theorists who argue that the posing of cultural challenges can over time transform institutional practices: As Tarrow notes, 'Merely placing a new issue on the agenda in an expressive and challenging way…enables coalitions to form around them to be aligned within general cultural frames' (1994: 184).

This comparison of the impacts of children's participation on public decision-making is crude and requires more sophisticated analysis of the different contexts; the various power and relational dynamics; and the functioning of the participatory structures in each of the case studies, but three prominent and broadly categorised themes emerged from the comparative analysis as to the factors that work as

'enablers' and 'inhibitors' in children's deliberative forums achieving change in public decision-making and governance. The three enabling and inhibiting factors are now discussed in turn with reference to selective data analysis. The first factor, traditional constructions of childhood is presented as an inhibiting factor. The second factor, the integration of adult and child participation and capacity building structures; and the third factor, the taking of a strategic approach to turning children's 'voice' to 'influence' with the support of 'expert' guidance, are understood as enabling factors. While the three factors are presented separately, it is important to note that in practice they overlap and inter relate. The messiness and ambiguities in children's participation noted by Gallagher (2008), is confirmed by the findings of this study. Although the exact nature of the inter-relationships between the three factors was beyond the scope of this study, chapter eight builds on this analysis to consider a number of related tensions that have to be navigated in children's participation and in civic participation more broadly and chapter nine considers the policy and practice implications of these findings.

7.3.1 *Constructions of childhood*

One of the themes that came across most powerfully during the fieldwork in Wales and proved to be a rich seam in the analysis is the ways in which traditional understandings of childhood are influencing the perceived outcomes of children's participation and in turn the level of interest in devising the means to monitor and evaluate the outcomes. In Lamberton, Elected Members, senior managers and support workers saw the primary objective of the youth forum as helping children to develop into responsible, active citizens. In Marlings, the chair of the school governing body thought the school council was primarily about helping children to learn to take responsibility and solve problems (although the headteacher also thought the school council had an important role to play in the school's own improvement agenda). The analysis in chapter five confirmed the links highlighted in previous research, between the nature of the organisation's objectives for the children's forums and the perceived impacts and noted the relative divisions

between viewing the *process* of participation as more significant than the ability to shape or influence policy *outcomes* (Arnott, 2008).

Returning to consider the three dimensions of change of the Kirby *et al*.'s typology that was used to structure the examination of the impact of children's participation in the previous chapter (see Figure 2, page 86), it can be seen that in the Wales case studies, those involved with the child participation structures are not expecting them to effect changes to public services. Rather they are expecting positive benefits for the children or young people and some changes in 'social and power relations' (e.g. adults viewing young people as valued members of the community). Impacts on public services are not looked for; they remain elusive, 'too difficult' to evidence and in some way 'laughable'. For example, in Lamberton when the careers advice service manager was interviewed to ascertain the influence the youth forum had had and to find out whether the careers service had been able to listen and respond to children's suggestions for more flexible access to careers advice both in and outside school, the answer was 'yes, we'll see what we can do' but, the careers adviser, added: 'if anyone thought careers advisors would work regularly after 5pm (laughter) they will have to think again; it isn't going to happen' [Careers advisors' terms and conditions being largely similar to teachers].

In Marlings, the school council had not yet been invited to deliberate on any governance decisions; rather as was noted in chapter five, the council were engaged in trying to change the behaviour of other pupils and to help the school implement national policy. In the two Welsh case studies children generally seemed content with this situation. Focus groups with children and observations suggested that for the children, getting respect, accessing facilities, getting opportunities to take part in interesting things and enriching their skills and capacities was sufficient as this data extract from the focus group discussion in Lamberton illustrates:

> *Focus group discussion, Lamberton*
>
> *Researcher:* What's the best thing about being a member of the youth forum?

> *Girl aged 12:* Making friends and feeling you have achieved something
> *Boy aged 13:* You gain more confidence in what you're doing. Get a chance to do things that you wouldn't – like going to Brussels.
>
> *Girl aged 12:* we've got our way across, like people will say don't listen to kids they don't know what they are talking about but when they say like, they listen to what we've got to say they respect our point of view and say 'well OK then we'll give kids a chance'

Percy-Smith's (2007) evaluation of the development of young people's participation plans in two Children's Trusts in England reported similar findings despite a similar absence of policy influence.

The concern of society across the UK with what Prout (2000:18) terms the 'futurity of children' combines with children's low or perhaps individualistic expectations to render impacts on public services of little relevance. The objective or purpose of children's participation is seen as educating or training children to be good future citizens and not really about influencing policy-making or service development. For Prout, writing in 2000, the strong emphasis on the futurity of children is about social control or the normative socialisation of children.

In the two Welsh case studies (Lamberton and Marlings), traditional constructions of childhood which see childhood as just a stage in life where children learn to be responsible adults can be seen as an inhibitor to translating children's 'voice' to policy 'influence'. In CHiP, while the children in the children's advisory group reflected a range of different contexts and cultures, the adults the advisory group were seeking to influence (the directors and trustees of CHiP) were all based in the UK and the dominant views on children and the value of their participation in high-level decision-making were heavily influenced by the same traditional constructions of children as in the Welsh case studies. The support worker advised that the directors and trustees were visibly 'shocked' at what they saw as one of the advisory group members 'outbursts' when he challenged them on the proposed closure of the programme of work in his home country. In their review of the meeting with the children's advisory group, the directors and trustees resolved to

be clearer with the group about the limits of their influence although they also agreed with the advisory group's support worker that one of the lessons learnt from the meeting had been the need to:

> *Extract from 'Lessons Learnt' document, April, 2009:* **Find ways to enable children's issues to influence our work:** When children raise issues of importance to them, we consistently meet their recommendations with an honest but fairly de-motivating 'I'm afraid we can't do that because…'. To avoid this happening again, we could be more open to adjusting our plans in light of the young people's recommendations.

The cultural context in south India where ASHA operates is of course very different to Wales and the UK. Imbalances in power relations between children and adults and between genders is a strong feature of south Indian society (Rothermund, 2008) but interdepencies between the children's parliaments and the adult activists within the villages seemed to be more overtly acknowledged and worked at. The NCPs were not stand alone entities, but were formally linked with other civil society and governance structures, enabling the children's proposals to gain broader political, legal and social support (Austin, 2010). The discussion now turns to examine the links made between children and adult participation in ASHA and to consider in some depth how this relational embedding of children's participation worked as an enabler in turning children's voices into influence in the Indian context.

7.3.2 *Integration of adult and child* participation and *capacity building*

One of the most interesting features I observed at ASHA with the National Children's Parliaments (NCPs) was the way they were integrated with a whole range of capacity building initiatives within the rural, Dalit[6] villages. Villagers subsisted as tenant farmers working on land that yielded little having been poorly managed by the landlord. ASHA was helping the villagers to re-introduce traditional farming

[6] Dalits is the name given to people from the Schedule Castes who are the poorest and most subordinated in Indian society (Thorat, 2009)

methods and overcome the damage caused by over-fertilization and mechanized cultivation.

In each village, the NCP worked alongside the Village Task Force or VTF (a community planning body comprising villagers, a local councillor and local public administrators) and a range of other capacity building structures that had been established with support from ASHA. Other structures and institutions included a supplementary education programme or SEP, an adolescent girls' group and the youth group, a micro-finance scheme and a self help women's group. Two representatives of the NCP were members of the Village Task Force (VTF) which also worked as an important vehicle for woman's emancipation within the communities with 50% of the membership reserved for women.

The setting up of children's parliaments in these villages had been a relatively late addition within ASHA's community development programme, building on the success of the VTFs, the SEPs and the youth groups. The links between all of these structures and the central role of ASHA in supporting them and facilitating what could be termed the more 'formal' relations between them and local government representatives seemed to be crucial in the success the NCPs had in influencing public policy and a strong enabling factor. The Director of ASHA stressed this principle in interview (as did a number of the representatives from the NGO network):

> *NGO Director CP Network* ….you see, the most important thing with the NCP model we have learnt, is how all the capacity building structures work together, the NCP, the SEP, the VTF – it helps to raise the profile of children in the village and shows the adults the capacities of children and the social commitments they can make.

Children, community leaders and local people who were employed as facilitators and teachers in the SEPs also commented on the importance of the inter-connectedness of these structures in their villages as data extracts in chapter five illustrated. I observed the links in action on my many visits to the villages. Co-operation between children and adults in the village communities to advocate on

issues of importance to children (particularly in respect of their education and well-being) and the whole community was evident. The link between the SEP and the NCP seems to be particularly important. The SEP provides education for two - three hours on school days in the evenings. The education takes places in available locations within the different villages. Some have a dedicated building to meet in, others use the local temple. With the help of pressure from peers, the SEPs target school 'drop outs' or those at risk of dropping out of state schooling. The education provided supplements formal schooling. Children have the opportunity to receive coaching, to improve their literacy and numeracy and practice for tests and exams. Perhaps most importantly, the SEP works to motivate children and parents and raise their awareness of children's rights and capabilities.

Young people from the local community are trained and supported by ASHA to teach and run the SEPs and support the NCPs. The NCP is promoted to children through the SEP 'as a platform to raise awareness relating to children's rights and their social commitments' (teacher in one of the SEPs). While these concepts are differently understood in the Indian context, such explicit linkage of the concepts of rights and responsibilities is also reflected in the dominant discourses on citizenship in the UK (Lister, 2007). In the villages that I visited there was a sense that the children and adults were working together to bring about mutually beneficial improvements within their communities. Co-operation and mutual support was recognised as beneficial by both groups. I observed this to be particularly the case with the women activists who reported feeling empowered by the other capacity building structures introduced by the NGO and the programme's funders. It was evident in my interviews with children and female activists (many of whom were also parents of dependent children) that they shared a number of common concerns and interests, for example in relation to education; hygiene; water, transport as well as sharing a subordinate position within a robustly patriarchal society (Rothermund, 2008).

The alliances between adult and child activists in ASHA seemed from my observations and enquiries to be strengthened by their common identity as Dalits. I

observed amongst children, women and men in the villages shared expressions of pride in their culture and heritage and a keen desire to challenge the discrimination they face. While the cultural context in India manifestly produced some very different versions of childhoods to those in Wales, imbalances in power relations between children and adults and between genders was still a strong feature (albeit with differences in transitions and roles to the UK context). But the sense within these village communities of a common identity as Dalits seemed to be dominant. I noted in my fieldnotes that community leaders were full of praise for the NCPs and appeared to be very proud of what the children had achieved.

Notwithstanding, the probability noted earlier that as an outsider I was being presented with a 'best business' account of it all and that I was inevitably less familiar with the nuances of both behaviour and verbal accounts in the Indian context (compared with my extensive knowledge and experience of children's participation in Wales/UK), the cross generational outlook reflected in the ASHA case study, the sense of a shared agenda and a joining together across civil society of the human, social and at times, economic, capital, seemed to be largely absent in the Wales case studies. The data suggest, as Prout and Tisdall (2006:243) argue, that 'children's participation cannot be understood outside of the set of relationships that constitute all the actors that warrants'.

This integration or relational approach was not evident in the other three case studies. Marlings school serves an immigrant, mainly Muslim population in a disadvantaged urban area. The headteacher maintained that whilst the school does try to engage parents in the school and in their children's education, language difficulties and different cultural expectations 'make this quite challenging'. The school in this context operates at the boundaries of different cultures and developing a sense of common endeavour between the children as pupils in a Welsh state school (culturally a very western institution) and their parents and community leaders would, the headteacher concluded: 'require a dedicated programme'.

Lamberton's youth forum does not work alongside adult participation structures, although I was advised by the support workers that some members of the youth forum are engaged with adult community groups at a very local level. This support worker went on to explain that she thought that one of the difficulties was that the existing adult and child forums in Lamberton operated at different levels and in different ways so that meaningful links (between the adult and child participation structures) would be difficult to make:

> …….the forums that are there for adults – either operate locally – like Communities First or if they are County-wide, they work for a specific interest group, like the Alzheimer's society.

The children's forums in the Welsh case studies were thus, unlike the NCPs in India (ASHA), isolated and detached from adult participation structures and capacity building work going on in local disadvantaged communities. In CHiP there is no advisory group for parents or adult citizens at any level of the organisation's governance as it is only children who are constructed as the beneficiaries that CHiP is accountable to.

In conclusion, the data suggest that the integrated, inter-generational approach and the work on shared problems and the sense of a common identity that featured in the Dalit villages in India, was largely absent in the other three case studies. In Lamberton, where much of the stated focus of the work of the youth forum was designed to challenge negative stereotypes of young people, I noted that adults in the community (particularly what we would think of as community leaders) because of their allegedly negative or more traditional attitudes towards children, were seen by some of the more outspoken youth forum members (and all of the support workers) as more likely to be part of the problems that children face rather than as part of the solutions.

I noted in my fieldwork diary during my visit to India that there is much to be learnt from the ASHA' NCP model in terms of the evident benefits of facilitating strong formal links between structures supporting, respectively, child and adult

participation. The recognition of the value of the contributions of both parties and the additional strengths of an approach that maximises the concepts of relationality and power (Prout and Tisdall, 2006) seemed beneficial in terms of not only positively improving provision and facilities in the villages but also in terms of improving the manifestations of the social and power relations between children and adults. The link between the impact of children's participation on public services and the impact on social and power relations between children and adults at a community level seemed to have a degree of mutual dependency and would be a useful focus of further research. Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010:362) in their concluding chapter of the *Handbook of Children's Participation* note the 'great success of participation that is embedded within communities' and the importance of 'creating spaces for joint projects of mutual interest to young people and adults'. Working across generations through established, linked capacity building structures can be seen as a key enabler in turning children's voice to influence.

The other related ingredient in the success of the NCPs in influencing public policy seems to have been the strong guidance role adopted by the NGO support workers and the taking of a more strategic and focused approach to the job of influencing decision-makers compared to the two Wales case studies. The analysis now turns to consider this factor as an enabler in the process.

7.3.3 *Taking a strategic approach to turning children's 'voice' to 'influence' with the support of 'expert' guidance*

The discussion above of the importance of formalised links between structures that support adults' and children's participation leads on to wider consideration of strategies that are effective in enabling children to influence public services and the specific role of adults in supporting and guiding children to get their perspectives represented, heard *and* considered by decision-makers. Another key enabler for children's forums in terms of influencing public policy to have emerged from the data analysis was having a clarity of purpose combined with the existence of a well thought through plan of action or strategy that aims to get children's messages

across to the *relevant* audiences at times and in ways when those messages can be best received.

To understand how and why a strategic approach works as an enabling factor in turning children's voices into influence, it is worth recapping briefly here on the understandings of the policy making process that inform this enquiry. Chapter two of this thesis reviewed some key literature concerned with citizenship engagement in public policy and explored ideas about the making of public policy in the UK context and how the policy making process might best be influenced by those outside of government. The complexities of the social welfare policy making process were noted and the notion that policy making follows a linear, rational process, from an evidence-based proposal through to implementation, was critiqued (Davies, *et al.,* 2000). The move from government to 'governance' was charted with the introduction of devolution in 1999 leading to a stronger focus in Wales on developing public policy in partnership with different interest groups.

The chapter drew on political science concepts to illustrate that policy change in the UK context is most likely to take place during what Kingdon (1984) defined as short lived 'policy windows' where the problem stream, the policy stream and the political stream all come together. The importance of policy networks or policy communities in bringing influence to bear on decision-makers as identified by Tisdall and Davis (2004), was also noted. The conceptualization of power and how it is exercised, as diverse and dispersed were also explored in chapter two. When discussing the concept of a 'right to audience' as a key stage in the process of turning children's voice to influence earlier in this chapter (section 7.2), the data from the Wales case studies illustrated that power to affect policy change (for example in how careers advice is delivered) does not reside in any one person, whatever their position of authority. Rather, the exercising of power over the myriad of decisions involved in policy formulation and implementation is invested in a range of people and interests operating at different levels of government as well as in the operational services themselves (Colebatch 2009).

Having provided a brief reminder of the theoretical perspectives on policy-making that inform this study, the analysis now turns to explore how taking a strategic approach to turning children's voice to influence worked as an enabling factor in the ASHA case study. Data suggesting the absence of such an approach in Lamberton are also considered. Reference is made to previous research that cites the importance of children's collective forums engaging in strategic alliances in order to bring about policy change. Some of the challenges to adopting a strategic, collaborative approach to children's participation are also referenced. These challenges will be followed up in the next chapter which explores the tensions that exist in children's participation and how they can best be navigated by the children and adults involved.

In ASHA, I was advised that the decision-making processes the NCPs were seeking to influence were 'relatively straightforward' given the low level of governance where they operated. However, it was made clear in interviews with the Director of ASHA and other NGO representatives in the locale who were supporting NCPs, that the NGOs worked hard, alongside the NCPs and the other capacity building structures in the villages or towns (such as the Village Task Force), to develop strategic and mutually beneficial relationships with key decision-makers. The NGOs were also instrumental in determining strategy and guiding the NCPs as to how and when they sought to exert their influence, be it through petitions, cultural events, letters, protests, testimony or discussion.

Further exploration with the Director of ASHA and some representatives from the 13 other NGOs in the NCP network supported by ASHA, suggested that as a rule, the resources and power of the NCPs were deliberately combined with the resources and power of others (for example, NGOs parents and community groups) and deployed to influence public policy in a strategic and thought through manner. There was some indication that in this respect the NCPs were less child-led than the narrative in ASHA' documentation suggested (see Section 5.4.1 for a full analysis of the scope or degree of the children's participation as understood by the children and supporting adults in each of the four case studies). But the children seemed to

see this as strength of the NCP model rather than a weakness and welcomed the guidance of ASHA and the support of the Village Task Force. As I was dependent on the NGO workers and particularly the Director of ASHA for language interpretation, I noted that I need to treat this reaction with some caution, although I found the children's smiles and the obvious warmth and mutually respectful relationship they had with the NGO workers, very persuasive.

The role of the supporting adults in ASHA in devising and steering a strategy which sought to combine the children's resources with the resources of others in the community and with the resources of the NGO and the wider NGO network, seemed from the data analysis to be an important enabling factor. The adult guidance and direction on how the NCP could be most influential, as well as the support provided to the children in actually undertaking the influencing activities, emerged as a very evident 'enabler' in my observations of the NCPs in action.

While support workers in the other, UK-based case studies in the research did provide support and guidance to the children's forums, in the Welsh case studies in particular, the support workers seemed less 'savvy' about the policy making process. In Marlings, as previously noted, policy influence was not a priority but in Lamberton it was. Access to 'expert' knowledge relating to the children's policy change objectives seemed a particular issue in Lamberton where the youth forum and its support workers were firmly established in the youth services directorate and had weak and sometimes non-existent links with colleagues working in other departments within the local authority and in other public services that the youth forum wished to influence, for example health. As the youth forum team manager acknowledged, this was a weakness:

> *Youth forum team manager:* We used to have quite good links with the children and young people's partnership led by the authority and the idea was that we could go to them to get access to someone who could advise the youth forum and us on the policy area and where we should focus the youth forums representations. But we got a new co-ordinator at the partnership and it doesn't seem to be happening. There is no way we can know all about all the policy areas – we're youth workers after

> all. We need those links if the youth forum is to be effective in getting things changed….but we don't have very good links with council officers outside of the Community Education and Youth Services Directorate – we've better links with the councillors [Elected Members]. It used to be much better and it's something we've got to work on.

This data extract provides a reminder that staff as well as young people move on and there is a need to continually rebuild relationships and understandings. Previous research in Scotland by Tisdall and Davis (2004) suggests that the lessons from ASHA in India on the importance of a strategic approach, of purposeful alliances and of 'expert' guidance and support from adults, do have resonance in the UK. The increased effectiveness of taking a strategic approach that combines children's voices with those of other groups (of adults) who have similar interests is emphasised by Tisdall and Davis (2004) who suggest that despite the then new imperatives in the UK to include children and other citizens in influencing policy very much depends on the *status* of the group and the *strategies* they employ.

The authors reflect on an project where children are invited to participate in the drafting of a Bill before it goes before the Scottish Parliament and describe how the supporting adults sought to change the status of the participating children so that they would be genuinely perceived as a relevant interest group that should be allowed to influence policy decisions. The strategy adopted by the supporting adults in Tisdall and Davies' (2004) example was to link the children more closely with NGOs who had also been invited to participate in the drafting process. The project, Tisdall and Davis (2004) report, sought to use the resources of the children (and the power they had) with the resources of a network of NGOs and adult organisations (with the power they had) to become an 'insider' group, that is a group that are ascribed legitimate status by government who involve the group in meaningful, regular consultation (Grant, 2000).

While the resultant combined network had some successes in influencing policy outcomes, including on some of the children's particular priorities, Tisdall and Davis (2004) suggest they were also constrained by a lack of resources and a range of

environmental factors (including the structure of the decision-making machinery of public authorities) and the children had (with the assistance of the supporting adults) to learn the 'rules of the game'. Arguably children's groups are always going to be constrained by these factors. Faulkner in her study of a group of young people set up by a local authority to feed into policy making on youth issues, reminds us that such groups can lack significant resources (other than their knowledge of children's views) and they lack 'control over goods or labour, economic significance or implementation power' (Faulkner, 2009:102). But as Tisdall and Davis (2004) conclude, having strong links with other groups (who ideally have resources that complement the children's) via a policy network can be a useful tactic for children's forums to make use of, in their efforts to influence policy-making.

Similar strategies were perceptible in the India case study, ASHA. The NCPs were not stand alone but were formally related to other civil society, participative structures and to the Panchayat governance structure. This worked to ensure that it was easier for the children's proposals to gain political and social support as this VTF member explained:

> *Village Task Group member (female), ASHA:* The NCP has achieved a lot… they have representatives on the VTF and the local Panchayat Raj comes to the meetings and he can see how responsible they are.

Parents and community leaders were engaged with the NGO (ASHA) which was a driving force in directing the influencing activities of both the NCPs and the community leaders. I was not convinced that this network quite formed an 'insider' group as defined by Grant (2000) but the influence of the NCPs seemed greater as a result of these strategic and formal alliances combined with the skilled and knowledgeable guidance role exercised by the NGO director. No such civil society alliances were evident in the other three case studies, although Lamberton's youth forum had formal links with the local authority and consequently a degree of political support. Leadership from the adult support workers (in terms of devising and implementing an influencing strategy) was muted in Marlings and CHiP and deliberately weak in Lamberton.

In concluding the discussion on this enabling factor, it should be noted that adopting a strategic, collaborative approach that reflects the complexities of the policy making and policy influencing processes undoubtedly raises some real challenges for children's deliberative forums operating in the UK. The first challenge identified is in relation to temporal considerations. The absence of any concrete policy outcomes in the Welsh case studies, may well be down to the fact that given the complexities of policy making and the range of different decision-makers, it takes longer than the children's forums can allow (and the period of this research covered) to effect change. As previously noted with reference to Kingdon's (1984) policy windows, anyone seeking to influence public policy from the outside must consider the most appropriate timing of their efforts. But time (as noted in relation to Lamberton in section 7.2), for children involved in the youth forums and school councils in Wales as in the rest of the UK, is often limited. For example, the school year ends, some children move on and a new school council is elected that will have new priorities. Thus the significance of the temporal dimension in children's participation in public decision-making can work to limit both the expectations and the outcomes, relating to policy change.

The second challenge relates to considerations of the wider social and power relationships between children and adults. The role of supporting adults, Wyness (2009) concludes in supporting school and youth councils to effect policy change, is complex and challenging. He suggests that the supporting adults have to maintain a balancing act between the institutional priorities (of the school or council) which effectively exclude children as social agents and 'creating spaces where children have a degree of autonomy and recognition and enjoy the status of participants' (2009:404).

Notwithstanding the need as Wyness (2009) suggests, to be cognisant of the broader structural power relationships at play in each context, the findings from this analysis suggest that the exercise of power in new governance spaces in Wales is more complex and dispersed than a purely structural analysis allows. While power is not evenly shared out amongst the various actors, the exercising of it is something

that circulates through networks of relationships rather than something that flows from the top of a social hierarchy downwards (Foucault, 1980:98). If, as Prout and Tisdall (2006) suggest in at least some contexts of children's participation, power is not a 'zero-sum game', then children's relationships with adults might open the way to mutually beneficial outcomes in which both increase their power' (2006:245). In this context, the role of adults and the guidance, support and direction they provide to children's collective forums can help to facilitate such relationships and work as a powerful enabler for children's effective participation in public decision-making.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring how children's voices are turned into influence using Lundy's (2007) conceptual model that separates out children's right to express a view or 'have a voice' from the right of children to have that view taken into consideration and given due weight. Having ascertained what 'doing' participation entails and acknowledged the important relationship between motivations and outcomes in chapter five and explored accounts of the impact of children's participation in chapter six, the purpose of the analysis in this chapter was to explore in more depth just *how* children's views were seen to be influencing the design, implementation and review of public services. This is one of the two secondary research questions this study was seeking to address. The data analysis suggested a more complex juxtaposition of power relations than Lundy's model implies which served to highlight the multiplicities of audiences. The importance the children attached to their views being treated with respect was also emphasised. The data analysis confirmed that concepts of relationality and power are deeply implicated in the process of children's participation (Prout and Tisdall, 2006).

The next section of this chapter reviewed three prominent factors that worked as enablers or inhibitors, analysing data from ASHA where policy change was seen to result from the children's participation and comparing this with the Wales case studies where it did not (Lamberton and Marlings). Additionally, some previous UK research was explored to help bridge and strengthen the transfer of learning from

India to the UK context. The three enabling and inhibiting factors were described individually but they are closely interrelated. Reflections on the experiences of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in south India (ASHA), compared particularly to the Lamberton case study in Wales, while bearing in mind the very different cultural contexts, suggests that children's participation is more likely to influence and affect change in public policy when there is:

- clarity about shared objectives with at least some priority objectives that privilege policy outcomes over process;
- an influencing strategy focused on well-understood policy or practice opportunities with 'expert' policy advice, guidance and support;
- a 'right of audience' for children with those who exercise power and authority to make the desired changes;
- close integration between child participation structures and capacity building structures targeting other civil society groups at a local level.

One of the themes to emerge from this analysis is that there is a great deal to be learnt from considering the impact of children's participation in public policy within a framework that enables exploration of the processes involved in influencing policy 'from the outside' and the broader power relations surrounding citizen engagement and user-participation. When studying how children's voices are taken into consideration when deciding on policy, as well as clarity of purpose, consideration needs to be given to how children's voices combine with the voices of others to bring about change. The literature on policy networks and communities and the role of adults in supporting children's participation suggests hard questions should be asked about the role of adult negotiators in policy development with children and young people (Wyness, 2009; Tisdall and Davis, 2004).

The next chapter continues this focus on what can be learnt from theories and concepts concerned with adult, or citizen, participation. The research findings highlighted a number of tensions in children's participation that have to be navigated by practitioners and children alike. These tensions, which include some that can be seen as common to adult and child participation practice and some that

are specific to children's participation, are explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how these tensions can be navigated to best effect with the implications for policy and practice expanded upon in chapter nine.

Chapter 8: Navigating the Tensions

8.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the analysis in the preceding chapters to explore the tensions and contradictions that those engaged in citizen participation have to navigate. The accounts explored in chapters five and six provided insight into the 'doing' of children's participation, the organisational objectives for the deliberative forums and how these influence the perceived impact of the children's participation. Chapter seven followed through on the perceived impacts of children's participation on public policy and centred the analysis on the actual process of turning children's voices into policy influence. Drawing on understandings of the theoretical constructs of childhood as well as some of the most salient political science theories associated with broader citizen engagement in public policy deliberations, the analysis in chapter seven developed explanations as to what was happening in the field and highlighted a number of factors that worked as either enablers or inhibitors.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings set out in the previous three chapters and in some cases, re-interrogate the data, in order to open up the most promising possibilities for change and progression. The focus of this chapter is on exploring some of the main tensions that emerged from the analysis and considering, with reference to the literature, how these might best be navigated by practitioners working to support children's participation in public decision-making and by other adults engaged in deliberative, policy making processes. This chapter thus acts as a platform from which to launch the discussion in chapter nine on the utility of the findings, the implications for future policy and practice as well as for future research and academic endeavour. The analysis in this chapter continues to be informed by theoretical constructs developed to explain processes of civic engagement in 'new' governance spaces as well as by literature that highlights the particular status of childhood in western societies. It focuses on exploring a number

of tensions and contradictions that emerged from the data and that underlie the 'messiness' of children's participation as identified by Gallagher (2008).

My research confirms what Shier (2010) also noted, that many of the important issues or 'tensions' that are being faced in children's participation, are not very different to those encountered in work on citizen engagement in general. Theories of governance throw additional light on the problematics of children's participation and can help develop understanding of the impact of children's participation on policy-making and thereby what steps can be taken to improve the effectiveness of policies and practice in this regard (Taylor and Percy-Smith, 2008; Taylor, 2007).

A number of authors refer to the tensions and contradictions that those engaged in citizen participation have to navigate. Taylor (2007) exploring community participation in new governance spaces, notes (through the lens of governmentality theory) the ways in which state power persists even when governing is increasingly devolved. However, the author also outlines how the same theory allows for the possibility of 'active subjects' who can shape and influence the new spaces into which they have been invited. Navigating the tensions within these new governance spaces, Taylor suggests is not easy (2007:310). Craig (2003) in his review of the use of community development techniques to promote children's involvement in a range of country and policy contexts noted a number of tensions or contradictions in working with children within what is essentially an adult-driven framework. These include the challenging of the power of adults by children and young people and the role of adults to 'liberate [children's] abilities and creativity within a negotiated framework of rights and responsibilities' (2003: 49). Shier (2010) reviews both the tensions that are common to participation in public decision-making by all citizens and those that are specific to children.

This chapter reflects on the tensions that emerged from the data analysis, following Shier's (2010) approach of looking first at the tensions common to public participation and secondly at those tensions that reflect understandings of children as a legitimate group in the policy deliberation process. In section 8.2 below, the

analysis explores some of the main tensions that can be seen as common to participation in public-decision-making and governance by all citizens. These can be broadly categorised as tensions around participation as control or participation as empowerment. Then in section 8.3, some of the key tensions that are specific to children's participation are considered. These are generally issues that concern children's status and the power relations with adults that emerged in each of the four case studies. Throughout the chapter, suggestions are made as to how these tensions might best be navigated and the chapter concludes with optimistic reflections for steering a path around the constraints imposed by the social, organisational and political contexts to ensure that children's participation in public policy is as meaningful and effective as it can be.

8.2 Tensions for all

As Shier (2010) notes, the tensions that persist across all public participation can be seen as between positions which see public participation as a means of empowering citizens, of re-building trust and renewing democracy and those that see public participation as just another means by which the state exerts control of its citizens in an increasingly complex world. A number of these tensions are explored below with reference to the research findings and the literature reviewed in chapters two and three.

8.2.1 *The citizen as consumer - the citizen as 'active'*

In chapter two the recent history of citizen participation in the UK was reviewed looking back to the collective service user movements of the 1970s and the less democratic and more consumerist approaches to service user participation of the 1980s and 1990s. The 2000s saw the continuation of what is described as the managerialist turn within the public sector under New Labour whereby, the status of 'customers' continued to prevail in the discourse around civic participation (Pinkney, 2011). This occurred, despite the promise in Wales and Scotland at least,

of opening up new governance spaces to citizens through new devolved political institutions (Chaney, *et al.,* 2001).

In the 2010s, in England under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition Government, there is a renewed emphasis on the role of the market in the provision of welfare services and a renewed focus on the preferences of the individual consumer at the expense of people's roles as citizens and their related rights and responsibilities (characterising a more democratic approach). As has been widely debated, the promise of David Cameron's Big Society to roll back 'big government' in favour of de-centralisation, neighbourhood and individual empowerment, organised by voluntary organisations, social enterprise and individuals themselves seems at the time of writing to be more of a propaganda exercise in selling the shrinking of the state, than a vehicle for delivering on citizen engagement (Ellison, 2011).

Once again, as Arnott (2008:356) suggests, attempts to promote 'civil renewal' in the UK, include, 'new governance strategies rethinking the relationships and roles between the state, civil society and the individual'. It seems that civic participation is regarded as fundamental to democracy but that is where the consensus ends with each theory of democracy associated with its own interpretation of what participation means. The consumerist versus activist dichotomy maps across the typologies developed by Esping-Anderson (1990) of welfare state regimes. Esping-Anderson (1990) identified three clusters of welfare regimes: the liberal welfare state which is predominant in the UK and in the US, Canada and Australia; the corporatist welfare state which clusters around France, Germany, Italy and Austria and finally, the social democratic welfare state that predominates in the Scandinavian countries. All of these categories reflect different ideas about what is the optimum relationship between the state, the market and the family. Consumerism can be seen as following the Anglo-American template with the concept of 'active citizenship' more in line with the social democratic model where the aim is to reach consensus through dialogue.

Citizenship in the UK, Cockburn (2010: 312) concludes is based on short term 'consumerist' notions of participation where citizens are presented with a 'choice' of services or how they might feel about them. The consumerist element is seen as harmful to those who are economically marginalised and do not have a strong consumerist hand to play. Such shallow consumerism, Cockburn (2010) continues, does not encourage 'active' participation as citizens are only able to display a rather limited amount of agency.

The analysis now turns to consider how 'children's participation' in each of the case studies constructed children as consumers and/or as 'active citizens'. The section concludes with some reflections on how navigation of the tensions between these two constructions. by those investing in and supporting children's participation in public decision-making, can enhance opportunities for children to be seen as legitimate policy actors (Arnott, 2008).

The concept of consumerism was most evident in the CHiP case study, where the children's advisory group had been established within the context of an organisational imperative to be seen as being accountable to beneficiaries. Against a backdrop of increasing demands for international NGOs to be more accountable to the constituencies they claim to serve and represent, accountability to children is seen by CHiP as important as a matter of principle, of credibility and as 'a pathway to promoting good governance'. The following extract from the terms of reference of the children's advisory group in CHiP identifies one of the main organisational objectives of the forum:

> *Extract from the Terms of Reference, CHiP:* To be a channel for wider accountability to children by CHiP through formal reporting and dialogue with trustees and senior managers and feedback the results of this dialogue to larger numbers of children.

However without structures and mechanisms for the children's advisory group to feedback 'the results of the dialogue to larger numbers of children' or to gain a

mandate from a larger constituency, the children's advisory group was effectively a group of 12 children who gave their views on their preferences.

There was no similar construction of children (or adults) as service users in ASHA. The concept of service-users has little resonance in a country like India, where the majority of the Indian population cannot expect to receive public welfare services in the same way that we have come to expect in the UK. Rather, there was in ASHA a strong sense of community and collective endeavour amongst the Dalit villagers as this extract from my field notes suggests:

> *Extract from fieldnotes:* They were so proud of their heritage as Dalits. The community centre/classroom had a huge portrait of Ambedkar (the leader of the Dalit movement in the 1940s and a contemporary of Ghandi). There was a real sense of 'community' at the meeting of adult leaders and children from the Neighbourhood Children's Parliament of working together to improve their circumstances and particularly the futures for their children.

These data extracts illustrate something of what divides consumerist and activist tendencies. Further manifestations of the divide can be seen to have emerged from the data analysis in chapter five which explored accounts of how the issues that are up for discussion and influence within the four deliberative forums were determined. Shier (2010) maintains that consumerist approaches present citizens with a pre-determined and often, narrow range of choices and activist approaches place the citizen's own issues and concerns at the forefront. Below, the data is briefly reviewed and explored to see what it reveals about the manifestations of children as consumers or citizens in each of the case studies.

In CHiP, previous analysis revealed that the agenda for the annual meeting of the children's advisory group was largely devised by the organisation. Difficulties were reported when one of the advisory group members (Noi) introduced a new item onto the agenda of the meeting in March 2009, that is, the closure of CHiP's programme of work in his home country. Although accounts from the lead manager some months later, indicated that over time this interjection posed a useful cultural

challenge that contributed to a transformation of institutional practices (Tarrow, 1994).

As noted in chapter five, in the Lamberton youth forum and in the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in ASHA, the agenda was more obviously jointly produced by the children and adults working together. Nonetheless, as noted in chapter six, when exploring the impacts of the children's participation, there were notable differences between the two cases in respect of the actual influence the children's forums had on policy-making. In ASHA the supporting adults were independent of the body the children's parliaments were seeking to influence (the Panchayat) and were more 'savvy' and strategic in how and with whom, the children focused their influencing tactics. In Lamberton the supporting adults were part of the same organisation (the local authority) and stood back to allow the children to determine their own policy 'change objectives' and influencing activities. The absence of any 'expert' advice and support to encourage the youth forum to develop a more ambitious and thought through influencing strategy was seen in chapter six to work against the youth forum effecting policy change. In Marlings, the data suggest that while the initial agenda for the school council was dominated by the school's own improvement agenda, the members of the school council during the course of the year had successfully introduced their own item for discussion and action, notably raising funds for the Haitian earthquake relief effort.

This analysis illustrates how tendencies associated with consumerism or activism reflected in each of the four case studies were not necessarily fixed in time or static and that children can be active agents in altering or adjusting the tendencies. The findings of this study suggests that, as Prout (2006:72) concludes, the 'complex realities' of producing 'childhood' within a set of relations can lead to small differences having big effects. The research suggests that there is potential to navigate tensions along the continuum of the dichotomies, to good effect.

The tensions between consumerism and activism were also evident in the analysis presented in chapter five of the organisational motivations for setting up each of

the forums and the purposes which were invested in each of the forums. In the Welsh case studies (Lamberton and Marlings) there were strong external drivers relating to domestic policy and legal requirements to establish school councils and youth forums. In CHiP the purpose of establishing the children's advisory group was to improve accountability mechanisms in the organisation. While in all three organisations there was also a stated commitment to children's rights and to giving children opportunities to be involved in decision-making relating to public policy as it affected children's lives, the tensions between the consumerist and activist positions were continually being negotiated.

In ASHA, the National Children's Parliaments (NCPs) seemed to be much further toward the activist end of the spectrum. ASHA's Director and the German donors advised, in interviews, that the reason for setting up the NCPs was to introduce another capacity-building mechanism into the poor Dalit villages to complement those already in place, such as the Village Task Force. However as noted in my field notes, the NCPs got involved in a number of public relations events which were largely pre-determined by the local Panchayat or ASHA on behalf of donors:

> *Extract from fieldnotes*: It's not all one way….Looking back over this first week children seem to be taking part in a number of government sponsored activities, e.g. the National Environment Day as passive, placard-waving, 'future' citizens – with me as the guest of honour! Also children in the children's parliament in Village B reported that adults initiated a lot of their activities.

So in ASHA too, the same tensions had to be navigated. Each of the case studies reflected, to varying degrees, elements of both consumerist and activist approaches to children's participation. It seems likely that as Whitty and Wisby (2007:304) suggest in their report on a UK government funded research project into the role of school councils that the inherent contradictions link back to New Labour's policy objectives which on the one hand privileges centralisation and evidence-informed policy while at the same time emphasising local participation and user perspectives (2007:316). More optimistically and in line with the findings of my research, the authors conclude that these tensions can be navigated by the professionals involved

to bring about more collaborative, democratic and transformative relationships if the school, the local authority or the 'owning' organisation have the will. The next section of this chapter explores the tensions surrounding the 'spaces' for citizen engagement and participation in public decision-making

8.2.2 *Spaces for participation*

Concepts of participation spaces are debated at length in the literature (see for example, Shier, 2010; Taylor, 2007 and Cornwall, 2004). In this section of the chapter, the analysis focuses on a conceptualisation of participation spaces developed by Cornwall (2004) which focuses on the differences between 'invited' and 'popular' participation spaces. A second conceptualisation developed by Moss and Petrie (2002) is the idea that the 'space' for children's participation is constructed through 'place', that is, how children and childhood are placed within broader social relations. Both of these perspectives had resonance with the research particularly in the two Welsh case studies (Lamberton and Marling) and provided a useful analytic tool for analysis. Moss and Petrie's (2002) conceptualisation of children's 'spaces' and 'place' is focused particularly on the structuration of childhood and will be considered later in this chapter when considering tensions specific to children's participation. Here, I explore the concept of 'invited' and 'popular' spaces developed by Cornwall (2004) which relates to civic participation more broadly.

Cornwall's (2004) conceptualisation of 'invited' and 'popular' spaces outlined in chapter two fits well with the four forums in my sample which were all technically examples of 'invited' spaces that is, the forums were all set up by adults and children were invited to take part. In terms of engaging in governance and policy-making, the children were clearly on the margins and 'resource-poor' compared to most of the adults involved. Obvious links between these invited spaces and children's popular spaces were perhaps strongest in the Indian case study where even though the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) mirrored representative adult structures, the meetings and activities took place in the

children's villages and the areas they generally inhabited like the temple, a field or other communal space in the village or neighbourhood. The NCPs then might best be thought of as hybrid spaces where spaces are made available but capable of being populated in a way determined by those invited in.

In Marlings, the links between the invited space of the school council (meeting in a class room) and the children's own spaces (out in the playground) were physically close but very different. I noted in my field notes that in the school councils meetings the children were very polite, put up their hands to ask permission from the support worker (a teacher) to speak and were generally quite subdued compared with the noise and hubbub of the playground. In Lamberton, the youth forum meetings took place in the council chamber and the links with children's own spaces were fractured by the representative nature of the structure. In CHiP, attendance at the children's advisory meetings was a very different experience for the children and many miles away from their own, popular spaces.

Recognising the relative importance of 'invited' spaces as the spaces where decisions are made and 'popular' spaces as the spaces that children own, Shier argues as noted in chapter two, that the power and effectiveness of these spaces lies not in the spaces as such, but in the connections and movements between them (2010: 29). He sets outs a schema of spaces ranging from adult only spaces where children are excluded to children's wholly autonomous spaces. Shier illustrates from the data he collected, in the UK and in Nicaragua, how the power is in the interactions between the spaces – for example where children's own spaces can be a base to launch a protest from an 'outsider' position and/or a place to 'prepare, empower, support and legitimise those who are then delegated to enter the 'lion's den' on their behalf and engage in policy deliberations in an invited space' (2010:29).

The exploration in chapter seven of the process of turning children's 'voice' to 'influence' in the forums suggested an important role for supporting adults in navigating the connections and movements between these spaces, maximising

resources and policy influence. This was evident in ASHA where the integration of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) with adult focused, capacity building structures in the villages and the central role of the supporting NGO allowed for co-ordinated and effective influencing activity. This case illustrates that while children may be 'resource poor' when viewed in isolation, when their resources are combined with other outsider and insider groups, there is potential for children collectively to assert a strong negotiating position and, working with these other interest groups, to influence policy-making.

In the Lamberton forum in Wales, it was the acceptance of a status quo In the 'invited' space of the youth forum where 'decision-makers' were seen to exercise all the power and the absence of any such tactical thinking or co-ordination across different groups or interests that was striking. The adults supporting the youth forum in Lamberton seemed resigned to the fact that the forum was not going to influence public services. The primary objective from their perspective was to alter the social and power relations between the children and adults by raising awareness of the capacities of the children and the value of their contributions albeit that eventually this would pay dividends in terms of policy outcomes. In Marlings too, the 'invited' space of the school council could be understood to be low on, or even empty of, policy influence perhaps because the council was at such an early stage of development.

In considering the potential to navigate the spaces along Shier's (2010) spectrum to enhance capacity for the turning of children's 'voices' into policy 'influence' it must also be recognised that new technologies and ways of communicating that are especially favoured by young people and by social campaigns such as social networking have arguably changed the landscape and the links between participation spaces irrevocably. This is borne out by the reported wide spread usage of such technologies to organise student protests in the UK and the revolutions that marked the Arab Spring (BBC, 25th October 2011).

All these considerations suggest that the binary of 'invited' spaces having all the power and 'popular' spaces having no power is perhaps too simplistic for the world in 2011 and fails to recognise the fluidity of power, the concept of power as a productive rather than a repressive force and the role of self-regulation (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). The research suggests that there is much more to be gained from an analysis rooted in an understanding of more fluid notions of power operating within a broad spectrum of participation spaces alongside understandings of the contributions of insider and outsider groups to the policy making process. As Taylor (2007:314) suggests, 'a post-modern analysis of power holds out the promise of a more fluid and ambiguous politics' in which young citizens may be able to generate power. Now, the discussion turns to the final tension to emerge from the data that the literature suggests is common to public engagement involving adults as well as children. This is what Shier (2010) describes as the tension between local and 'close-to-home' public participation and participation at higher, national and global, levels of governance.

8.2.3 *Participation and the level of governance*

Data analysis revealed that a further factor to work as an enabler in the children's forums influencing public policy was the targeting of influencing activities at a relatively low and most familiar level of governance. In ASHA, the NCPs seemed to have been very successful in effecting changes at the lowest level of governance. The relationships that could be developed at that level, between the children and the community leaders and between the children and the government representatives, seemed to be vital to the NCPs' success in influencing policy. However, the UNCRC requires that all children should be enabled to participate in decisions on *all* matters affecting them. Where children's collective influencing activities are targeted and located therefore needs to relate primarily to the nature and type of issue(s) (and associated decision-making processes and governance mechanisms), that the children's forum wish to influence. Nurturing similarly productive relationships at higher levels of governance is likely to remain a challenge, especially as Taylor notes, 'how resistant public sector actors can be to

partnership working' (2006: 275). On this basis, the issue of the 'level of governance' was categorised as more of a tension that had to be navigated than as an enabling factor.

The analysis suggests (and largely the literature confirms) that these lower levels of governance are where children and indeed adults can be most influential (see for example Lansdown, 2006). Hart (2008) in his critique of such 'localism', however, emphasises the importance of other places where power and knowledge are located. In the UK context, as in India there are a number of levels of governance ranging from community councils, through to town councils and local authorities and (in the case of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) national assemblies or parliaments, the Westminster Parliament and the European Union (Rees and Chaney, 2011).

The model of children's parliaments in ASHA in Tamil Nadu works at a very local level compared to the participation structures in Lamberton and in CHiP. The Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments were guided by the NGO (ASHA) to prioritise, from a longer list of their own concerns, issues that they could influence. This, ASHA's Director suggested were, 'the local issues that come under the jurisdiction of the Gram Panchayat'. Locally elected members of the Gram Panchayat were already engaging with the village (and their local electorate) through the Village Task Forces operating in each of the 13 villages and were perceived as receptive to the children's accurately targeted demands.

When assessing the impact of children's participation across the case studies, the apparent ease of effecting change at this very local level, compared favourably (in terms of achieving changes to public services) to the more complex and bureaucratic circumstances in Lamberton. The youth forum is operating at a much higher level of governance than the NCPs in south India. It works to represent the views of children and young people across a municipality of 200,000 people. Its influencing activities primarily target the municipal council with over 50 Elected Members and hundreds of local government and public service officials. The 13

NCPs I studied in India aim to each advocate on behalf of all children from a village of between 60 and 150 households, and primarily work to influence the local Gram Panchayat and related key public officials. Gram Panchayats represent the lowest level of formal governance in India and in this rural area of Tamil Nadu each Gram Panchayat is concerned with a total population of about 2,500 people (a group of villages).

One of the crucial outcomes of these differences is the nature of the relationship and the communication between the children's forum and their allies and the people they are trying to influence. For the NCPs relations were, it seemed, relatively familiar and communications were direct, straightforward and apparently well-targeted. In Lamberton, the youth forum's relationship with others who exercise power including those who are nominated 'decision-makers' over the public services the youth forum wish to influence, was subject to many more intermediaries than in the NCPs and was much more difficult to finger, let alone trace. The interface between the influencers and those to be influenced in Lamberton, appears from the data, to work haphazardly at best, through a complex web of expectations and traditions underpinned by strong ideological conceptions about childhood, the purposes of children's participation and its benefits.

An understanding of the subtleties of relationality and power (Prout and Tisdall, 2006) suggests that the building of more effective citizen engagement at a local authority, state or national level of governance at least, has to be founded on a 'rock' of local participation. But as Taylor (2006) notes, the challenges of bridging the chasm between very small-scale community activity on the ground (which people can relate to more easily) and city or district-wide decision-making are considerable. Taylor (2006) suggests that a variety of connections across communities and sectors are essential, with more time and opportunity for informal approaches. The data from ASHA supports that assertion. As previously noted, in ASHA I observed a number of informal events or gatherings when the different interest groups in the village (including children) met with each other and also with government representatives. I speculated as to how these opportunities

encouraged mutually beneficial relationships built on increased respect and trust. In Lamberton and Marlings I did not get the exposure to the children's 'popular' spaces that was possible in ASHA. It was the apparent isolation of the youth forum and school council in these case studies (i.e. isolation from most of the other participation 'spaces' on Shier's spectrum), that was striking. Here again, within the dimensions of place and the level of governance, there are tensions to navigate and opportunities to exploit.

This concludes the exploration of tensions that are common to participation discourses in governance spaces whatever the age of the participants. They can be characterised as tensions between participation as a mechanism 'through which government attempts to govern' (Arnott, 2008) and participation as empowerment. Given what the data analysis reveals about the fluidity of power and its relational quality and the resonance of these findings with the literature, the tensions highlighted here, while challenging, do not, the research suggests, have to be defeating. As Atkinson (2003: 117) notes with this Foucaultian notion of circulatory and fluid power there is the possibility of resistance, 'which allows the articulation and implementation of alternative agendas'. The analysis now turns to explore tensions that can be seen as more specific to *children's* public participation.

8.3. Tensions specific to children

The second category of tensions are specific to the situation of children. As Taylor reminds us, governing beyond the state does not take place in a vacuum and 'the existing distribution of power is inscribed in the new sites and spaces' (2007:302). There are structural considerations that impact on the manner of children's participation. Children's real and imagined dependency on adults and their lack of economic or political power does negatively affect perceptions of children as a legitimate group in the policy deliberation process (Shier 2010). The tensions explored here are located in the broader context of inter-generational relationships and have particular implications for the role adults play in supporting children's

participation as they juggle 'complex and contradictory pressures……in their advisory role with participants' (Wyness, 2009:395).

The first tension explored below recalls the concept of participation 'spaces', this time exploring how the 'spaces' for children's participation in each of the four case studies can be seen as being constructed through children's 'place' in the respective social structures. The 'place' of children being one of dependence on adults whereby children are seen as vulnerable and in need of protection and/or control and not as active participants in the larger social fabric. The latter position is an adult privilege and prerogative. From this perspective, denying children this status is ethically sound because of course most children will inherit it later in life when they become adults (Qvortrup *et al.,* 2009:5).

8.3.1 *Participation spaces and children's 'place'*

Moss and Petrie (2002) juxtapose the concept of children's 'spaces' with children's 'place'. In children's 'spaces' they argue, children have a political voice; they are taken seriously by adults and arrangements are made to incorporate children in decision-making processes. This concept of space implies children's 'here and now', where children have commitments and interests as children. The concept of children's 'place', on the other hand, locates children within specific domains where they are expected to conform to what Jenks (2005) calls a 'vision of futurity'. Children are thus viewed as primarily 'social, economic, political and moral investments in the future' (Wyness, 2009: 396).

In chapter seven data analysis highlighted how traditional constructions of childhood worked as an inhibitor to turning children's voice to influence. The predominance of the perception of childhood as a stage in life where children learn to be responsible adults rather than as active citizens in their own right came to the fore in the analysis of the Lamberton data in particular. In that context it served to marginalise any conception that children's deliberations might lead to policy change and to prioritise the *process* of participation over its policy related *outcomes*. While

constructions of childhood in India also rendered children as subordinate to adults, the interdependencies between the children and adults within the low caste villages were emphasised by the relational embedding of children's participatory structures within similar associational structures for the adults living in the Dalit villages.

In Lamberton and Marlings, the research suggests that children were not enabled, during the study period at least, to take up what Tisdall and Davis (2004) call 'decision-making positions' or to create long term dialogue between children and decision-makers and that is why, Tisdall and Davis (2004) would suggest, they failed to achieve tangible policy outcomes. The failure of top down and adult-led 'child participation' initiatives to construct children as a legitimate group in the policy making process has been a common critique in the literature (see Thomas, 2007). The deliberative spaces that children in Wales and the UK have been invited into in recent years such as youth forums (like Lamberton) and school councils (like Marlings) are destined to fail in this regard because, as Cairns (2006) argues, they usually mimic flawed adult structures. That is, structures that are concerned with representative democracy rather than participatory democracy which are seen as having the potential to engage ordinary citizens more directly in decision-making.

Youth forums at the municipality level are seen as excluding of marginalised young people and of acting as training grounds for 'responsible citizenship' forums of social control (Macpherson, 2008). Lamberton actually worked hard (and with some success) to engage marginalised young people and support them to learn the 'rules of the game'. Other literature, notably Morrow (2001), Wyse (2001) and Alderson (2000), cite research which found schools councils to have limited power, to be dominated by 'high fliers', to be not very democratic, restricted to decisions on school facilities and environments (or what Whitty and Wisby (2007: 304) have described as 'toilets and chips issues') and kept from core issues of teaching and learning. However, these studies were undertaken at an earlier stage in the development of such formal structures and other studies that subsequently directly report children's own views. For example, Stafford *et al.'s* (2003) qualitative study involving 200 children aged three to 18 from across Scotland, suggests a more

mixed picture. In Stafford *et al.'s* (2003) study, children and young people said that they felt listened to in youth forums and councils and liked getting to know each other over time and working together with other like-minded young people but the consensus was that not much was achieved. Those who were already members of such forums were more positive about them than those who were not.

Tisdall (2010:325) reports on a survey of secondary school pupils in Scotland in 2007 which found children and young people only 'moderately positive' about school councils with 29% agreeing with the statement 'the council has improved things in my school' and 28% disagreeing. But, Tisdall continues, pupils were considerably more positive about school councils in principle with 44% of Scottish secondary pupils agreeing with the statement 'I think school councils are a good way of listening to pupils'. My research also demonstrates the positive aspects that children discerned from their experiences of being involved in formal, adult-led deliberative forums. The data from all four case studies (and from a range of different sources), suggest that the key for children is being listened to and treated with respect by the adults they interact with, as well as what Stafford, *et al's* 2003 study highlighted, as the more overtly social aspects of belonging to such a forum. So, if adult-led, top down structures are not to be seen as inherently flawed in and of themselves as suggested by Cairns (2006), at least not by the children involved - how can the tensions inherent in constructing children's 'place' through these participation 'spaces' best be navigated?

The data suggest that the role of supporting adults in facilitating children's participation in public policy, their guidance and direction on how children's forums can be most influential, their support for children in actually undertaking the influencing activities and the role they can play in linking children's participation with adult structures, is very important in turning children's 'voice' into policy 'influence'. The wider social and power relationships surrounding children and adults must be considered and supporting adults should be cautious and reflective with their guidance role. However, abandoning children to plough their own influencing furrow because of concerns about adult domination and the importance

of supporting a 'child-led' approach, as was noted in Lamberton, seems to be counter-productive. Moreover, the experience in ASHA suggests that embedding children's participation within broader civic participatory structures and networks that link with real political power can increase the resources of the participating groups and their capacity to influence. Evident in Lamberton and Marlings was the apolitical nature of children's participation in the UK as noted by Tisdall and Bell (2006) and the fact that children's participation tends to be isolated from adult associational structures as well as distanced from governance structures (or spaces), as Whitty and Wisby (2007) noted in their study of school councils in England and Wales.

The dominant concept of childhood in the UK sees children and governance and politics as a contradiction. Theis (2010:350) maintains that this is a feature across international development as well as in the UK suggesting that: 'when children are involved in the political process they are often seen as technical actors who can provide useful information, rather than as citizens or political actors with rights to uphold and interests to defend'. My research suggests that this particular positioning of children's participation is what needs to be fundamentally challenged. Participation activities in the UK have proliferated with youth forums and school councils established everywhere. In Wales, all local authorities have a youth council or forum in place and all primary, secondary and special schools are required by law to have school councils in place (WAG, 2005). Rather than dismiss all these structures as inherently flawed, the research suggests that more attention should be paid to the role of the adults who provide support to children's deliberative forums and the linkages between child and adult citizen participation.

Wyness (2009) drawing on data from research on young people's involvement in three school or town councils in England that are similar to my Welsh case studies, suggests that the role of adults in supporting children to participate in policy development via these structures is complex and challenging. He suggests that the supporting adults have to maintain a balancing act between the institutional priorities (of the school or town council) which effectively exclude children as social

agents and 'creating spaces where children have a degree of autonomy and recognition and enjoy the status of participants' (2009:404). Wyness continues:

> On the one hand, adults were trying to ensure that the pupil and civic councils were effective and had some influence within structures that on the whole marginalised the position of children and young people. On the other hand, the adults also had to connect with the institutional priorities of those adult structures, which often act as barriers to children and young people's full participation. Adult involvement in children's participation was thus a complex process of supporting children and young people's attempts at articulating their interests, and in many instances trying to re-articulate these interests and bring them into line with the relevant dominant adult agendas (2009:404)
> :

As discussed in chapter seven, the process of moving from 'voice' to 'influence' (Lundy, 2007) requires thought and planning by the children and the support workers. Children need to be supported (by the adults who have the requisite knowledge and understanding) to make their representations to the right audiences, that is, those that are able to effect change. These audiences need to provide feedback to the children on how the children's views have been taken into account, again facilitated by adults. If the adults who support the children's forums and those who are receiving the children's views and making the decisions, do not consider that this is part of the process or (as in the case of Lamberton), feel unable to guide the children appropriately (either because of a lack of knowledge and/or because of an ethical viewpoint that privileges children's own views on all matters, including the influencing process), then it is not surprising that policy remains unaffected and children's forums cannot be seen as influencing it.

The navigation of the tensions around participation spaces and children's place in society has considerable implications for the role of adult mediators in policy development with children including those who support children's forums such as those in this study, as well as the roles of other adults engaged in the policy development process. The following chapter considers these in more detail meanwhile, the discussion now turns to consider the second and final tension I

want to explore with reference to the data, which is concerned with the conceptualisation of children as 'beings' and 'becomings'.

8.3.2 *Beings and Becomings*

This tension relates closely to the one discussed above in that it is concerned with the structuration of childhood in the social order. The concept of children being seen as 'beings' as well as 'becomings' is located in what has been called the new childhood paradigm of the late twentieth century. In this paradigm, as noted in chapter three of this thesis, sociologists sought to highlight the social construction of childhood, challenge the traditional socialisation model (which sees childhood as a waiting room for adulthood) and demand the visibility of children in their here and now (Qvortrup *et al.,* 2009). Such dualistic thinking has subsequently been critiqued in favour of understandings that see adults as well as children as partial 'becomings' as well as 'beings' (Prout and Tisdall, 2006; Lee, 2001; Roche, 1999) and for some, a concern to call for the re-thinking of children's participation within a framework of intergenerational, collaborative dialogue (Percy-Smith, 2006; Mannion, 2010). Percy-Smith (2006) argues for participation as a relational and dialogical process, suggesting that in the UK:

> Little attention has been paid to the role of adults or the way in which the agenda and values of adults and children are negotiated and power and responsibility are shared. Most frequently, young people tend to 'participate' as a group apart from adults, which re-enforces their separation from adults in the everyday spaces of their communities (2006:154).

In a related way, as Mannion (2010) notes, whether we see children as potential citizens ('becomings') or as active citizens ('beings') will also determine how children's participation plays out. This certainly has resonance with the findings from my research whereby the investments in children's participation in Lamberton and Marlings seemed primarily concerned with the development of socially responsible young people and adults. In CHiP the organisational motivation for the children's advisory panel were largely externally driven with a concern to be seen to

be establishing mechanisms for children to participate. Despite the annual audience that CHiP's advisory group had with high-level decision makers, the adults listened to children, but apparently made the important decisions elsewhere. In ASHA, the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs) were supported by an NGO which emphasised the rights and responsibilities of all citizens and demonstrated that children's contributions were valued. Analysis of field notes and the data from interviews showed how the children in ASHA were, however, also viewed as 'becomings', on the receiving end of knowledge and provision and in need of adult guidance and direction at all times.

Prout (2005) argues against the tendency to dichotomise 'beings' and 'becomings' in favour of a more discursive analysis suggesting that we need to direct attention to the 'mediations and connections between the oppositions they erect' (2005:68) so as not to limit the ground. He points out that while the properties that make up the structuring of adult/child relationships are stable they are not static and can shift from what he calls, one 'phase state' to another and as such, in any given context, what it means to be a child as well as what it means to be an adult is produced within a set of relations (2006:75). Childhood and adulthood as well as children and adults are both 'beings' and 'becomings'. The categories of child and adult are far from clearly separated out. They are as Alanen and Mayall (2001) suggest, not only performed but are by definition interlinked and expressed differently in different locales.

The aim of shifting adults' perceptions of children was very much a focus for all stakeholders in Lamberton. As noted in chapter five, the youth forum were engaged in a range of activities and events designed to profile children's capabilities and challenge assumptions about their competencies. Activities that fulfilled similar functions were evident in all the other case studies, for example: the clean up campaigns the NCPs in ASHA undertook; the healthy lunch box award scheme in Marlings; and the films that the CHiP advisory group produced for world leaders.

These activities were no doubt valuable in challenging some common assumptions and may well over time contribute to cultural shifts in perceptions of the childhood/adulthood divide - of the type Prout (2006) describes. But in Lamberton, the discourse was framed in a more combative and adversarial tone than in the three other case studies. This seemed based on understandings amongst the supporting adults that nothing much would change until the dominant misconceptions amongst Elected Members in particular, of children as 'angels' or, more often, 'devils' was changed. This, the data suggest, worked to sustain a perception of children as becomings rather than beings, albeit as becomings who were largely misunderstood. Of even greater import, I would suggest is how this discourse worked to set children and adults up as oppositional forces and to isolate the youth forum and its members (apart from in rare instances) from the adult associative bodies operating at both the community and the local authority level. This is not unusual. As Percy-Smith's (2006) quote on the previous page indicated, it is not common in the UK for children to participate alongside adults.

Understanding that children and adults (and the structural relationships between them) are both 'beings' and 'becomings' demands a much more inclusive, inter-generational approach to civic participation. But there are undoubtedly challenges. Mayall (2006:210) in a feminist critique, highlights the difficulties in advancing the socio-political status of childhood against a backdrop of patriarchy, social class divisions and the principle of protection as the driver of child related policy in the UK. Power is unequally distributed and some children, particularly those affected by discrimination associated with class, gender and race, have less political and economic resources on which to draw than most adults. Much of the legislative base for children's participation in the UK is founded on the principle of a permissive adult 'knowing best' with children having, what Tisdall (2010:327) terms, a 'qualified' right to be heard.

Care must be taken in negotiations and in the sharing of power and responsibility, not only to protect the civil rights of children to be heard but also to ensure that deliberations respect the multiple versions of childhood and adulthood that are

intersected by class, gender and race. The implications of this (as shall be explored further in chapter nine) are that children's participation in Wales needs to be re-framed so it operates more inclusively, as participation between and amongst various stakeholders in communities. As Mannion notes, and the data from ASHA confirm, adults and children's 'identification processes are structurally coupled' (2010: 337). Navigating the fluidity of subject positions (the 'beings' and 'becomings' of children and adults) has the potential to be transformative both in terms of shifting the social and power relationships between children and adults but also in respect of children attaining influence in the policy making process. Children, like many adults, have limited power to influence public decision-making but the experience in ASHA suggests that by combining resources and developing relationships over time, change can be affected.

The research demonstrates that children's forums do have influential resources with which they can bargain. They have unique information and knowledge that policy makers require and, as was demonstrated in all four of the case studies in the research, they have strategic importance for policy makers who want to be seen to be including children. Some forums will have capacity to mobilise membership and will be sensitive to marshaling their resources strategically for best effect in the policy making process. Forging alliances with other interest groups, such as NGOs and community associations and combining their resources with the resources of others (who may able to provide for example, finance and staffing resources), can strengthen the children's forums' bargaining power and policy influence.

As Tisdall and Davis (2004) and Taylor (2007) report, the intertwined concepts of resource exchange and bargaining as well as the concepts of status and strategy in the policy influencing process are fundamental to the policy network literature. Children's participation in public decision making has much to gain from exposure to these insights into the realities of how those outside of the government machine can achieve influence in 'new' governance spaces. If, as has been argued, power is not a zero sum game, then as Prout and Tisdall (2006) suggest, children's

relationships with adults might open the way to mutually beneficial outcomes in which both increase their power.

This was certainly the case in ASHA and CHiP. In ASHA the resources of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments were combined with those of other groups and committees in the village and the finance, staffing, contacts, relationships and expertise of the NGO to influence public decision-making. In CHiP, a lead manager tactically used an opportunity created by a shift in understanding amongst high-level decision-makers (a shift brought about by the children's advisory group 'telling it like it is') to push through proposals to improve children's participation at all levels of the organisation. If power is productive and cumulative as the post-structural ideas of Foucault and Giddens suggest, then as Prout and Tisdall advise, the quantity of power, 'depends on the strategy and tactics of the players' (2006: 244).

Conflicts of interest between the different groups will have to be negotiated and power and responsibility shared. In some cases the interests may be so diametrically opposed that an alliance is not a feasible option. Tisdall and Davis (2004) illustrate in their account of disabled children's participation in a policy review by the Scottish Executive, how sensitivity to a vocal and powerful lobby from some parents' organisations, caused the Executive to re-think its initial thoughts on giving children the right to appeal against their education statement, an issue that the children involved in the deliberations had prioritised.

Tracking the process of turning children's voice to influence in four children's forums and linking the themes arising with the literature on policy making and policy networks has suggested a number of enablers and inhibitors as outlined in chapter seven. It has also revealed a number of common tensions that those engaged with children's participation need to grapple with. Some of these tensions can be seen as common to all civic participation, some just to children's participation but all share the potential for navigation and suggest opportunities as well as threats.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the tensions in children's participation in public decision-making and suggested how the concept of 'navigating' these tensions opens up possibilities for agency both for the children who are members of the deliberative forums and also for those adults whose role is to advise and support them. The tensions explored in the first half of the chapter were seen to feature in all public participation and focused on i) consumerist and activist approaches; ii) the concept of invited and popular participation 'spaces'; and iii) the challenges for civic participation as the distance from governance institutions increases. All of these tensions (and the navigation possibilities) had resonance across all four of the case studies in my research. The tensions explored in the second half of the chapter are those that were specific to children's participation. The two tensions explored were: i) seeing children's 'spaces' as constructed through children's 'place' in the social structure and ii) understandings of children as 'beings' or 'becomings', while common to all four case studies had most resonance with the two Welsh case studies, informed as they are by the dominant constructions of childhood in western societies.

Throughout the analysis applying the theoretical understanding of power (outlined in more detail in chapter two of this thesis) as fluid and productive expanded the possibilities whereby 'navigating the intersections of relationships' as Gaventa (2004:38) argues, may 'in turn create new boundaries of possibility for action and engagement'. The tensions and contradictions reviewed in this chapter underlie the 'messiness' of children's participation as identified by Gallagher (2008). But, perhaps contrary to what Gallagher's position implies, the data suggest that with careful navigation based on a more thorough understanding of these tensions, children's position as active subjects can be further enhanced. Gallagher's (2008:403) alternative conclusion that attempts to systematically capture the policy impact of children's participation in public decision-making are just 'another form of the utilitarian instrumental rationality by which childhood is increasingly governed', is largely dismissed.

Although, epistemologically, I do acknowledge the subjective nature of the production of knowledge and am not proposing to make claims based on objective truth, nevertheless as I set out at the beginning of this thesis, I agree with Lansdown (2006) who concludes that until there is more persuasive evidence about the benefits (or not) to children, organisations and communities, the full potential of participatory approaches (and their institutional support) will remain largely untapped. The efficacy of children's participation needs to be demonstrated (in particular at times of public sector expenditure cuts) to get the investments in the necessary legal, social and economic supports to enable it to become a reality for children.

The discussion in this chapter on the tensions or contradictions that have to be navigated in children's participation provides a platform from which to launch the conclusions of this thesis. The next and final chapter reviews the research findings and on the basis of these, determines the most salient and plausible answers to the research questions. In doing so it also explores the contribution of this research. The chapter continues with reflections on the strengths and limitations of the research design and the methodological approach selected before exploring the implications for policy and the practice of children's participation in public decision-making and for future research.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis. It highlights the key themes of the research findings shaping answers to my research questions and explores the contribution the research has made to the study of children's public participation and the implications for policy and the practice of children's participation in Wales and across the UK. The chapter includes some final reflections on methodological approaches to measuring the impact of children's participation and points to recommendations for future research on this topic.

The research examined the impact of children's participation in public decision-making in four case studies, two in Wales and two international, and explored the processes involved. The study drew on theoretical perspectives concerned with governance and power as well as those concerned with the constructions of childhood and was particularly concerned to examine how the spaces created by 'new' governance approaches in Wales, include children as a legitimate group in the policy making process. The central question the research sought to address was: How does children's participation (through deliberative forums established for that purpose) impact on the governance of public services? This question was broken down to a series of sub-questions which privileged the perspectives of all of the main stakeholders including the child participants. These were:

- What changes in public services have occurred as a result of children's participation in policy making and service development?

- How do children/support workers /managers/policy makers understand how children's views influence the design, implementation and evaluation of public services?

- What can be seen as working to enable or inhibit children's influence on public decision-making?

The first section of this chapter explores what the research findings have to say in answer to these questions with reference to the particular theoretical perspectives adopted as a lens for this enquiry and identifies the main themes arising. Section 9.3 goes on to discuss the policy and practice implications of the research. Section 9.4 reflects on the contribution the research has made to the study of children's public participation and in particular, in addressing some of the many challenges of 'measuring' the impact of public participation.

9.2 Findings

9.2.1 *Research questions*

The answer to the headline research question: How does children's participation impact on the governance of public services?, is reflected in the complexity of the policy-making process and the positioning of children's engagement in that process. The study has shown how children's participation can impact on public decision-making but also how this is not a straight forward, linear relationship. Answers to the sub-questions posed at the start of this thesis about the changes in public services that occurred as a result of children's participation and the factors that enable or inhibit children's influence on public decision-making are rooted in the understandings and perspectives of the key stakeholders on the processes involved.

Changes in public services were seen to have occurred as a result of children's participation in two of the case studies, CHiP and ASHA. Reflections on the experiences in ASHA of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (NCPs), suggests that children's participation is more likely to affect change in public services and facilities when participation is 'close to home'; where there is clarity about its objectives (amongst all the different stakeholders); where efforts are focused on well-understood policy or practice opportunities; and where there is close

integration between child participation structures and capacity building structures targeting other civil society groups at a local level.

The challenge for ASHA is that the NCPs have an uncertain future. Funded short term by foreign donors, the NCPs are positioned in an international development context where donors' preference is to support civil society rather than governments which are perceived as weak or corrupt. There is no sign of the local or district government taking over responsibility for funding the NCPs and their sustainability is questionable. As Tisdall (2008:425) reminds us, this side stepping of formal government structures risks colonizing civil society and undermining the accountability of government. Reflections on CHiP confirm the importance of policy networks, of linking the resources and power that the children are able to command with other factors (such as external drivers) and fitting them into the relevant governance and organisational structures when opportunities or 'policy windows' arise. The complexities of these processes and timescales pose particular challenges for those engaged in children's participation through formal structures such as youth forums and school councils. The research suggested that the tensions around participation as a governing strategy and participation as empowerment and the tensions surrounding the positioning of children as 'active citizens' in western societies provide opportunities as well as threats.

Navigating these tensions, being strategic and tactical as well as reflective, can it is argued, enable children (as well as other interest groups) to influence policy making more effectively. The research highlighted the important contribution of political science theories (including theories on governance and citizenship) to understandings of children's public participation. It also highlighted a number of lessons that we in the UK can learn from the different institutional approaches to children's participation in international development. The strengths of community-based, relational approaches that work to integrate children and adult engagement in local governance and the role of NGOs as brokers in helping communities to be heard, were particularly noted.

The research illustrates how the social and cultural context in which children's participation occurs helps or hinders the extent to which children's voices are turned into influence. In the two Welsh case studies, Lamberton and Marlings, stakeholders did not see the youth forum or school council as successfully influencing any policy outcomes. In Lamberton, ambivalences around the construction of childhood influenced the desired impacts which were focused on the benefits to the children directly involved in the forum and on challenging the broader social and power relationships between children and adults. In Marlings, the school council was not yet positioned to influence school governance and traditional western constructions of childhood were influencing the initial overall goals selected for the school council and the desired impacts of the children's participation. The more overt 'rights-based' approach in ASHA delivered more of a focus on policy outcomes compared with the more ambivalent and confused motivations in Lamberton and Marlings. Having presented this brief resume of the answers to my research questions, the discussion now turns to explore the key themes arising from the research in more depth.

9.2.2 *Key themes*

Reviewing the findings from the four case studies highlights a number of common and related themes that contribute to our understanding of children's participation in public decision-making. The first theme arising is that constructions of childhood that see children more as 'becomings' than 'beings', influence the organisational motivations for and the outcomes of, children's public participation (Rossi and Baraldi, 2009). This was certainly so in the UK-based case studies. ASHA outwardly adopted a more 'rights based' stance and stakeholders there reported on a wide range of improvements to public services and environmental conditions. If the reasons for establishing forums to support children's participation in public policy in the UK are focused on the training and development of good, responsible adult citizens (in line with a perspective that does not see children as full citizens in their own right), then the outcomes expected, looked for and invested in are unlikely to include changes in public policy.

When there is a greater understanding of children as full rights holders, as active citizens who can and should be able to hold government to account, policy change is more likely to result. As Arnott (2008) and Hart (2008) note the relative importance to date in the literature on the *process* as opposed to the *outcome* or 'end point' of children's public participation in the study of and development children's participation, links back to the institutional goals and organisational motivations for such participation.

One of the effects of the more traditional views on childhood as seen in Lamberton, is to set children and adults up as oppositional 'interest groups'. From the perspectives of both groups the characteristics of the power relationships between children and adults are seen as rooted in the social structure. Adults because of their rationality and competence, have the power and are in charge and children, whose perspectives are valued as unique and sometimes useful, have limited power or perceived competency in the policy making process. This separation (from both adults and governance structures) has the effect of isolating, and rendering apolitical, children's participation in public decision-making. Children are there to feed in their views and contribute but not to participate in the actual making of decisions.

Secondly, it was noted from the research, that governance perspectives that emphasise more fluid concepts of power as diverse and dispersed whilst also recognising how the state 'governs beyond the state' with neo-liberal, top-down restrictions, can open up potential for change and resistance, especially when children's contributions are deployed more strategically and tactically as part of a broader policy network or community. While caution has to be exercised in importing the themes emerging from the investigations of the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in India lock, stock and barrel into a UK context, the data from ASHA suggest that it is possible for children's forums to impact on policy outcomes. This can happen when children's participation is more closely linked with adult participation and capacity building structures through some sense of a shared,

rather than a separate identity and those supporting children's participation are wise to the realities and nuances of the policy making process and the ways in which power is exercised. This contrasted to the situation in Lamberton where the adults supporting the youth forum seemed to be so concerned with ensuring the forum's influencing goals and activities were child-led, that they failed to provide or arrange access to guidance and policy expertise.

The CHiP children's advisory group was a hybrid forum somewhere between an international and a UK case study involving as it did, children from all over the world but with the adult decision-makers the forum were trying to influence all being UK-based. In this case study, the children's forum was seen to have influenced a policy outcome *indirectly* by sensitising the adult decision-makers to the importance, value and meaning of children's participation. Once sensitised, other policy actors (in the CHiP case study, a lead manager) could exploit the organisation's concerns with accountability to affect policy change and gain access to new resources.

A third related theme to arise in all four case studies was the positive benefits for children of participating in public decision-making but the research illustrates that these benefits of increased confidence, a sense of self-efficacy and of enhanced well-being are dependent on the children gaining a sense of being respected and valued by the adults they interact with. A number of previous studies of children's participation have highlighted the priority children give to be being treated with respect and to seeing that their contribution is valued, over and above other gains (Drakeford, *et al*., 2009; Percy-Smith, 2009 and Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). Similarly, children in the Welsh forums in my study prioritised the respect they were afforded by those adults they sought to influence and by those professionals who supported them. As with the children in the NCPs in south India and in CHiP, they enjoyed being members of the youth forum or school council and felt that on a personal level they benefited from the opportunities they got through the forums to make positive contributions, to take responsibility, learn new skills, meet friends, have fun and gain confidence.

Further research is required but experience from these four case studies suggests a number of challenges as well as opportunities. Perhaps the biggest challenge is that the children involved in the forums, whether elected representatives or individuals representing themselves tend to be involved for limited periods of time, for one or maybe two school years or terms of office. Children select issues to work on collectively over a relatively short period of time and move on to new issues or concerns as different children get involved or as the institution or organisation's priorities change. These timescales do not fit well with the real world of policy-making and the need to respond to policy windows or opportunities as they arise. A further challenge is that not all children can gain access to these formal participation structures. While in each of the forums in this study, organisations worked hard to improve the representativeness of the forums and to include diverse and marginalised voices, this was recognised by adults workers and by the children, as a difficult requirement to fulfill.

It is also important to highlight the broad category of learning from my research about the nature of civic engagement and policy influence and the importance of those involved, being reflexive and asking questions about the positioning of adults as well as of children and the spaces set aside for children's participation (and how they can work to disconnect children's public participation and render it apolitical). The research has illustrated: the complexity of the processes involved; the importance of institutional cultures and structures and the elusiveness of 'decision-makers'; the social, economic and political factors that affect decisions; the need for time, tactics and strategy if policy and practice are to be influenced by children's forums; and the limits and possibilities of structure and agency.

The findings of the research have implications for the policy and the practice of children's participation in public decision-making in Wales and in other parts of the UK. These will be expanded upon in the next section of this chapter but the themes reviewed here suggest the importance of initiatives that support children's engagement being linked with local government and civil organisations and not stand alone entities and the important (and as yet under developed) role of

supporting adults in turning children's 'voices' into 'influence'. In new governance spaces, making connections with the myriad of 'spaces' where decisions are made and targeting children's influence are perhaps the key to success. Creating these spaces through the devolution of power and the establishment of new governance institutions and approaches to citizen engagement as we have seen in Wales is not enough in itself. It is important to develop civil society's (including children) capacity, support children to learn 'the rules of the game' and to join with others to maximise the opportunities for change.

Having reviewed the key themes and short answers to the research questions, the next section considers the policy and practice implications arising from the research. These build on the factors identified as enablers and inhibitors in children influencing policy outcomes in chapter seven and reflections on the tensions to be navigated in chapter eight.

9.3 Policy and practice implications

This section explores the implications of the findings for children's participation in public decision-making. The messiness and ambiguities in children's participation noted by Gallagher (2008) are reinforced by the findings of this study. But so too is the imperative to address what Lundy (2007: 931) describes as the 'cosiness' of current interpretation of Article 12 of the UNCRC which she contests is 'in danger of creating a type of 'chicken soup effect where children's voices are held out as an unquestionable good to be endorsed by all'. When children's voices challenge dominate thinking, generate controversy or cost money, this initial goodwill, Lundy suggests, can dissipate just as the 'rhetoric needs to be put into practice' (2007:931).

This imperative underpins the policy and practice implications of the research as set out below. Despite progress in the rhetorical commitment to the political rights of children in Wales, the research suggests that the challenges and contradictions in respect of reconciling concepts of childhood and of citizenship, civil and political

rights that Theis (2010) describes, are alive and well. As Wales is poised to introduce a new law that requires Welsh Government Ministers *to* pay 'due regard' to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is opportunity to re-assert the conceptualisation of children's participation in policy making as political, challenging and not just a technical, tick box solution (Tisdall and Bell, 2006).

Clarity over purpose and shared objectives

One implication to discuss is the need for greater clarity in the purpose and objectives of children's public participation which would help tease out these contradictions and strengthen accountability. Clarification of the purpose of children's forums set up to influence the governance of institutions such as schools and local authorities would assist in determining appropriate indicators of success and help to position children's participation as more central to policy deliberation processes. Different stakeholders will have different objectives and there is a need, as Sinclair (2004) suggested, to enable children and institutions to negotiate a shared and transparent agenda in school councils and youth forums such as in Marlings and Lamberton.

A '*rights based' approach*

The findings of the research illustrate how the motivations and purposes invested in the forums by the sponsoring organisations influence the outcomes and indicators of success. Adopting a perspective that sees children as full citizens who have a right (particularly in new governance spaces) to have a say in shaping the design, delivery and evaluation of public services that affect them and consideration of Lundy's concepts of 'audience' and 'influence' as well as the 'space' and 'voice' of children's participation, will serve to focus attention more on policy outcome as opposed to a sole concern with the quality of the participation process.

The structuration of childhood remains and adults involved in children's public participation need to be reflective in their practice and mindful of the power

imbalances and the potential and actual conflicts between the children and other interest groups. Non-governmental organisations play a significant role in the UK and elsewhere in supporting children's participation, sometimes funded through donors (as was the case in ASHA) or commissioned by government (Tisdall, 2008). They can be key insiders in the policy making process, 'intermediaries between 'the hierarchies of power…and the 'grassroots' of the groups of children' (Tisdall and Bell, 2006:113). The research suggests that the independence of the support NGOs provide combined with a civil society, rights-based perspective and access to 'invited' spaces, can be beneficial. However, Tisdall and Davis (2004) and Tisdall and Bell (2006) suggest some caution and the need for reflective practice, pointing out that NGOs have vested interests as they gain from facilitating children's participation in terms of funding, enhanced media access and improved relationships with policy makers.

There are few examples in Wales of an independent organisation supporting a local authority youth forum and no known examples of NGOs supporting a school council (Save the Children, 2006). This profile is unlikely to change in the current economic climate; the onus therefore is for the governance institutions, local authorities and schools to be better sensitised and trained in adopting a rights-based approach that matches the policy rhetoric in Wales (Tobin, 2011). In practice it will be important that youth forums and school councils establish systems for monitoring and evaluating not only the opportunities that the forums have to communicate their views and opinions on public services but also the extent to which those views are listened to and taken into account by decision-makers.

Connecting children's participation spaces

While traditional constructions of childhood which see children as only partial citizens or little-people-in-the-making were seen in this study as an inhibitor to turning children's 'voice' to policy 'influence' other factors worked as enablers in the Indian and INGO context. These have policy and practice implications. The first enabler recognised the relational aspects of policy making and of children's

participation and concerns the importance of linking children's participation with adults' participation and of developing bridging relationships between children's forums and other actors (both insiders and outsiders) influential in the policy making process. Links between adult and child participation and community-based capacity building structures can, as was seen in ASHA, be mutually beneficial alongside the cultivation of mutually respectful relationships with state actors.

As other studies have also demonstrated (see for example, Tisdall, 2010 and Whitty and Wisby, 2007), the disconnect between children's participation in school, with adult associational and governance structures within or outside schools, is a considerable weakness of school councils in the UK. This isolation or 'bracketing off' (Morrow, 2005) of children's participation in the UK is cause for concern and more attention should be paid to developing a more intergenerational, inclusive and integrated approach to civic participation. Percy-Smith advocates the concept of 'collaborative social learning', a concept that is 'relational and dialogical', which can be used 'to enhance the quality of participation within and between community groups, in policy development and in local decision-making processes' (2006:155).

This research supports Percy-Smith's position on the importance of children's participation becoming more relational and dialogical and suggests that the connections between children's forums such as in Lamberton and Marlings and other communities of interest and across sectors are vital. One of the key practical implications is the need for more time and opportunities to be made available for informal as well as formal dialogues between children's forums, adult participation structures and local decision-makers so that relationships can be nurtured and mutual respect and trust developed.

This is a considerable challenge given the current configurations of child and adult participation mechanisms across local authorities and communities in Wales and the UK. Opportunities are available in Wales through the *Communities First* regeneration programme which established local partnerships in the 100 plus most deprived electoral wards but links between these partnerships and school councils

and youth forums needs to be substantially strengthened. School councils and youth forums such as Marlings and Lamberton will need to consider how they might challenge their own isolation and develop lateral relationships with other interest groups in their communities as well as with local decision-makers. Experience in ASHA and the literature (see for example Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010) suggests that collaborative approaches which encourage inter-generational dialogue and the recognition of collective identities rather than approaches which emphasise the differences between children and adults, may well be the key to realising the potential of children's public participation to influence policy.

Finally connections need to be made between children's participation spaces and the different levels of governance with participation built up from the context of community and children's everyday life. Bridging the gulf between local, community-based participation and municipal, regional and national governance spaces presents challenges. As key beneficiaries children should be engaged in shaping public services at all levels of governance and connections have to be made between local participatory efforts and children's contributions to the larger more distant governance systems and structures where power resides.

Strategic intent

The second enabler giving rise to further policy implications was linked to the importance of approaching the tasks involved in influencing public decision-making with a degree of strategic intent and 'insider' knowledge. Influencing policy-making requires links and relationships being made with other interest groups and with actors on the inside of policy making and sustained over the length of time it takes to bring about a change. Children's forums of course should be involved in determining their own influencing strategy but they (as would adults) are likely to require help and support from others who have some 'expert' knowledge of the institutional context, the governance processes and the social, political and economic context of the particular policy or service the children's forum want to change.

This has significant implications for the role of adults who support youth forums and school councils like Lamberton and Marlings as well as for the ways in which such forums plan and review their activities. The role of supporting adults is considered further below but my research suggests quite fundamental changes are required if school councils and youth forums are to become more effective in influencing policy making. There are implications for determining the most appropriate skill set for workers who support children's forums, their positioning within the institutional context and the breadth of the professional relationships and networks they need to establish and maintain.

Role of supporting adults

The research findings support theories that understand the exercise of power in the new governance spaces as dispersed and while power is not evenly shared out amongst the various actors, it is something that circulates through networks of relationships rather than something that flows from the top of a social hierarchy downwards (Foucault, 1980). As such engaging in these networks in purposeful and tactical ways can strengthen the influence that children have on the policy making process. The experience in the Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments (ASHA) and in CHiP suggests that the role of adults engaged in the process both as supporters of children and as insiders in the policy making process, is crucial. These adults are well positioned to guide and support children's forums to influence public decision-making and to act as a bridge or a 'broker' in making and sustaining productive relationships and exchanges. Efforts to influence policy (whether by children or adults) will be more effective if they focus on well-understood policy or practice opportunities rather than the rather 'scatter gun' approach to policy influence reflected in Lamberton youth forum.

The research has thus really highlighted the need to reflect upon the role of adults who support children's participation and the skills set necessary for effective engagement. The research suggests that practitioners supporting youth forums and school councils such as those in Lamberton and Marlings, need to consider their

own knowledge and experience of policy making in their particular context and the key partners, levers and opportunities that the children's forum can use to maximise influence. They should question, who the audiences are that children should meet with to put their views across, and what other interest groups are involved in the policy making process. They can explore how children can forge alliances with groups with overlapping concerns to influence policy outcomes. Workers supporting children's forums should expect to play a number of parallel but linked roles such as acting as a critical friend to the forum, as well as an enabler, a co-ordinator and resource provider. Given the power imbalances between children and adults, workers need to retain a reflective approach to the ways in which they facilitate children's participation in governance arrangement to ensure they give good and considered advice and direction and to guard against abuses of power at one extreme and the abdication of responsibilities at the other.

Temporal considerations

The final policy implication to highlight is concerned with addressing the mismatch between the relatively short timescales for children's involvement in these formal governance structures and the length of time it can take to influence policy-making. The practice implication here is that those managing youth forums and school councils need to ensure improved continuity in membership by, for example, staggering elections and institute a system for following up on developments after a period of more intense influencing activity. Temporal considerations also have implications for the design of evaluation frameworks.

9.4 Contribution to research and implications for future research

Contribution

The research has shown how governance perspectives can reveal opportunities for children's participation albeit that these opportunities are fraught with a number of tensions that have to be skillfully and reflectively navigated. The study has raised a

number of important implications for policy development in Wales and the UK, in particular the need to revise the role of the workers who support children's participation and to adapt the skill and networking requirements accordingly.

The research makes an important contribution to the development of robust and relevant frameworks for evaluating the impact of children's public participation. I set out to measure the impact of children's participation and learnt very quickly that there were a number of significant challenges in conceptualising and quantifying the variables and interventions that comprise both 'public participation' and 'impact' (Burton, 2009). My response to these challenges was to adopt a rigorous qualitative methodological approach which would enable me to chart and analyse the exercising of power through the accounts of key stakeholders, taking proper account of the social and cultural variations which give different meanings to concepts of 'public participation' and 'childhood'.

The utilisation of a number of existing analytic frameworks including Kirby *et al.'s* (2004) three dimensions of change, Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of children's 'voice' and 'influence'; Cornwall's (2004) conceptualisation of participation spaces; and the possibilities opened up by the ideas around adults and children 'navigating the tensions' explored by Taylor *et al.* (2009) and Schier (2010), proved to be particularly valuable. The research has further tested and developed possible indicators for assessing the impact of children's participation across Kirby *et al.*'s dimensions of change. These can now be used as the basis of a framework for assessing the impact of children's public participation systematically across many sites and allow for the aggregation of data and the synthesizing of findings into a relatively consistent and coherent picture of impact. However, the research also suggests that when evaluating the impacts of public participation, the combination of the merits of quantitative and qualitative approaches that allows for example, for the contextualization of the response given to surveys and some appreciation of the respondents' knowledge and relevant experience, will be the most useful research design.

Implications for future research

The replication of this research will be important, not least in order to further refine and develop Kirby *et al.'s (*2004) conceptual framework and to devise methodological approaches which can facilitate and support, more routine evaluations, of the impact of children's forums on policy-making. The research also suggests a number of other new lines of enquiry. Given the high levels of positive feedback and agreement amongst children, it would be useful in future research to undertake a more participatory approach with child participants which allows sustained opportunities for understanding children's perspectives over time, both to determine how temporal considerations affect their perspectives and to perhaps enable children to be more critical in an atmosphere of trust and rapport built up over time with the researcher. It would also be useful to explore further the inclusivity and representativeness of the formal structures set up for children's public participation by including the perspectives of children who are not involved in the deliberative forums and by examining the influence of factors such as gender, age and ethnicity.

The isolation of children's public participation reflected in the Welsh case studies (and in the UK literature) made it difficult in this research, to include the perspectives of parents, community leaders and other adults. These perspectives would have thrown additional light on the impact of the children's participation on social and power relations in the Welsh context and perhaps helped to explain the reasons underpinning the disconnect between children and adult's participation and the challenges to developing a more inter-generational approach in the UK. Further research on initiatives in the UK that do connect up children's public participation with the participation of other civil society or special interests groups, would be valuable, if relatively stable examples of such initiatives exist.

While long overdue, evaluating the impacts of children's participation in public decision-making is not as straightforward as first thought but is essential if the practice of children's public participation is to be strengthened. As Burton (2009) notes, the putative benefits of public participation have for too long been shielded

from robust evaluation and judgement allowing 'the assertion of procedural principles to supersede the demonstration of instrumental benefits' (2009: 280).

9.5 Conclusions

The changing relationship between the state, civil society and the individual citizen in advanced democracies which posits a move from government to governance, has opened new spaces for children's participation. The drive to include and consult children has led in Wales, and in much of the UK, to the burgeoning of youth forums or parliaments and school councils. But evidence of the impact of children's influence on policy-making remains difficult to capture and little work has been done either to evaluate or develop methodology to evaluate, such forums as to their influence on policy making.

Looking back at the historical literature with regard to children's participation, times have changed. There is much less of the discourse these days which sets child protection issues up as a barrier to children's participation but, as Lundy (2007) suggests, we seem stuck with the concept of children's 'voices' and pay too little attention to the 'audience' and influence' elements of the cycle outlined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children in Wales, and elsewhere, have the right to both express a view and to have that view given 'due weight' when adults are deciding on matters that affect them.

This thesis examined the impact of children's participation on policy making in four settings and explored whether policy-makers were really listening and taking into account children's views and opinions when designing, delivering and evaluating public services. The research suggests that in Wales, more needs to be done to encourage policy makers to be accountable to children as citizens as well as responsive to them as consumers (Tobin, 2011; Tisdall and Bell, 2006). This research added knowledge on how children's forums can best be supported to ensure children's views are given 'due weight' and impact on the governance of public services, as well as knowledge about what factors work to enable or inhibit whether

and how, such influence occurs. In taking forward children's participation in policy making the research has highlighted how, as Tisdall (2008) suggests, we must think both strategically and tactically and be aware of the wider institutional contexts, while at the same time, reflecting on the positioning of adults, children and children's participation and the ways in which adults and organisations facilitate (or not) children's participation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

National Children and Young People's Participation Standards (Wales)

Appendix B

Interview and Focus Group Topic Guides: CHILDREN

Members of the Forums

BEFORE – FOCUS GROUP

1. Please tell me about the forum, what it is, what it does, how it works?
2. Achievements and progress – Obstacles – Opportunities
3. Membership – how recruited, length of membership, range of interests represented – strategies for outreach/inclusion
4. Reasons for setting up. Purpose. Value
5. Motivation for getting involved, hoped for benefits? Actual benefits? Any negative impacts?
6. Activities - what do you do?
7. What issues to work on – how decided?
8. Issues you have selected to work on? What do you want to get changed?
9. What have you got planned to talk this forward?
10. How do you link to the people who make the decisions you are trying to influence?
11. What are the best and worst things about the forum? How will you know if it's been a success?
12. Lessons learnt - what works in terms of influencing policy change, what doesn't?

Appendix B

Members of the Forums

AFTER – FOCUS GROUP

1. What's been happening? How did it go? Tell me about all the things you've been doing?
2. Progress in achieving the changes you wanted to achieve (recap on the 'change objectives' they selected).
    - Have you achieved the changes you wanted?
    - Run through each issue and ask for account of what's happened in relation to each – ask them to say where they think they are at and what are the next stages and how pleased they are with progress?
3. How were these received? Do you feel your views were listened to and taken into account by those who are making the decisions you were trying to influence? What makes you think that?
4. What happened? What happens now? Did you get feedback?
5. Was it all worthwhile?
6. Enough time/support/resources? What helped or hindered? What do you think helped make sure you were listened to? What were/are the obstacles? How can they be overcome?
7. Awareness of rights – more aware?
8. Greater willingness to listen to children in all areas of their lives?
9. Sustained opportunities for children's participation?
10. Do you think you benefited personally – if so how?
11. Any other benefits or impacts?

Quality of the Process (National Standards – Appendix A)

12. Did you get all the information and advice you needed in order to be able to make a difference? Rate on a scale of 1-10
13. Did you get the support you needed? Rate on a scale of 1-10

14. How did you get to be involved? Is it open to all? Were you made to feel welcome? Rate on a scale of 1-10
15. Where you treated equally? With respect? Opportunities for skill building? Rate on a scale of 1-10
16. Did you have fun/benefit? How? Rate on a scale of 1-10
17. Did you get feedback? What sort? Rate on a scale of 1-10
18. Did you get opportunity to review and reflect? Rate on a scale of 1-10

Level of participation

19. Group asked to position the level or 'degrees' of participation along the following spectrum

Position 1 Consulted & informed	*Position 2* Assigned but informed	*Position 3* Adult initiated, shared decisions with children	*Position 4* Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	*Position 5* Child-initiated and directed
The project is designed and run by adults, but children are consulted. They have full understanding of the process, their views are taken seriously.	Adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project, they know who decided to involve them and why. Adults respect children's views about decisions and actions	Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered but children are involved in taking the decisions	Children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for young people to consider	Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is going to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.
Power moves to adults ---------- Power moves to children				
Adapted from: Treseder, P.1997. *Empowering children & young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making.* London: Save the Children and the Child Rights Development Unit.				

Appendix B

Lamberton Youth Forum

AFTER – SURVEY

Questionnaire

You decided to focus on a number of issues over the last few months. Having had feedback from your sub-groups on the work they have been doing and the progress they have made I would like to get your feedback on what you think of the progress in relation to:

Education

- Careers Advice - making it more widely available
- Access to College Courses in Year 10 - making it a fairer system
- Better advertising of the Youth Service
- Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) - available to more young people

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Please Tick the answer that is nearest to want you think for each issue

1. Do you think that people have listened to the concerns you raised?

Issue	YES	A Little	No	Don't Know
Careers Advice				
Access to College				
Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)				

Appendix B

2. Do you feel confident that your views have been or will be taken into account?

Issue	YES	A Little	No	Don't Know
Careers Advice				
Access to College				
Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)				

3. Do you think you've achieved the changes you wanted to now or in the near future?

Issue	YES	A Little	No	Don't Know
Careers Advice				
Access to College				
Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)				

4. If you have any suggestions for anything more that should be done to get the changes you want to see on any of these issues, please write below:

THANK YOU

Appendix C

Interview and Focus Group Topic Guides: ADULTS

Support workers

'BEFORE' INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

1. Background to the development of the forum
2. Role of the forum? And within any broader strategy for children and young people's participation/user involvement?
3. Achievements and progress – Obstacles – Opportunities
4. Structure of the forum – how it works, annual cycle
5. Membership – how recruited, length of membership, range of interests represented – strategies for outreach/inclusion
6. Reasons for setting up. Purpose – hopes and expectations including hoped for benefits
7. Links with decision-makers? Access To policy-makers/service planners?
8. Impact of the forum on policy/organisation? Other impacts. Examples, evidence?
9. A mechanism for accountability?
10. Best and worst aspects?
11. How will you know if it's been a success?
12. Lessons learnt - what seems to works in terms of influencing policy change (or perceived benefits), what doesn't?
13. Plans for the coming year? Issues, activities, the forums objectives
14. Future – opportunities, threats.

Appendix C

Support workers

'AFTER' INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

1. What changes have resulted to reflect young people's concerns and priorities?

   Run through each issue and ask for account of what's happened in relation to each – ask them to say where they think the forum is and what are the next stages and how pleased they are with progress?

2. Do you think the people the young people were trying to influence listened to their concerns? Were they willing? What happened? How were they received? What response did they get? Feedback? *How to improve?*
3. Do you think the young people's concerns were or will be taken into account? What makes you feel that? *How to improve?*
4. Do you think the forum achieved the changes they wanted/any change?
5. What do you think helped make sure the young people were listened to? What were/are the obstacles? How can they be overcome?
6. Comment on the 'Influenceability' of the issues selected?
7. Other impact or benefits?
   - Has there been any change in organisational culture towards greater respect for children's rights? Re-assess where the organisation is at with regard to enabling young people to influence policy and practice?
   - Are you/the organisation more aware of young people's capacities?
   - Impact on young people – confidence, skills, enjoyment?
   - Impact on relations between adults and children? Has it improved relationships between you/the organisation and young people? Are you/the organisation more willing to consult with young people than you were before?
   - Spill over into other areas of children's lives? How young people are viewed in their communities/everyday life? Children's participation built in to all areas?
   - Improved status of children within the community
   - Other benefits?
   - Any negative impacts or drawbacks?
8. Was it all worthwhile?
9. Lessons learnt, what helped or hindered? How could things be improved? Obstacles to the forums influencing the policy-making on the issues they

want to change – what are they and how they might be overcome? What about opportunities - Strategies that helped? What needs to change?

Quality of the Process (National Standards – Appendix A)

20. Do you think the young people got all the information and advice you needed in order to be able to make a difference? Rate on a scale of 1-10
21. Do you think the young people got the support they needed? Rate on a scale of 1-10
22. How are members recruited? Is it open to all? Rate on a scale of 1-10
23. Do you think members are treated fairly? With respect? Rate on a scale of 1-10
24. Do you think the young people had fun/benefited? How? Rate on a scale of 1-10
25. Did the young people get feedback? What sort? Rate on a scale of 1-10
26. Did the forum take time out to review and reflect? Rate on a scale of 1-10

Level of participation

27. Group asked to position the level or 'degrees' of participation along the following spectrum

Position 1 Consulted & informed	*Position 2* Assigned but informed	*Position 3* Adult initiated, shared decisions with children	*Position 4* Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	*Position 5* Child-initiated and directed
The project is designed and run by adults, but children are consulted. They have full understanding of the process, their views are taken seriously.	Adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project, they know who decided to involve them and why. Adults respect children's views about decisions and actions	Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered but children are involved in taking the decisions	Children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for young people to consider	Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is going to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.
Power moves to adults ---------- Power moves to children				
Adapted from: Treseder, P.1997. *Empowering children & young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making.* London: Save the Children and the Child Rights Development Unit.				

Appendix C

Lead Managers, Governors or Sponsors

INTERVIEWS

1. Role in relation to the forum
2. Purpose of the forum. Reasons for setting up. Place within overall approach?
3. Impact of the forum on policy/services, on children, on adult/child relationships, other? Benefits, drawbacks for the institution, for the children? Other?
4. Have services improved/changed as a result of hearing children's views and experiences? Please describe examples?
5. Lessons learnt? What's gone well/not so well? Anything done differently to ensure changes result from children's participation?
6. How the forum works to influence policy and service development? Please share examples?
7. Factors that help or hinder the forum having influence over policy making, service development?
8. Future – expectations, hopes. Opportunities/threats?

Appendix C

Decision-makers

INTERVIEWS

1. What is the purpose of gaining children's views on the design, delivery and evaluation of public services and indicators of success
2. What were your hopes and expectations (including hoped for benefits)?
3. Please describe to me what the [forum] put across to you?
4. Was it clear what they wanted to change and the nature of their concerns or priorities? Can you recall the children/young people's key messages?
5. Was this a good way for them to have the influence they wanted (re-state change objective)? Were they speaking to the right people? At the right time? in the right 'way'?
6. How did you/your agency respond? Taken their views/concerns into account (or will it)?
7. Have the [name of forum] received feedback? If so, please describe.
8. What do you think has been the impact of the children's participation in respect of [the issue]?
9. What impact (if any) did this example of children's participation have on you/your organisation?
    - More aware of children's rights?
    - Change in organisational culture?
    - Greater awareness of children/young people's capacities now?
    - Children/young people's participation built in to all areas of service development?
10. How good do you think the process was? (*prompt standards, e.g. inclusion; level of participation; sufficient information; well supported*)
11. Was the way in which [NAME OF FORUM] put across their views a good way to get their points across? Any suggestions for how [NAME OF FORUM] or similar could improve the ways in which it tries to influence policy and service development in your agency – to make them more effective?
12. Overall do you think it was a worthwhile exercise? How could things be improved?
13. Barriers and opportunities? What needs to change?
14. How is policy made and decisions taken on the quality and quantity of the [specific] service?

15. How open are those making the decisions to what children's forum like [name of forum] put forward?
16. Are these people in a position to make changes in response to children's concerns or suggestions? (have they got the power?)
17. What other things do the agency/organisation have to take into consideration when making decisions? What else/who else is influential?
18. What is the agency/organisation's current policy and practice on user involvement and children's participation in policy and service development? How is this monitored and quality assured.
19. How effective do you think children's 'collective' participation is as a means of holding the [specific] agency/organisation to account?
20. How could things be improved – so that children were able to influence policy-making? What would help? What are the obstacles? What needs to change?
21. Would it be possible to get an update on your agencies response to the forum's representations?
22. Ask for any relevant policy documentation.