Mapping out the field of children’s participation – meanings, narratives and disputes

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Defining participation

- Developmental and hierarchical (Hart 1997)
- Inclusive (Thomas 2007; Thompson and Holdsworth 2007)
- Political (UNICEF/Hart 2003; Cockburn 2010)
- Context specific – global and wide ranging with an emphasis on social inclusion
Different forms of participation – student participation in Australian schools

1. Physically present in school
2. Involved in school activities - ‘on task’
3. Involved in formal school decision making [pupil voice]
4. Informal ad hoc involvement and initiation [deliberative]
5. Community and social activism through the school [political]

(Thompson and Holdsworth 2007)
Range of sites within which participation takes place

- *Central* – institutional settings – schooling, care, protection, community etc
- *Peripheral* – the market, the street; policy formation
- *Private/hidden realm* – family
- *Virtual*
Dominant Narrative – policy, practice and at some levels within the research field

- Institutional and formal
- Event based
- Outcomes oriented
- Discursive
- Individualist
Critical Narrative

- Issues of authenticity
- Issues of institutionalisation
- Does participation deliver?
- Indicative of, or challenging, generational relationships?
- A global or Western phenomenon?
Emergent narrative

- **Embedded** - routine and ongoing (Mayall 2002)
- **Relational** – interdependence (Oswell 2013; Wall 2010)
- **Emotional and embodied** (Jupp 2008; Kraftl and Horton 2007)
- **Material** - economic as well as ‘political’ (Boyden 1997; Liebel 2003; Skelton 2007)
- **Distribution of participation** - differentiation and inequality (Thomas 2012; Tisdall 2010)
To conclude: a possible model of children’s participation

Rawlsian framework

concept

voice agency decision-making

conceptions of children’s participation

Children’s participation is ultimately aspirational