

Editorial

All the articles in this special issue contribute – some more directly than others – to theoretical repertoires for thinking about the participatory rights of children, understood in legal terms as people younger than 18 years.

In the introduction, **Henderson, Pendlebury** and **Tisdall** trace the genesis of the special issue from a trans-disciplinary academic network of scholars from Brazil, India, South Africa and the United Kingdom. They delineate the main lines of conceptual contestation around the notion of children's public participation and indicate how these bear on education. Picking up two central conceptual issues, **Bray** and **Moses** argue *for* a context-specific understanding of children's participation and *against* the analytically convenient but theoretically limiting distinction between "formal" and "informal" forms of participation. Bray and Moses show how participation is constituted in and by different social spaces in South Africa. Their article serves as a platform for remaining articles.

The next three articles focus on modes of participation and the modal affordances of different theoretical positions. Each offers a different take on the conditions of possibility for authentic and meaningful participation. All three also raise questions, albeit obliquely, about taken-for-granted relationships between children and adults. **Henderson** argues that children's expressive repertoires are frequently overlooked as a form of social critique. She uses four cases studies to illustrate the richness of phenomenology, the anthropology of the senses, performance theory and multimodal pedagogies as sources of theoretical ideas for considering children's 'impassioned' forms of expression. In a companion piece, **Newfield** recapitulates instances of researched practice to illustrate how teachers have used multimodal pedagogies to expand the semiotic space of classrooms in expressive ways that worked against deficit models of children in under-resourced schools in South Africa. **Linington, Excell** and **Murris** consider participatory possibilities for young children in the reception year. They propose a form of pedagogy which, they argue, addresses both the diverse realities of South Africa's children and the principles underpinning participatory democracy.

Theories of democracy and social justice present an array of concepts pertinent to the practice and understanding of political participation. The next two articles are rooted, in different ways, in this literature. **Bentley** raises critical questions about the conceptions of children and children's rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). She defends deliberative democracy as a substantive approach to political participation, and considers how this might play out in children's exercise of their rights and capabilities as political actors, for example, in school governance. **Bozalek** proposes a normative model for children's participatory parity in different social spaces. The model brings together elements from Nancy Fraser's trivalent account of social justice, the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, and literature on the political ethics of care. Bozalek illustrates the model through examples from children's participatory practices in South African families.

In the absence of appropriate enabling conditions, participatory rights may be vacuous. The next two articles look critically at some of the spaces for children's participation in governance. **Roodt** and **Stuurman** present an overview of issues that have undermined the implementation of participatory initiatives – for both adults and children – in different parts of Africa. In South Africa, they argue, increased inefficiency on the part of local governance structures has led to rising disillusionment with participation by citizens, especially younger people. Roodt and Stuurman illustrate their argument with findings from a small study of grade 12 learners in Grahamstown/Rhini in the Eastern Cape. **Carrim** critically examines modes of participation in relation to conceptions of children in the South African Schools Act and South African curriculum policy, with particular attention to children's participatory opportunities in the domains of school governance and pedagogy. According to Carrim, the representative structure of school governance mitigates against genuine participation. He argues, too, that the policy conceptualisation of the learner representative is at odds with the policy conceptualisation of the learner as pedagogical subject and that both homogenise children.

The final pair of articles focuses on children's participation in educational research. The notion of 'voice', criticised in some of the earlier articles, is central to both. **Walton** analyses a dilemma at the heart of research in inclusive education: Whereas children's participation in such research has the potential for 'insider voices' to be a 'lever for change', selecting children to participate on the basis of disability or another marker of difference undermines the inclusive endeavour. Walton describes four research initiatives that highlight this dilemma which, she concludes, remains unresolved. **Sonn**, **Santens** and **Ravau** argue that learner participation and 'learner voice' in school-community interventions contribute to the development of children's critical consciousness and social understanding. Sonn and her co-authors describe the role of creative participatory action research methodologies in supporting thirty secondary school learners from schools in challenging contexts to deepen their social understanding through participation in a Health Promoting Schools initiative.

Together, from different disciplinary perspectives, the articles advance an ongoing conversation towards theorising children's participation and the ways in which participation is constituted in and by different social contexts and practices.

Shirley Pendlebury

Guest Editor (with co-editors Patricia Henderson and Kay Tisdall)