

A Service for Children?  
The development of a new out-of-school centre

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Suzanne Hood  
Social Science Research Unit  
Institute of Education  
University of London



## Abstract

This thesis offers an in-depth analysis of conceptual, methodological, and policy issues in the implementation of children's participation rights. The way in which children's participation is understood and operationalised *within* and *across* services affecting children is a related area for study.

The thesis explores the varied emphases given to children's participation rights (and multi-agency working) within and across play, educational, health, welfare and out-of-school services; and it examines and discusses conceptual, policy and practice issues in the implementation of children's participation rights within and across these services.

The example of the development of an out-of-school centre known as "A Space" is then used to provide a detailed analysis of the progress and process of participative and multi-agency working. Both the A Space exemplar and the wider public policy context within which it is located are viewed as forms of 'data' - and it is these two forms of data which are considered together.

The thesis suggests that whilst it seems possible to make some progress towards implementing some elements of children's participation considerable barriers exist. These barriers include the tensions which exist between the interests of children and of adults; the constraints of public policy agendas, socio-economic considerations, and the kinds of welfarist and developmentalist understandings of children and childhood which underpin the approaches of children's service agencies and the perspectives of the staff therein. It concludes that if the implementation of children's participation is to be anything more than a 'token' exercise then ways will need to be found to overcome these barriers.

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Whilst the work of writing this thesis has been mine, there are many others without whom it would not have been possible and I would have been unable to proceed.

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION AND THESIS PREVIEW</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>1.1 Introduction</i>	9
<i>1.2 Aims of the Thesis</i>	9
<i>1.3 Objectives of the Thesis</i>	10
<i>1.4 Research Role and Consultancy</i>	12
<i>1.5 The Children's Centre Concept and its Policy-Relevance</i>	12
<i>1.6 The Feasibility Work and Proposals and the Establishment of a Children's Centre</i>	14
<i>1.7 The Main Study Research Design</i>	19
<i>1.8 Differences between the Children's Centre Studies and the Thesis</i>	20
<i>1.9 Thesis Preview</i>	22
<b>2. CHILDREN'S STATUS IN BRITISH PUBLIC POLICY AGENDAS</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>2.1 Introduction</i>	24
<i>2.2 Setting the Scene: Children and the Public Policy Agenda</i>	25
2.2.1 Introduction: understandings and ideas about children and childhood	25
2.2.2 The influence of developmentalism and welfarism	26
2.2.3 Challenges to welfarism and developmentalism: children as a minority social group	29
<i>2.3 Children and Policy Making in 1990s Britain</i>	31
2.3.1 Inter-departmental collaboration and children's rights	31
2.3.2 Children's rights and participation.	33
2.3.3 Children's Services: the social policy context	36
<i>2.4 Children as Participants: Understandings of Children and Childhood in Play, Education, Welfare and Health Services</i>	40
2.4.1 Play	40
2.4.2 Education	43



	5
2.4.3 Welfare	49
2.4.4 Health	54
2.4.5 Summary	58
<b>3. BRITISH PUBLIC POLICY AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SERVICES</b>	<b>60</b>
3.1 <i>Introduction</i>	60
3.2 <i>The 1990s and the Expansion Of Out-Of-School Services</i>	62
3.3 <i>Key Themes and Influences: Risks to Children</i>	66
3.4 <i>Key Themes and Influences: Education</i>	70
3.4.1 Chronological development of school-based out-of-school centres	71
3.4.2 Analysis	74
3.4.3 The links between childcare and study support	77
3.4.4 Children's participation rights	78
3.5 <i>Key Themes and Influences: Concluding Thoughts</i>	80
3.6 <i>The Children's Centre Model</i>	81
<b>4. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION RIGHTS: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE</b>	<b>85</b>
4.1 <i>Introduction</i>	85
4.2 <i>Children's Participation and the Implementation Process</i>	86
4.2.1 Participation rights: interrelatedness with other rights in the Convention	86
4.2.2 Participation rights and a cross-service perspective	88
4.2.3 Implementation: developing a model for analysis in the UK service context	89
4.2.4 Key 'ingredients' for implementation	90
4.2.5 Structural measures	92
4.2.6 Attitudinal change	93
4.3 <i>Children's Participation: Examples from Practice</i>	96
4.3.1 Introduction	96
4.3.2 Participation in practice: education, welfare, health services	97
4.4 <i>Conclusion</i>	103

## **5. THE PROCESS AND PROGRESS OF A SPACE: METHOD AND METHODOLOGY 105**

<i>5.1 Introduction</i>	<i>105</i>
5.1.1 Organisation and structure	107
<i>5.2 The Main Study: Purpose, Methods and the Role of the Researcher</i>	<i>108</i>
5.2.1 Definition and research role	108
5.2.2 Methods	111
5.2.3 The research role or function and my positioning as researcher in relation to the researched.	112
5.2.4 Concluding comments	117
<i>5.3 Access and the Data Collection Process</i>	<i>118</i>
5.3.1 The Steering Group	118
5.3.2 Centre staff	119
5.3.3 The children	123
<i>5.4 : The Research, the Researched, Funding and Out-Of-School Policy</i>	<i>131</i>
5.4.1 Introduction	131
5.4.2 The changing policy scene, the research and the researched	132
5.4.3 Funding, the research, the researched and policy	133
5.4.4 Discussion	134

## **6. THE PROCESS AND PROGRESS OF A SPACE: CHILDREN AS PARTICIPANTS 137**

<i>6.1 Introduction</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>6.2 The Development and Running of a Pilot Programme: September - December 1997</i>	<i>140</i>
6.2.1 Introduction	140
6.2.2 Team development work which preceded the opening of the Centre in November 1997	141
6.2.3 Children as participants: early dilemmas and practices	142
6.2.4 How did staff resolve these dilemmas?	143

6.2.5 Developing a programme	145
6.2.6 Resolutions	147
6.2.7 The pilot in practice	149
<i>6.3 The Development of Centre Policies, Practices and Ethos: January-April 1998</i>	<i>150</i>
6.3.1 Introduction	150
6.3.2 Centre policy, practice and ethos development: children as participants	151
6.3.3 Resolutions	152
6.3.4 Who sets the agenda?	154
<i>6.4 May - December 1998</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>6.5 Summary and Key Themes</i>	<i>158</i>
<b>7. THE PROCESS AND PROGRESS OF A SPACE: COLLABORATIVE WORKING</b>	<b>161</b>
<i>7.1 Introduction</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>7.2 A Summary of Collaborative Work at a Space</i>	<i>162</i>
7.2.1 A word on terminology	162
7.2.2 The context for collaboration	163
7.2.3 Collaboration at A Space: a summary	165
<i>7.3 The Contributions of Key Agencies to the Work of a Space</i>	<i>169</i>
7.3.1 Welfare (including social, play and youth services)	169
7.3.2 Health	171
7.3.3 Education	173
<i>7.4 Discussion and Conclusions</i>	<i>176</i>
<b>8. CASE STUDIES: THREE ELEMENTS OF THE A SPACE PROGRAMME</b>	<b>179</b>
<i>8.1 Introduction</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>8.2 The Case Studies</i>	<i>180</i>
8.2.1 The 'Listening Ear' service	180
8.2.2 The peer mentoring service	187
8.2.3 The transition service	190

8.3 <i>Summary, Discussion/Conclusion</i>	195
8.3.1 Concluding comments	197
<b>9. A SERVICE FOR CHILDREN? THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A SPACE</b>	<b>199</b>
9.1 <i>Introduction</i>	199
9.2 <i>Children's participation (and multi-agency collaboration): Key themes arising from the A Space exemplar</i>	200
9.3 <i>Contextualising the Findings in Relation to Chapters 2-5 of the Thesis</i>	202
9.3.1 Introduction	202
9.3.2 Promoting factors	203
9.3.3 Constraining factors	205
9.4 <i>Concluding discussion</i>	208
<b>10. References</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>11. Appendix 1: Information on the research noticeboard</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>12. Appendix 2: The contribution of voluntary and statutory agencies to the A Space programme (July 1998)</b>	<b>236</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND THESIS PREVIEW

### 1.1 Introduction

From September 1996 I and Dr. Berry Mayall at the Social Science Research Unit (SSRU), Institute of Education, were funded by the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts to carry out a one-year feasibility study to investigate the possibility of setting up an innovative children's out-of-school centre<sup>1</sup> in inner London. In March 1997, following our proposal based on the feasibility study, the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts generously agreed to fund both the establishment and research of a centre in the London Borough of Hackney for an eighteen month period (September 1997-February 1999). This was an unusual - if not a unique - piece of research. It is rare for a research team to have the opportunity to study the development of a new project 'from scratch'. It is rarer still for the researchers to have pre-dated the project; shaping, as we did, its operational framework before it was established.

This PhD thesis is based on my research work during these two consecutive studies (September 1996-February 1999): which I call the 'The Children's Centre Studies'.<sup>2</sup> The primary focus is on the second study: termed 'the main study' but I draw also on the first: the 'feasibility study.'

### 1.2 Aims of the Thesis

The original idea for the new Children's Centre was underpinned by a basic principle - enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations 1989) - that children should have rights of participation in relation to issues and services that affect them.

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<sup>1</sup> By this I mean a centre which operates out-of-school hours. There is a complex terminology in 'out-of-school' provision. I will discuss this further in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Three SSRU Reports were written over the course of the studies. The feasibility study work is summarised in Hood and Mayall 1997. Hood and Mayall 1998 and Hood and Mayall 1999 are based on the main study.

The thesis uses the establishment and development of the Centre - known as 'A Space' - as an exemplar for analysis of conceptual, policy and practice issues in the implementation of children's participation rights. The thesis is concerned primarily, therefore, with issues relating to children's participation, but it adopts the view that participation is more likely to be promoted where agencies that work with children collaborate closely. The way in which children's participation is understood and operationalised within and across services affecting children is - as a consequence - a related area for study.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Thesis**

In setting out my objectives, I list the inter-secting concerns in the order in which they are first substantially dealt with in the thesis. Thus, my broad objectives, in writing the thesis, are as follows:

- To describe and analyse the conceptual significance of British<sup>3</sup> policy-making in recent years, with regard to children, with a particular focus on play, education, welfare and health services (Chapter 2);
- To build on this conceptual framework in order to study the conceptual and policy-significance of public policy in relation to out-of-school services (Chapter 3);
- To examine and discuss conceptual, policy and practice issues in the conceptualisation and implementation of children's participation rights (Chapter 4);

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the term British (here and elsewhere) may not always be entirely accurate as the thesis analyses the public policy context with regard to legislation which most commonly covers just England and Wales (e.g. the Children Act (England and Wales)). However, I have chosen to use this term because there are many parallels in public policy direction in children's services across Britain as a whole; and my main concern is to analyse and discuss the broad understandings of children and childhood which are reflected within this policy.

- To consider the interesting methodological issues raised by this unusual study of one out-of-school centre (Chapter 5);
- To describe and analyse the process and progress of the Centre, with a principal focus on the implementation of children's participation rights; given that a range of agencies provide the adult input to the programme and ethos (Chapter 6);
- To describe and analyse the contributions of key agencies (particularly education, welfare and health) to the Centre, and to explore the processes and progress of collaborative working, with particular emphasis on children as participants (Chapter 7);
- To explore participation issues in greater depth, and, in particular, to study key factors that facilitate or constrain implementation, through an analysis of three specific services which have been developed at the Centre (Chapter 8);
- To summarise and discuss the conceptual, methodological and policy-related issues in the field of children's participation and children's rights which are raised by the exemplar of A Space and by the thesis as a whole (Chapter 9).

This chapter provides a prelude for the thesis by offering a summary description of:

- my research role and consultancy received (1.4);
- the Children's Centre concept and its policy-relevance (1.5);
- the feasibility work and proposals and events leading to the establishment of the Children's Centre (1.6);
- the main study research design (1.7);
- the differing focus and intent of the Children's Centre Studies and the thesis (1.8);

- the thesis structure (1.9).

#### **1.4 Research Role and Consultancy**

I was responsible for carrying out all the fieldwork during both phases of the Children's Centre studies. During the feasibility study Berry Mayall acted as Project Director, offering supervision and support for my work. Berry and I were Co-Directors in the main study. I took prime responsibility for day-to-day planning and implementation of the study and Berry offered opportunities for consultation and discussion where this was needed. Berry has also acted as my PhD supervisor.

In the course of the work I also consulted with others who were able to provide expertise and advice in key areas. I talked with Professor Nigel Fielding (Sociology Department: University of Surrey) about some of the methodological dilemmas which were raised for me in moving from the feasibility to the main study. Professor Fielding is well known for his expertise in qualitative methods. I consulted also with Dr. Janet Harland from the Institute of Education on methodological issues. Dr. Harland teaches a module on evaluation methods and she assisted me greatly in defining the boundaries of the main study. Finally, I discussed some of the key issues relating to children's participation rights with Dr. Priscilla Alderson (SSRU). Dr. Alderson has written extensively in this area and is particularly known for her work on children's decisions in health care.

Berry Mayall and I have clearly collaborated in the design and progress of the studies which form the focus of this thesis. However, the thesis represents my own work. As I describe below (1.8), its focus and intent can be clearly distinguished from that of the research studies.

#### **1.5 The Children's Centre Concept and its Policy-Relevance**

At the outset of the feasibility study it was envisaged that a Children's Centre would be established in a socio-economically deprived area of inner London. This Centre



would be a form of 'out-of-school' provision and it would have the broad aim of improving children's social experiences and opportunities for learning. The Centre would be open to children aged 8-14 from a secondary school and from local feeder primaries and staffed by a team whose work would be supplemented by local people with relevant expertise and by professionals from health, welfare and education agencies. These staff would offer a variety of educational, recreational, health and welfare opportunities to children, and the services would be developed in response to children's expressed wishes and needs.

Unusually, this concept crosses traditional age boundaries between primary and secondary school. It also emphasises a universalist and non-stigmatising approach to service delivery: in this approach children are not 'targeted' according to adult-defined concepts of need, nor are they seen as 'problems'.

The two key elements which form the focus for this thesis are of particular policy-significance:

- The concept is underpinned by a basic principle - enshrined in the UNCRC - that children should have rights of participation.
- *The United Kingdom (UK) ratified the UN CRC in 1991. However, reporting in 1995, the UN Committee was critical of UK progress in implementing the convention (UNCRC 1995). As we approach the next committee report<sup>4</sup> the UK still has a long way to go in order to comply fully with the Convention's participation articles.*
- The service envisaged for the Children's Centre does not build on the remits of individual services, but crosses the boundaries of these services.

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<sup>4</sup> The UK government will be examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in early 2002 (personal communication, Priscilla Alderson).

- *Education, health and social services departments share the main responsibility for the provision of services to children in this country. Children's health, educational and social needs are complex, changing and closely related. However, children's services in the 1990s have been typically fragmented despite recent legislative and policy emphasis on closer collaboration.*

As I noted in my objectives, the proposed *combination of these elements* is important: fragmentation between agencies effectively serves to deny the existence of the 'whole child' whose expressed needs and wishes may change over time; and divisions between agencies that work with children may serve to deny the voice of the child as a participant in planning services which he or she will use. The Children's Centre concept introduces the possibility of children having flexible and easy access to integrated and holistic services which are developed in response to their expressed needs.

The concept is especially timely given the recent policy emphasis by the current government on primary prevention services, inter-agency collaboration and the development and expansion of out-of-school provision (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3).

## **1.6 The Feasibility Work and Proposals and the Establishment of a Children's Centre**

The feasibility study aimed to investigate whether it might be possible to set up a centre whose operation and ethos were informed by the original Children's Centre idea. It was envisaged that this would be a qualitative exploratory study involving the collection of data using a range of methods, including: document and policy analysis, informal discussions and consultations with individuals in a range of children's services, small group discussions with children in selected schools and self-completion questionnaires for children and their parents and carers.

I was involved in two phases of work prior to the proposal to fund the establishment and research of a Centre:

During the first phase (September-October 1996) my work included: investigating the current nature and extent of UK out-of-school provision; clarifying the national policy framework for such provision; studying a range of models of provision and identifying an area for the study.

The London Borough of Hackney was selected for further investigation for a number of reasons:

- The Borough rates highly on indicators of socio-economic deprivation;
- our initial idea was well received there;
- the Local Authority appeared to have an interest in and a commitment to developing both children's participation and multi-agency collaboration; and
- Hackney is reasonably accessible from the Social Science Research Unit.

From November 1996-March 1997 I focussed on: consultations with senior staff in Hackney's statutory sector; identification of the selected secondary and three feeder primary schools to participate in the study;<sup>5</sup> and discussions with teaching staff and with small groups of children in the selected schools.

This work formed the basis for the refinement of the original Children's Centre idea into a full framework within which a proposed new centre might operate. Berry Mayall and I drew on the views expressed by all in the consultation process (education and other agency staff, children) and on the original Children's Centre idea

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<sup>5</sup> We specified that we were interested in a co-educational state school where out-of-school activities were not highly developed. The selected secondary school was suggested by a senior member of staff in the Education, Learning and Leisure Department. The three primaries were selected on the basis that they were geographically close to the secondary and that they were key feeder schools.

to develop a proposed framework for a new centre. We set this framework out in 12 key features. We envisaged that the Centre would:

1. Be available to children aged 8-14 who attended one secondary school and three of its main feeder primaries;
2. cross traditional service boundaries by providing educational, recreational and health and welfare facilities and opportunities for children;
3. be universal and positive in its approach to children;
4. be complementary for children in offering them a wide range of services and opportunities;
5. be compensatory in working towards redress for social disadvantage;
6. serve the needs and wishes of children, and indirectly parents, through a process of responsive consultation;
7. be open after school, at weekends and in the holidays;
8. provide both a care service and an open door service;
9. charge for its services, but, through a simple means test, be accessible to all children;
10. be committed to multi-agency collaboration to provide the best possible services to children;
11. encourage self-esteem and community development by harnessing the skills of parents and other local people to provide some services;

12. draw on local expertise among staff of voluntary and statutory services to provide, through re-deployment, teaching, welfare and recreational services.

After the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts had agreed to fund the establishment and research of a centre (March 1997) a multi-agency Steering Group was formed to oversee the development and operation of the project. Membership<sup>6</sup> included two representatives from the Sainsbury Trusts, senior officers in Hackney Play and Youth services, the Borough Children's Plan Co-ordinator, the Centre Director, the Head teachers of the selected schools, two representatives from Hackney and City Health services and myself and Berry. The group was chaired<sup>7</sup> by a senior officer from Hackney Education, Learning and Leisure Department.

I was then involved in further feasibility work, as follows:

- Development work towards the establishment of the Centre including planning meetings, and steering groups;
- staff recruitment;
- negotiations regarding premises;
- exploration of further funding possibilities; and
- the collection of data by self-completion questionnaire from children in the participating schools (May 1997) and from their parents and carers (July 1997).

During the Summer of 1997 a selection panel <sup>8</sup> appointed four core staff to set up and run a Children's Centre: a Director, two project development workers and a (part-

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6 Membership of the Steering Group has changed over the course of the project. Changes are discussed, where relevant, in later chapters.

7 Chairing of the group has also changed.

8 The selection panel included myself, Berry, the Steering Group chair, the deputy head teacher of Kingsland School and a staff member from Hackney Personnel Department.

time)<sup>9</sup> administrator. These staff brought a wide range of experience to their new posts: including project management, community education, youth and play work, community work, art therapy and mental health work. It was agreed that the Centre running costs and staff salaries were to be managed by Hackney Council; and premises were secured in a self-contained annexe on Kingsland Secondary School site.

The four core staff took up their posts at the Children's Centre in September and October 1997. They named the Centre 'A Space' to reflect the provision of 'a space' which would be 'filled' by the ideas and activities of the children and young people collaborating with staff to develop a service. A Space opened with a pilot programme which ran from November-December 1997. It has operated a full service to three of the four selected schools<sup>10</sup> since January 1998, including after-school provision, a lunchtime drop-in (for secondary pupils only) and holiday and weekend sessions. The work of the core team has been complemented by a team of sessional staff, both paid workers and volunteers.

The project has been granted further funding from the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts (March 1999 - August 2000) and it has also secured funds from the London Borough of Hackney and a variety of other sources<sup>11</sup> which ensure its continuation beyond August 2000. The Steering Group has continued to meet regularly throughout the course of A Space's development.

In March 1999 the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts agreed funding for a further research study which focuses on the impact of A Space on the children who use it, on their parents and carers and on the participating schools. However, data from this study<sup>12</sup>, which I am directing, is not considered as part of this thesis.

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<sup>9</sup> The administrator's post is now full-time.

<sup>10</sup> During the Autumn of 1997 one of the three selected primaries withdrew from the project. Some of the staff at this school were concerned that participation in A Space might reduce the numbers of children using the schools own play scheme.

<sup>11</sup> These include funds from various charitable bodies and from government initiatives.

<sup>12</sup> 'The Impact of A Space' Suzanne Hood and Gill Poland (June 1999 - December 2000).

## 1.7 The Main Study Research Design

It was agreed that the research would focus on the development of the Children's Centre model in practice. It would consider how far the Centre developed in accordance with the 12 key features identified during the feasibility study; and what were the opportunities and constraints which emerged in the establishment and operation of the Centre service.

The study would address the broad question:

*What are the characteristics of the processes involved in the development and operation of this universalist service, which requires multi-agency participation and in which high value is placed on children as participants in the shaping of the service?*

There were four key sub-questions:

- a) How far and in what way do the various agencies which contribute to the Children's Centre share ideology, ethos and policies and, in the light of the extent or lack of congruence, how are practices shaped at the Centre?
- b) How far and in what ways do the agencies' remits and philosophies impact on the understandings developed at the Children's Centre of the meaning and value of children's participation?
- c) What are the processes by which children are actually involved in planning and developing the services at the Centre?
- d) What are the principal factors that affect the development of the Centre?

A range of research methods were to be used, including:

- informal discussions with children, parents and core and sessional staff (in groups and as individuals) on the process and progress of the Centre;
- questionnaires to cover users and non-users of the Centre, parents and school staff in order to consider usage, satisfaction, suggestions, problems, successes;
- observation of activities, use of space and time;
- attendance at staff meetings and Steering Group meetings;
- record-keeping work: work to ensure appropriate record-keeping by core staff, collation and analysis of the data;
- evaluation of the Centre's work according to the 12 key features originally set out;
- comparison in general and conceptual terms with other projects having similar elements;
- consideration of the generalisability of findings.

### **1.8 Differences between the Children's Centre Studies and the Thesis**

Like the main study the thesis is concerned with exploring the progress and process of A Space. However, the thesis uses the development of A Space (including some elements of the feasibility phase) as an exemplar for a broad and wide-ranging analysis of conceptual, policy and practice issues relating to the implementation of children's participation rights. Its remit is considerably wider.



The key differences between the Children's Centre Studies and the thesis are as follows:

- The main study addresses specific research questions and these are contextualised in theoretical and policy-oriented literature reviews; the thesis is centrally concerned with issues in the implementation of children's participation.
- The main study focuses on the progress and process of one centre - A Space; the thesis is concerned with out-of-school services more generally, and it uses A Space as an example.
- The main study is concerned with analysing the progress and process of A Space in line with 12 key features; the thesis focuses primarily on the implementation of children's participation and this is considered in relation to the other key features, particularly multi-agency collaboration.
- During the Children's Centre Studies I was concerned with the methods as part of the process of *doing the research*; the thesis explores the methodological issues arising from the Studies from a time distance.
- During the Children's Centre Studies I collected a considerable amount of data from children, parents and school and centre staff. This data was carefully analysed and written up in a number of research reports. The thesis draws on and develops the material in these reports (principally in Chapters 6,7, and 8). However, unlike the reports, the thesis does not include direct quotations from research participants (see Chapter 6: 6.1 for further discussion and justification).

## 1.9 Thesis Preview

The thesis has nine chapters.

### *Chapter 1* The Introduction

*Chapter 2* introduces a conceptual framework for the thesis. I begin the Chapter by considering children's place and status on the British<sup>13</sup> public policy agenda; and I go on to explore the varied emphases given to children's participation within and across play, educational, health and welfare services.

*Chapter 3* builds on this conceptual framework in a consideration of public policy in relation to out-of-school services. I suggest that this is a contested area in which differing understandings of children and childhood underlie recent policy developments. Using this analysis of contemporary policy I outline the significance of the Children's Centre model.

*Chapter 4* focuses on conceptual, policy and practice issues in the conceptualisation and implementation of children's participation rights. I draw on examples of education, welfare and health service practice-based initiatives which have sought to promote children's participation in order to suggest some of the factors which might promote or impede this process.

*Chapter 5* is concerned with method and methodology. I discuss the research design and the research process in relation to the Children's Centre Studies, though primarily in relation to the main study. Reflecting the substantive concerns of the thesis, I focus

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<sup>13</sup> See note 3.

particularly on methodological issues raised by my attempt to develop participative and collaborative methods.

In *Chapter 6* I summarise the process and progress of A Space from the Summer 1997 (shortly before the beginning of the main study) to the end of December 1998 (when I stopped collecting data). The summary has a principal focus on the implementation of children's participation rights.

In *Chapter 7* I describe and analyse the contributions of education, welfare and health services to the Centre, and I explore the processes and progress of collaborative working, with particular emphasis on children as participants.

*Chapter 8* explores participation issues in greater depth, and particularly the key factors that facilitate or constrain implementation, using 'case studies' of three specific services which have been developed at the Centre: a 'Listening Ear' service, a peer mentoring service and transition work.

In *Chapter 9* I summarise and discuss the conceptual, methodological and policy-related issues in the field of children's participation and children's rights which are raised by the exemplar of A Space and by the thesis as a whole.

## 2. CHILDREN'S STATUS IN BRITISH PUBLIC POLICY AGENDAS

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I aim to provide an analysis of recent British<sup>14</sup> public policy-making with regard to children. I start from the premise that ideas, understandings and goals about children and childhood underlie all such public policy (as well as other agendas such as economic competitiveness) and that these understandings are socially constructed and are the products of both time and place. I also assume that children and childhood are relational categories. It is the relations between children and adults and childhood and adulthood that are at issue in policy and practice.

Whilst my analysis will be primarily concerned with children's service planning in 1990s Britain it will be contextualised both historically and by comparison with other (mostly European) countries. It will have as its particular focus two discrete but related developments and their relationship to the shaping of British public policy:

- the increasing influence of the children's rights movement, and more particularly the influence of the concept of children's participation;
- the increasing emphasis on inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration within and between children's services since the 1980s.

The chapter is in three sections.

In the first section (2.2) I consider children's place and status on the public policy agenda. I examine the key influences of developmentalism and welfarism on this

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<sup>14</sup> See footnote 3 (Chapter 1 (1.3))

agenda and the recent challenges to these approaches which have been offered by the children's rights movement and those working within the sociology of childhood.

In the second section (2.3) I focus more closely on policy-making for children, looking at the themes of children's participation and inter-departmental collaboration in relation to children's legislation and services broadly.

And in the third section (2.4) I offer a historical account of public policy development with regards to children in: play, education, welfare and health services. My account focuses on the understandings of children and childhood which have informed policy in these service areas and I discuss the varied emphasis given to children's participation within and across these services.

It is my intention that this material will form a broad conceptual context for Chapter 3 which has a narrower focus on out-of-school policy and provision.

## **2.2 Setting the Scene: Children and the Public Policy Agenda**

### ***2.2.1 Introduction: understandings and ideas about children and childhood***

Whilst there has been considerable criticism of Aries' (1962) thesis that childhood did not exist at all before the fifteenth century (e.g. see Wilson 1980; Pollock 1983), historians of childhood would be unlikely to dispute his proposition that *ideas about childhood* change with time: that childhood is both 'constructed' and 'reconstructed'. The social historian Harry Hendrick (1994) traces the visions of the child underlying the lives of the children who populated Britain from the 'Romantic Child' of the pre-eighteenth century to the 'Family Child' and the 'Public Child' of the post-second World War years. And Hendrick notes that:

The numerous perceptions of childhood which have been produced over the last two hundred years or so, can only be fully comprehended within the context of how different generations (and, no less significant, social classes) responded to the social, economic, religious and political challenges of their respective eras. (1994:19)

The cultural construction of these ideas can be illustrated using contrasting examples of media reaction to the death in Britain in 1993 of James Bulger and the death in Norway in 1994 of a five-year-old child. Both were killed by other young children. Whereas the British media emphasised themes of individual responsibility and deliberate intent in their coverage of the story, the Norwegian press spoke of pity, concern, community responsibility and the need to seek understanding for what had happened (see Franklin and Petley 1996 for discussion). Such differing images of children in this exceptional context have some parallels with ideas of children as 'victim' and as 'threat' (Hendrick 1994). The Norwegian child who kills was constructed as 'a victim of circumstance' - his behaviour a result of complex social and political processes. The two British ten-year olds are, on the other hand, framed as 'evil monsters' and as knowing perpetrators of an act for which they must be punished (see also Cavadino 1996 for discussion on children who kill and the response of the juvenile justice systems in a range of European countries). These contrasting visions of children and childhood can be located in many aspects of public policy-making both in this country and in Western Europe. And understandings of children as 'victims' on the one hand and as 'threats' on the other will be an important and recurrent theme in the critique of public policy set out in this thesis.

### ***2.2.2 The influence of developmentalism and welfarism***

The portrayal of children within the public policy discourse of 1990s Britain has been heavily influenced by both 'developmentalism' and 'welfarism' despite some strong theoretical challenges (see 2.2.3 below).

#### ***2.2.2.1 Developmentalism***

Hendrick (1994) traces the main impetus for the growth of developmentalism to the 1880s when the 'psycho-medical child' began to emerge during a period of immense adult preoccupation with the physical and mental conditions of school children. The discipline of child psychology - with its derivations in this period - aimed for a description of a decontextualised universal child who typically passes through a

sequence of ordered developmental stages in his or her journey from childhood to adulthood. A further basic concept informing developmentalism is the popular idea of 'socialisation':

the process by which young people acquire various patterns of beliefs and behaviours (from Gunter and Furnham (1998:13)

And Jenks describes and discusses the immense influence on the social sciences in the area of socialisation theory of Parsons and Piaget who together position children as socialisation projects on their way towards competence (1996:29).

Writing in 1994, Mayall notes that the traditions of interactionism and social constructionism have shifted arguments forward. For example, in recent years developmental psychology has attempted to move away from universalism by looking at the child's development in terms of his or her interaction with the social context. However, arguably, it still remains the case that:

The notion that children are best understood as incompetent vulnerable beings progressing with adult help through stages needed to turn them into mature adults, has socially recognised status, both theoretically and as enlisted in policies and practices affecting children's lives. (1994:3-4)

#### *2.2.2.2 Welfarism*

Welfarism predates developmentalism. Adult concerns about the welfare of children have been based for a long time - and at least as far back as the mid-late nineteenth century - on notions of children as inherently vulnerable owing to their (relative) physical weakness, lack of knowledge and experience (eg see Cunningham 1991). Within welfarist thinking this lack of knowledge and experience renders children less competent than adults - and less able, therefore, to make informed decisions concerning their own lives. If children are viewed as vulnerable it follows in turn that they require protection from the risks which may be posed to them. There is a certain compelling logic to such an argument: undoubtedly children require adult care and protection in order to survive and thrive (particularly very young children). However, as Engelbert (1994) observes, protection is often accompanied by social exclusion of

one form or another and it can become a form of 'unwarranted dominance' when it effectively serves to protect adults from 'disturbances from the presence of children'.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.2.3 *Developmentalism, welfarism and research*

The traditions of research which accompany developmentalism tend to have largely positivist goals. Studies document children's journeys towards adulthood, using adult-devised measurements to assess whether and how these journeys are successfully accomplished. Research on children's play provides a useful example of this kind of approach. Here, developmental psychology has assumed that play exists as a preparation for adult life (rather than perhaps as an end in itself or as an important cultural activity, see Huizinga 1976); and studies have focused mainly on the role of play in the development of cognitive and social skills (see also 2.4.1 below: play).

Welfarist research emphasises the links between knowledge, behaviour and individual responsibility. It is unsurprising that such research has usually been done 'on' children rather than 'for' and 'with' them and that children's views and experiences have remained largely absent. As Oakley observes:

The idea that children can constitute meaningful research data conflicts with adultist views of children as less than competent to make sense of the adult world. (1994:32)

Until the late 1980s at least, children have also been largely absent from research at the 'macro' level of social accounting:

Research about socialization and other types of individual or biographic childhood studies are abundant, but as soon as the dynamics of individual development is replaced by childhood as a factor of societal dynamics, systemic approaches are generally lacking. (Qvortrup 1990:81)

Thus, children have frequently been excluded from public statistics and subsumed within data which uses 'the family' or 'the household' as the unit of analysis. As

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<sup>15</sup> A good example of this is the present government's Crime and Disorder Act (1998) which sets out a series of steps which can be taken by Local Authorities to institute local child curfew schemes (see Drakeford and Butler (1998) for discussion).



Qvortrup (1990) notes the limited statistical data available on children until quite recently have usually concentrated on one of three areas: their production (fertility rates etc), expenses invested in them, or their failure to meet adult requirements. None of these tell us much directly about children's experiences. Further, the absence of children from social accounting can be understood more broadly as a reflection of their status as minors in society, a status which is largely confirmed within developmentalist and welfarist thinking.

### ***2.2.3 Challenges to welfarism and developmentalism: children as a minority social group***

As I have suggested (in 2.2.2.2 above), welfarism relies heavily on the idea of children's inherent vulnerability. However, there is a crucial distinction between children's *inherent vulnerability* and their *structural vulnerability*. As Gerison Lansdown argues:

There is a tendency to rely too heavily on a presumption of children's biological and psychological vulnerability in developing our law, policy and practice, and insufficient focus on the extent to which their lack of civil status *creates* that vulnerability. (my emphasis) (1994:42)

Lansdown's analysis is significant because implicit in her distinction between the two forms of vulnerability is the argument that children's lives are not solely determined by their inherent biological and psychological immaturity, but rather that children constitute a minority social group whose position may be bettered through processes of social and political change.

The idea that children are a minority social group has informed the extensive campaigning work of the children's rights movement. It has also formed an important premise in some of the recent work in the 1980s and 1990s within a new and developing sociology of childhood (eg Sgritta 1993; Qvortrup 1990).<sup>16</sup> Key

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<sup>16</sup> However, some writers within the new sociology of childhood disagree, suggesting that there are several models for conceptualising childhood (e.g. see James, Jenks and Prout 1998).

assumptions of this approach are: that children's interests are not necessarily harmonious with those of adults (for example in the home and in the school) and that social policies and forces will have specific effects on children and childhood. For example, in recent decades children's lives and social positions have been affected by increasing poverty (e.g. see Kumar 1993; Bradshaw 1990; Wilkinson 1994), family insecurity and instability (see Haskey 1995) and women's greater role in the workforce (see Institute for Public Policy Research 1993).

#### 2.2.3.1 *Children's rights, the sociology of childhood and research*

Driven by the influences of the children's rights movement and work within the sociology of childhood there is a growing body of research which has sought at the micro level to understand children's experiences using children's own accounts; and at the macro level of social accounting children are increasingly given separate consideration within statistics (see Qvortrup 1990 for discussion). Notable examples of these developments include 'Childhood as a Social Phenomenon' (1987-92) - a project in which 16 (mainly European) countries adopted a macro approach to the status of childhood, looking at: the sociography of childhood, children's activities, the legal status of children and distributive justice within families and across generations (see also Qvortrup 1991; 1993); and the recent Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) programme in the UK (1996-2000): 'Children 5-16: Growing into the 21st Century' which emphasised children as social actors.

These developments suggest the possibility of different purposes and possibilities for social research with children. Increased knowledge and understanding of children's experiences both at the micro and the macro level may be used towards campaigning for improvements in their present-day lives (as opposed to just ensuring their adequate preparation for adulthood). Further, where children are constructed as 'social actors' and as 'active subjects' rather than as the 'objects' of research, they themselves can play a part in this process by contributing to research agendas (e.g. see Morrow and Richards 1996) and by carrying out their own research (e.g. see Kefyalew 1996; Alderson 2000a).

## 2.3 Children and Policy Making in 1990s Britain

### 2.3.1 *Inter-departmental collaboration and children's rights*

The main responsibilities for the provision of services to children in this country are shared by four central government Departments: Health; Education and Employment; Social Services and Social Security; and Culture, Media and Sport (and policies made in other departments also impact directly on children). Ideas about children and childhood inform the development and implementation of policies within each of these four Departments. However, the extent and degree of collaboration *between* these Departments also reflects understandings of childhood and has effects on the quality of children's lives.

Children's health, educational, recreational and social needs are complex, changing and closely related - yet children's services in the 1990s have been typically fragmented and compartmentalised, despite an increasing emphasis in government rhetoric and legislation on the importance of inter-departmental collaboration and despite some signs of change under the current Labour administration.<sup>17</sup> Divisions both *between* and *within* agencies effectively serve to deny the existence of the 'whole child' (see Franklin 1995; Sutton 1997; Moss and Petrie 1999 for discussion) and such divisions may have serious implications for the quality of children's lives when policies made by one department fail to complement and sometimes even openly contradict policies made by another.<sup>18</sup> Importantly, they also serve to deny the voice of the child *as a participant* in planning the services which he or she will use.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, the present Labour government has set up a social exclusion unit within the cabinet which has a cross-departmental approach. And - at a more local level - the government's Sure Start initiative for young children provides a good example of a programme which emphasises inter-agency collaboration.

<sup>18</sup> For example, whilst the Children Act (1989) includes measures which have been commonly understood to promote children's rights, the Housing Act (1996) undermines these by generating adverse conditions for care leavers; and other policies prompt increases in child poverty (see Franklin and Parton 1996:3).

The UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991 (see also Chapter 1:1.5) and the Children's Rights Development Unit (CRDU) was set up in March 1992 to work towards the fullest possible implementation of the Convention in this country. When examining the UK's progress on implementation in 1995 the UN Committee proposed that Britain should introduce an independent monitoring body, that greater consideration should be given to the best interests of the child and that there should be more co-ordination between government Departments (see Lansdown 1988b:216). Revised guidelines for state party reports provided by the UN Committee in 1996 required all governments to report on existing or planned mechanisms 'for co-ordinating plans relevant to children' (quoted in Ruxton 1998:29).

However, progress in this country with the implementation of the Convention and, more specifically, with the introduction of mechanisms for inter-departmental collaboration, has been slow, particularly in comparison to that of other countries. For example, Norway, Israel, New Zealand and Costa Rica have established posts which are similar to that of a Children's Rights Commissioner; and Denmark has an Inter-Ministerial Committee on children which acts as a coherent planning body (see Franklin 1995; Ruxton 1998 for comparative perspectives). Though there have been some recent signs of progress - such as the establishment in 2000 of the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London,<sup>19</sup> the UK government has failed to appoint a Minister for Children with responsibility for drawing up a government strategy for UK children (as recommended by Hodgkin and Newell 1996). Furthermore, as Cloke (1995) and Ruxton (1998) note, children's rights issues have *themselves been compartmentalised* into a 'health and welfare' pigeon-hole within the policy-making process. It is the Department of Health which has co-ordinated the government report to the UN on the UK implementation of the Convention - and significant areas of children's lives in the domain of other Departments with an interest in children (e.g. housing, income support, leisure, education, employment, the environment) have not received a rights perspective.

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<sup>19</sup> And this happened nearly a decade after Rosenbaum and Newell proposed that a Children's Rights Commissioner should be appointed for London (see Rosenbaum and Newell 1991).

It is of particular interest, also, that whilst there is a large and expanding literature on issues in collaborative working within and across health, welfare and education services (e.g. see Leathard 1994; Sutton 1995; Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991; and government publications such as 'Working Together Under the Children Act (England and Wales)1989' (GB Home Office. D of H, DES, Welsh Office 1991) the fragmentation of children into separate service agendas is largely mirrored and endorsed in the literature which examines issues of children's rights and children's participation (see 2.4 below). Thus, whilst there are a number of guides to the implementation of the Convention (see for example, Ruxton 1998; Hodgkin and Newell 1998; Association of Metropolitan Authorities/Children's Rights Office 1995) there appear to be only a few examples of policy, research or practice-oriented studies of children's participation which cross the service divides.<sup>20</sup> This absence of cross-service debate poses particular conceptual and practical challenges for the researcher who aims to develop theory and policy-debate in this area and for the practitioner who aims to work participatively with children within a multi-agency approach. This thesis can lay claim to some originality in its adoption of *a cross-service approach*. Essentially, my work is concerned with ideas of children as participants in welfare, education, health and (more briefly) in play services (and I recognise, of course, that the practical need to place boundaries on this extensive focus may lay my work open to similar criticisms of fragmentation to those just discussed).

### ***2.3.2 Children's rights and participation.***

The idea of children's rights is complex and - for some - it is also emotive. Verhellen (1993) notes that the idea that children should have rights of their own - by virtue of

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<sup>20</sup> Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers (1998) include a useful discussion of the different discourses regarding children in welfare and education services. A few texts address the legal framework for children's participation in different contexts, for example, Sinclair (1996) Sutton (1997) and Franklin (1995) cover the legal framework in relation to social services and education. And a brief article by Davie (1993) reviews recent developments in the social, legal, medical and educational fields.

their status as human beings - has become broadly accepted. However, he goes on to observe that:

In contrast an issue that is still under discussion today is the question whether or not children are able, and hence entitled, to exercise these rights independently. (1993:59)

As Franklin and Franklin (1996) discuss there may be many interpretations of a term which combines 'children' - where children's childhoods are themselves socially constructed, and 'rights' - which carries notions of basic human rights to life and health as well as more radical claims for the rights to vote, work and own property. The language of these more radical rights often carries with it images of conflict or confrontation: an idea that rights *to something* means rights to be *taken away from* someone else.

What do we mean, therefore, by children's rights? To a great degree, the debates which have taken place amongst both proponents and critics around the precise meaning of the terminology are themselves embedded in differing traditions and understandings. The 54 articles of the UN CRC (1989) have commonly been grouped into three types of rights (e.g. by Lansdown 1994): the rights to provision, protection and participation (often referred to as the three Ps).<sup>21</sup> Provision rights have been defined as 'the right to possess, receive or have access to certain resources and services; the distribution of resources between the child and adult populations' (and these include the rights to adequate housing, health care and freedom from poverty); and protection rights as 'the right to parental and professional care; the right to be shielded from certain acts and practices' (including for example, protection from physical and sexual abuse and from neglect). Participation rights include 'the right to do things, express oneself and have an effective voice, both individually and collectively' (Bardy, Heilio, Lauronen and Wintersberger 1993:12).

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<sup>21</sup> However, Sgritta (1993) argues for the replacement of the three-fold categorisation with a concept of 'citizenship'. Sgritta maintains that the use of this concept will be more useful as it allows for more ready comparisons between different social groups (i.e. children viz. adults).

Participation rights are enshrined in Articles 12, 13 and 31 of the Convention:

The right of 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 (12)

For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of natural law (12)

The right to freedom of expression (including) freedom to seek, review and impart information and ideas of all kinds through any other media of the child's choice (13)

The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and cultural life and the arts (31)

Broadly speaking, understandings about rights to provision and protection can be linked to a welfarist tradition (where children are seen as less powerful and less competent than adults and in need of protection) and understandings about participation to a more libertarian tradition (where children are seen as oppressed and constrained and hence needing more opportunities for self-determination), although there are important links between the two (see 2.3.3.5 and 2.4.3 below). Importantly enabling children to participate can be understood as hindered by prevailing views that children are not competent to do so - and these views are supported within both the welfarist and the developmental traditions (see 2.2.2 above).

Of particular interest here, however, are the disparate understandings about children's rights held within the educational, social and welfare domains and the relationship between these prevalent understandings, the progress and history of the developing children's rights movement and government policy-making in relation to children. In Britain, between 1970 and 1990, we see a shifting emphasis both *within* and *between* the different domains (see Franklin and Franklin 1996; Wagg 1996 for discussion). Thus, during the 1970s claims for children's libertarian rights were made within education and within welfare (and often by children themselves); this was followed by an emphasis on protective rights within the welfare and social arenas in the 1980s

(along with the defeat of the Labour government, the International Year of the Child, growing concern on the left about child poverty and an increasing pre-occupation on the right with child abuse). In the late 1980s there was a renewed emphasis on libertarian participation rights amongst practitioners and policy-makers in the welfare and social spheres as it was increasingly perceived that children needed to be empowered in order to be protected from abuse<sup>22</sup> (see Franklin and Franklin 1996). However, there was no return to libertarian rights for children within education. In Britain today there are significant legislative inconsistencies between health, education and social services regarding the rights of the child. These inconsistencies are explored further in 2.3.3 and 2.4 below.

### *2.3.3 Children's Services: the social policy context*

Public policy-making for children is directly linked also to a broad social policy context where economic, political, philosophical and historical influences come into play. The brief overview of social policy from 1945-1990 which I provide below aims to link developments in children's service policies with this broader context. This is followed in 2.4 with a more detailed exploration of understandings of children and childhood within play (briefly), education, health and welfare services.

#### *2.3.3.1 The universalist consensus (1945 until the early 1970s)*

The forming of the Welfare State in post-war Britain marked the beginning of a period of optimism about the capacity of the State to cater for the needs of all its citizens. Two key pieces of legislation reflected this universalist ideal. The National Health Service Act (1946) introduced universal and free health care and under the Education Act (1944) formal education became free and compulsory for all children from the age of five to the age of fifteen.<sup>23</sup> The universalist ideal remained a popular

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'empowered' has become increasingly fashionable in health and welfare discourses. Those who see children as constituting a minority social group would question whether children can ever be empowered since structurally they lack power.

<sup>23</sup> The introduction of compulsory schooling in this country has a complex history (Cunningham 1991 gives details of this).



basis throughout the prosperous 1950s and 1960s for the provision of health and education. Davies and Challis (1986) provide a useful description of this approach:

The universalist critique has focussed on access to, and the non-stigmatising use by, a wide range of citizens; on the provision of services responsive to what seems to the consumer to be attractive and so on the contribution of social policy to reinforcing social integration. (1986:73)

### *2.3.3.2 Collapse of the universalist consensus: and 'welfare pluralism' (1970s onwards)*

A large social policy literature (e.g. Mishra 1984; Munday 1989; Johnson 1987) debates the collapse of the post-war universalist consensus in what has been termed 'the crisis of the Welfare State'. In summary, the crisis was linked with economic difficulties experienced by Western countries following the 1973 oil price rise and with demographic changes<sup>24</sup> which contributed to escalating public spending in Britain. During the early 1970s both Labour and Conservative politicians were in agreement that state spending should be reduced and in Conservative politics there was also a commonly held belief that the Welfare State should be the target of spending cuts. The late 1970s and the 1980s witnessed the introduction of 'welfare pluralism' within Britain and other Western countries - a policy which indicated a widening role for a range of non-statutory service providers and a lessening role for the State. This policy was linked to significant legislative and organisational changes in the provision of health and welfare services.

### *2.3.3.3 Selectivism replaces universalism (1980s onwards)*

Welfare pluralism reflects a selectivist (as opposed to a universalist) approach:

It is the selectivist critique of social policy which has focussed on the efficient use of resources to attain ends which are defined narrowly and clearly, on achieving benefits for those for whom the particular intervention is most socially cost-effective, on the allocation of resources in conditions of assumed scarcity. (Davies and Challis 1986:73)

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<sup>24</sup> Most notably, a significant increase in the numbers of elderly people.

During the 1980s the main statutory services working with children (education, health and social services) provided an increasingly selective service in response to resource constraints and to government promotion of welfare pluralism. The work of teachers and social workers also came under increasing scrutiny in the wider context of government hostility to state bureaucracies and the influence of 'New Right' thinking. (For example, Brewer and Lait (1980) were particularly critical of what they saw as social workers' tendency to professional aggrandisement). The language of the market-place was increasingly introduced into public service management and staff were expected to be more readily accountable for their work both to their managers and to the 'consumers' of services. In a tight economic climate where the resources of statutory agencies were regarded increasingly as limited, it was argued that services had to be carefully prioritised on the basis of need and - as a result - collaborative work between these agencies was more in evidence in work with 'high priority' groups of children (for example those with a disability, children who offend, children on the child protection register) than in the field of family support/early preventive services (see Sutton 1997). This prioritising of collaborative effort arguably mirrored the resource prioritising which was implicit in important legislation of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

#### *2.3.3.4 Legislation*

Three key Acts relevant to children's well-being were introduced in this period of major upheaval for public services, the Education Reform Act (1988), the Children Act (England and Wales) (1989) and the NHS and Community Care Act (1990). These Acts provide a legislative framework for present-day education, welfare and health services. The first two are particularly important to an analysis of children's services. The NHS and Community Care Act is concerned also with the social care of the elderly, the mentally ill and adults with a disability. However, I refer to it here because it belongs to a similar tradition and because there is a body of literature (e.g. Woodruffe and Kurtz 1989) which suggests that its provisions may have significant negative implications for children's health services (see 2.4.4 below: health).

The Education Reform Act responded to prevailing government concerns about 'malign' influences within the education system (see Hillgate Group 1986). The main

provisions of the Act were: the introduction of a national curriculum of ten compulsory subjects, including three core subjects; the provision for state schools to 'opt out' of Local Education Authority (LEA) control and be maintained by direct government grant; a new right for schools to admit (and to reject) pupils as they saw fit; and the introduction of regular testing for children. Jeffs (1995:26) notes that whilst the Thatcher government justified the reforms as directed at countering falling standards, reducing ill-discipline and extending parental choice through the injection of an enterprise culture into education, there was a covert agenda which denied locally elected representatives the capacity to shape policy, weakened the trade unions and neutralised the influence of progressive educationalists.

Winter and Connolly (1996) describe the key factors underlying the emergence of the Children Act (England and Wales) 1989 as: the need to draw together child care and family law in a coherent form; the growing concern about the competence and the accountability of social workers which was fuelled by critical child abuse enquiries during the 1980s; and a growing rights discourse in which families (parents and sometimes children: see 2.4.3.3 below) were viewed as being subject to unnecessary and harmful State intervention. The provisions of the Act have a dual focus on the protection of children who are 'at risk' and on the support and strengthening of the family with the use of family support services. The background to the Act has been usefully summarised by Fox-Harding:

Concerns about the child care aspects of the state doing too much, too coercively, and about them doing too little, too ineffectually, resulted in a wish for legislation and policy to proceed in two directions at once - both towards better protection of the child and better protection of the parents. (1991:230)

Inter-agency co-operation is promoted under Section 27 of the Children Act (1989). This requires any local authority, local education authority, local housing authority, health authority or any NHS Trust to comply with requests for help from local authorities in delivering services to children in need, provided the request is compatible with their statutory duties and does not prejudice the discharge of any of their functions. The Act also encourages the development of non-statutory services.

Under Section 17(5) local authorities are required to facilitate the provision of services by voluntary organisations and others.

#### *2.3.3.5 'Selective' legislation: Inter-departmental collaboration and children's participation*

There are some interesting and important inconsistencies both within and between this legislation. In summary, the provisions of the Education Reform Act effectively serve to limit children's participation in planning, organising, choosing and determining school life and to curtail the scope of schools to work collaboratively with other agencies. The Children Act (1989) 'straddles the divide' between protectionist and participatory rights (see Franklin and Franklin 1996). In contrast to educational legislation it goes some way towards promoting children's participation and it also emphasises inter-departmental collaboration. Within health legislation there is no obligation to listen to children or to take account of their views. However, recent practice and study guides do emphasise the importance of inter-agency collaboration within child health services (Hogg 1996; NHS Executive 1996; Brotchie forthcoming).

### **2.4 Children as Participants: Understandings of Children and Childhood in Play, Education, Welfare and Health Services**

#### *2.4.1 Play*

Mayall (1996) observes that play has an important role in children's own accounts and that adults play no part in children's definitions of play. And she notes that children's definitions of play, as a separate activity outside the demands of ordinary life, accords with those of theorists such as Huizinga (1976).

In Britain in the 1990s an increasingly vocal adult play lobby has argued the case that children have a *right* to play and that this right should not be sacrificed to adults' ideas that children could be, or perhaps should be, engaged in other activities. The

right of children to participate in 'play and recreational activities' is recognised in the UNCRC (Article 31). Writing about this, Adrian Voce observes that:

Children's play is defined by the UN as a human right because it is about freedom. When children are playing they are exercising their freedom of choice, freedom of movement and freedom of association. (Voce 1998:8)

The suggestion here is that in taking up their rights to play children are actively participating in deciding what they wish to do with their time - and that what matters to them is doing 'what comes naturally' to them in the here and now, as opposed to 'fitting in' with relatively adult-defined ideas about what they should be doing.

Voce's comments are interesting in a discussion of children's participation because, to a large degree, they reflect a dominant understanding, dating back as far as Rousseau and the Romantic movement, that play is a healthy, positive and natural activity, important in its own right, and what 'l'enfant sauvage' would opt to do. This understanding is widespread today - indeed, 'play', 'freedom' and 'innocence' are customarily associated - by adults at least - with children and childhood.

Analysis of the history of play in this country *since* Rousseau suggests, however, that if children do indeed choose to take part in play as a 'natural' activity then that activity has not been broadly understood as an end in itself: play must have a 'purpose' (e.g. see Matterson 1969 {1965}). Cohen (1993) notes the important influence of Victorian social values on the development of this idea. The Victorians introduced a range of legislation which gave children new freedoms from abuse and exploitation (see also 2.4.3 (welfare) below). However, play tended to be equated with leisure and opposed to the valued activity of 'work': thus play activity had somehow to be 'justified'. Developmental psychology research from the 1870s onwards was imbued with an emphasis on purpose, seeking primarily to discover the cognitive and emotional value of play. Within this framework of understanding play assists in the child's development: indeed it plays a fundamental part in the child's progressions from one developmental stage to the next (e.g. see Piaget 1952). Cohen's useful history (1993) discusses also the work of educationalists (e.g. Pestalozzi, Montessori and Froebel)

who emphasised the use of play in training children to develop cognitive and social skills; and psychoanalysts (e.g. Isaacs, Klein and Erikson) whose work suggested that play offered a technique for individual therapy.

If we turn now to discussion of the thinking behind the development of *play services* some very interesting and complex dilemmas are raised in relation to children's participation. The expansion of playground facilities early in this century was linked to the Victorian understanding that such provision might have a moral and a social purpose - it could help 'mould' children into good citizens (see 2.4.2 below: education). And the adventure playground movement which began in Copenhagen in the 1940s and which emphasises free self-directed play was premised upon a belief in the therapeutic value of such play for 'difficult' children.

Thus, the discourse of the contemporary play workers who lobby for the creation of safe play spaces where children can play freely but with easy access to adults contains an implicit tension between *the Romantic view of the natural child* which it upholds and the *post-Rousseau pattern of service development* which has been premised on the idea that play, however 'free', serves a developmental purpose. Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has recently pledged his support to the play lobby and its cause. However, he has also stated that:

Research should be conducted to establish the *effectiveness* of play. (my emphasis) (Smith 1998)

This view has made play workers come face-to-face with some of the tensions I introduce here as they attempt to define appropriate and acceptable 'outcomes' for play.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See for example, 'Play Today' Issue 10, November 1998:1.

### 2.4.2 Education

Schooling is part of the condition of 'modern childhood.' This condition has been associated with a set of historical processes which severed children from the economic mainstream during the late 19th century (e.g. see Hurt 1979). Concerns at this time about children as both threats and victims led to their segregation within the nuclear family and in schools (see Hendrick 1990; Dobash and Dobash 1986). Schools, when analysed within this context, are adult-regulated institutions with a protective function. They also act as preventive agents of socialisation, aiming to ensure the cohesive social and moral fabric of society.

Furstenberg (1992:29-42) questions, perhaps rightly, whether children were actually 'freer' in pre-Industrial (and pre-modern) society, arguing that whilst they may have been more socially 'useful' this does not of itself imply that childhood was less regulated by adult institutions. However, the introduction of universal compulsory schooling (see also 2.3.3.1 above) was I think, highly significant, because it effectively granted to schools the 'rights' to impose their definitions of children and childhood on pupils and parents;<sup>26</sup> a shift which Wald describes as 'a form of coercion that would be unconstitutional if attempted with adults' (in Franklin and Franklin 1996:100). Teachers in schools are 'in loco parentis' and children are required to spend a considerable proportion of their waking time in the school environment. As a result education must play a particularly important part within any contemporary analysis of (Western) childhood:

Compulsory education is one of the defining characteristics of modern childhood; to a degree, therefore, any politics of schooling is also a politics of childhood, with inevitable implications for the lives that children lead and for the way that childhood itself is understood. (Wagg 1996:8)

In contemporary Britain education and educational policy have rated highly on the political agenda: the main political parties have given precedence to education in their manifestos and much media time and space has been devoted to educational issues.

Within this discourse considerable emphasis has been given to raising school achievement; and debates about numbers of children in the classroom, classroom behaviour and traditional versus more 'progressive' teaching methods - have all linked into and ultimately been organised around an understanding of education as a means to academic qualifications and, in turn, to the best possible employment prospects.

Policies and practices around home-school relations have also been underpinned by this focus on educational achievement, and children as individuals or as collective participants have been largely absent from the prevalent home-school orthodoxy with its focus on parents and teachers (see Edwards and Davies 1997). Children are notably the 'objects' of education policy debate - and it is around children's prospective capacity for exam success and work, rather than the quality of their present lives - that most of the discussion has centred. Children as 'subjects' and as competent 'social actors' with the capacity and right to comment on their experiences have been missing from this picture.

This section moves on to offer a more detailed analysis of the implications of recent education policy for children's rights (particularly their participation rights). I begin with a brief historical overview which will provide a context for this analysis.

In the period between the universalist Education Act 1944 and the defeat of the Labour government in 1979 policy-emphasis was given to the role of education in ensuring equality of opportunity; and from 1965 comprehensive schooling was gradually introduced in keeping with a new academic consensus that the performance of school children was socially constructed and not biologically determined (see Wagg 1996 for discussion).

During the 1970s the work of key theorists (most notably Bernstein 1971; 1973; 1975) provided sociological backing for the increasing democratisation of schools; and this period was characterised by many claims for the libertarian rights of British

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<sup>26</sup> Though, arguably, the provision of schooling for all might also be viewed as an extension of children's rights (see Cunningham 1991).



school children. This was the decade of 'The Little Red Book' which gave pupils advice on issues such as school life, teachers, punishment and how to form a school council (see Hoyles 1989). The National Union of School students was active also issuing (in 1972) a twenty seven point policy statement (see Wagg 1996:14-15) which included calls for greater democracy within schools and for recognition of basic human rights for students.<sup>27</sup>

However, these developments were viewed with increasing alarm by journalists in the popular press and by right-wingers who were concerned about the effects on children of 'cultural subversion'. A pivotal focus for these fears was provided by the episode at William Tyndale School in North London where - in the early 1970s - teaching staff attempted to implement a new and progressive educational regime. The school and its teaching staff were given an extraordinary amount of publicity and in 1976 the affair provided a spring-board for a much broader attack by traditionalists and right-wingers on the autonomy of teachers, schools and local authorities.

The subsequent right-wing backlash against comprehensive schooling and progressive teachers was informed by an understanding that children should not be self-determining - rather they should be subject to discipline and firm standards. As Wagg describes, after the Labour defeat of 1979 - a new paradigm, based on 'the three Rs' and education 'as a means to social mobility and self-advancement', took over from its predecessor of education as a means to 'personal enlightenment or the tools of citizenship' (1996:17).<sup>28</sup> This paradigm underpins the Education Reform Act (1988). It has also remained a fundamental basis for educational policy throughout the early 1990s.

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<sup>27</sup> The history of British education provides many more examples of children's activism - e.g. in 1911 school children were involved in a series of strikes over 60 major towns and cities (see Hoyles 1989). See also Barrett (1989) and Adams (1991) for discussion.

<sup>28</sup> The present Labour administration has, however, established a Citizens Advisory Group. The government appears to be viewing the classroom as the place where citizenship skills can be learned for future civic life (see Lansdown 1998a:9), although these are not recognised and practised in the here and now of children's lives.

#### *2.4.2.1 Education and children's rights*

In 1995 the UN Committee recommended that teacher training should incorporate education about the Convention, that teaching methods should be inspired by its principles and that the Convention should be included on the school curriculum (see Lansdown 1998a). None of these recommendations have been followed at the time of writing. Indeed, Lansdown and Newell (1994) and a number of other writers (e.g. Jeffs 1995; Franklin and Franklin 1996; Blatchford and Sharp 1994; Jones and Bilton 1994) outline the numerous ways in which the educational policy of the late 1980s and early 1990s has effectively served to limit the rights of children at school.

The key provisions of the Education Reform Act (see 2.3.3.4) can all be understood in this light. Firstly, it is parents, rather than children, who are cast in legislation as the decision-makers and the 'consumers' of education (Jones and Bilton 1994)<sup>29</sup> and, as Stainton Rogers (1998) note, the education service is itself accountable to a 'Parents Charter'. Secondly, the marketisation of education results in greater competitiveness between schools, more disguised discrimination in admissions and more use of exclusions: outcomes which are directly harmful to children's rights (Wagg, 1996). Thirdly, schools have an important role to play in the process of assisting the child to 'engage in recreational activities and participate fully in cultural life' (UNCRC: Article 31) but with the introduction of Local Management Schemes (LMS) schools have had to charge for the use of their premises, and there has been a reduction in LEA museum, education, music and drama services to schools (Lansdown and Newell 1994). And fourthly, the introduction of the National Curriculum has led to a decreasing emphasis on physical education, music and other non-core subject areas (Lansdown and Newell 1994) and it has also eroded the control of teachers over content and method (Jeffs 1995). Jeffs (1995) suggests that this lessening in teacher's autonomy may result in children being denied the opportunity to negotiate both behavioural norms and lesson content.

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<sup>29</sup>The status of parent as 'consumer' has also been confirmed in a further Education Act (1993). Under Section 241(4) of the 1993 Act a parent has a right to withdraw his/her child from sex education regardless of the child's age.

Within education legislation there is no consideration given to the child's right to be consulted in 'all matters affecting the child' (UNCRC: Article 12). Children's participatory rights were severely affected by the debarring of anyone aged under 18 from membership of school governing bodies<sup>30</sup> (Education Act 1988). Children also have no opportunity to represent themselves within exclusion procedures - indeed they do not even have the right to be informed personally of the decision to exclude them (see Hyams-Parish 1996) and they have no means to complain about any decisions that are made.

The 1994 CRDU report (Lansdown and Newell) commented that in order to comply with Article 12, schools and LEAs should:

introduce procedures for ensuring that children are provided with the opportunity to express their views on matters of concern to them in the running of schools and that their views are given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (1994:165)

Writing in 1996 Wagg notes that about one seventh of primary schools and one third of secondary schools have councils which involve pupils in some aspects of running the school (1996:23-24), and it is probable that the number of schools with councils has increased since then.<sup>31</sup> These schools may well provide greater opportunity for children's participation than exists in those schools with no such provision. However, in a paper about her recent study which explored children's views of councils Alderson notes that:

A council that is seen by students as token has as much or more negative impact than having no council. (2000b:133)

Indeed, the powers of councils may be considerably limited: and the ruling about membership of governing bodies means that members lack access to the next tier of

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<sup>30</sup> Children are represented on school governing bodies in a number of other European countries (e.g. Spain, France and Norway) (Children's Rights Development Unit, unpublished paper, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> It appears that there is no up to date information on this and that there is no monitoring of the number of schools with councils (personal communication, Schools Councils UK).

decision-making. The erosion of teacher's control may also impact in this area: whilst teachers are represented on governing bodies neither the heads nor the governors are required to consult them on local management issues (Jeffs 1995). If teachers are disempowered it may follow in turn that they adopt less empowering practices with their pupils.

It is interesting for this discussion that the importance of ascertaining pupils views has been acknowledged by the government in the Elton Report (DES 1989) which recommends that staff should:

recognise the importance of ascertaining pupil's views and should encourage active participation of pupils in shaping and reviewing the school's behaviour policy (quoted in Cowie 1994)

And more recently, the DfEE has recognised the importance of involving pupils as part of a parent/pupil/school partnership in the development of home-school agreements (DfEE 1998).

In response to the Elton Report many schools have developed 'whole-school' behaviour policies and 'anti-bullying' policies; and in response to the recent DfEE Guidance some schools have chosen to involve pupils in drawing up home-school agreements between school, parents and pupils. However, there is considerable variation in the degree to which pupils have been actively involved as participants in shaping such policies; and the extent to which the home-school agreement initiative constructs children as active participants with rights as opposed to passive signatories to their responsibilities is questionable (see Hood 1999; Ouston and Hood 2000). Further, the spirit in which these policies can be implemented is surely constrained by the (prior) exclusion of under-18s from school governing bodies. Finally, it is also discouraging that the White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE 1997) which refers to home-school agreements - makes barely a passing reference to pupils' potential role in making an active contribution to the creation of effective schools (see Lansdown 1998b:219).

In conclusion, it is clear that the British educational system in the 1990s has failed to comply with the UNCRC and that there is little in the way of active support for children's rights in schools and within government circles. Nevertheless, as Wagg (1996:23) reports there are several national bodies which are sympathetic (e.g. the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the Campaign for State Education (CASE), the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) and Schools Council UK). And, despite the rather gloomy picture which I have outlined here, there are some innovative and exciting examples of initiatives which promote children's participation to be found within the British education system. I will draw on some of these examples in a discussion of children's participation in practice in Chapter 4 (4.3).

### *2.4.3 Welfare*

Here I focus on understandings of childhood and children's participation within British welfare agencies (mainly the statutory social services, and other voluntary welfare bodies). Perhaps unsurprisingly such agencies have been closely linked with the promotion of 'welfarist' provision and protection rights. However, welfare agencies have also played an important and - some would argue - a pioneering role - in the promotion of participation rights. As I have noted previously in relation to child abuse it is within the welfare domain that the relationship between protection rights and participation rights has also been most obvious: protection is understood to involve empowerment - and empowerment is viewed as a key ingredient for participation (e.g. see Cloke and Davies 1995). But there are also tensions between protection and participation and whilst the Children Act (England and Wales) 1989 is frequently referenced as being critical to the promotion of children's participation rights the extent to which it actually does so in practice is a subject of considerable research and debate (e.g. see Franklin and Franklin 1996; Lansdown and Newell 1994; Hendrick 1994).

Contemporary British statutory welfare services are targeted to those who are deemed to be most in need (see 2.3.3.3) and voluntary welfare agencies direct their work towards those children whom they define as disadvantaged or deprived. Local



Authority social service departments (SSDs) come into direct contact with only a minority of British children; although their legislative duties give them responsibilities for larger numbers (for instance through the registration and inspection of daycare provision). Welfare legislation (principally the Children Act (England and Wales) 1989 effectively confirms the prime responsibilities for children's upbringing as resting with their parents: the State intervenes to promote the strength of the family, and, where necessary, to protect children who are at risk of harm.

The lives of the small percentage of children who have contact with statutory social services may often be the focus for crucial and life-determining decisions - for example, whether the child should remain in the care of parents, whether and when s/he should be 'rehabilitated' to parental care, which foster or adoptive family is the most appropriate. Many 'parties' - sometimes with conflicting interests - may take part in these decisions: local authority social workers (or 'care managers'), natural parents, foster parents and the child him or herself. In many instances the court will also be involved. Clearly, the role of the child as participant in such decisions is of fundamental importance to any discussion of children's rights within welfare. Other important policies and decision-making processes also impact substantially on the day-to-day lives of children living away from their families in foster or residential care. For example children's participation in daily/routine decision-making in residential care has been the subject of some important campaigning and research in recent decades (e.g. Fletcher 1993; Willow 1995,1996; see also Chapter 4). This section looks at the changing history of understandings of children, childhood and participation within the welfare domain (since 1850) and discusses the Children Act (England and Wales) 1989 in greater detail.

#### *2.4.3.1 The emergence of children's social rights*

Modern day social work finds its roots in the national voluntary 'child rescue' organisations (such as Barnardo's and the National Children's Home (NCH)<sup>32</sup> which developed in the mid-nineteenth century. These organisations ran reformatory schools and charity schools in which 'deserving' children were subject to 'reforming'

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<sup>32</sup> NCH is now known as NCH 'Action for Children'.

'rehabilitative' regimes (see Frost and Stein 1989). Children here were constructed as 'dependents' and the concern to reform them was closely tied in with ruling class fears of 'independent' children and of a dangerous and immoral working class (see also 2.4.2: education). Frost and Stein (1989) observe that it was not until early this century that children's social rights were recognised within legislation. The 1908 Children Act gathered together piecemeal legislation, emphasised children's social rights and strengthened the law to prevent cruelty to children. The Children and Young Person's Act (1933) continued this pattern of social reform, extending the grounds for children being in need of care and protection and requiring the juvenile court to consider 'the welfare of the child' (Frost and Stein 1989:32). However, child neglect was still viewed primarily as occurring in 'bad' families (rather than being linked to social and material constraints) and the solution to the problem of 'bad' families was frequently the removal of the child.

#### 2.4.3.2 *The post-war welfarist consensus: state and family working together (1945-1970)*

In the forward-looking climate of post-war Britain new Children's Departments were created (Children Act 1948) and a more humane and liberal approach was adopted to families in difficulty. John Bowlby's work on maternal deprivation (1953) was highly influential during the 1950s and 1960s; it provided an individualised explanation of social problems which fitted in well with the new social casework approach; and the new child care service flourished and expanded during the post-war decades. Social work and social workers were allowed a high degree of professional discretion, and, as Parton discusses (1985:41, 1996:45), the profession worked in harmony with a post-war reconstructive approach which valued the idea of State and family working together to ensure children's welfare. However, despite the choice of the term 'Children's Departments' it was the family, rather than the individual (child or adult) *within the family* that was the prime focus for social casework concern.

#### 2.4.3.3 *The emergence of individual rights for women and children (1970 onwards)*

Local Authority SSDs were established in 1971 in line with the Seebohm Report (1968) which underlined the key role of professionals in overcoming social problems. However, psycho-social casework came under serious attack during the time that

Britain entered a period of economic crisis in the mid-late 1970s. Influenced by a growing concern with poverty and inner-city deprivation, a radical social work movement drew attention to the socio-economic pressures faced by many families (see also democratisation of education in 2.4.2). Radicalised social work groups saw individualised explanations for child abuse as both inadequate and pathologising; and they actively promoted new solutions including community work and advocacy. Importantly also with the growth of the women's movement and increasing awareness of domestic violence (and later of sexual abuse), the lives of *individuals within the family* became a focus for attention. The 1970s witnessed the rise of pressure groups with shared concerns for the rights of both adults and children whose lives were subject to social service intervention (eg the Family Rights Group, The Voice of the Child in Care, the Children's Legal Centre, the National Association of Young People in Care). These groups were responding, in part also, to the measures introduced within the Children Act 1975: an Act which was influenced by moral panic surrounding child abuse and the death of Maria Colwell and which focused on facilitating the removal of children from families and reduced the rights of natural parents.

#### 2.4.3.4 *Child abuse enquiries, Cleveland, parents and children's rights (1970s-1980s)*

The late 1970s and early 1980s were marked by a large number of child abuse enquiries. These enquiries brought the important issue of child abuse into full public view and there was a high level of media and public debate over the apparent failure of social services to protect children. Enquiry recommendations usually included improving inter-agency and inter-professional communication and co-operation. Parton (1996:45) notes that the recommendations also emphasised improving social workers knowledge of abuse and encouraging them to use their legal mandate. However, the 1988 Cleveland Enquiry into child sexual abuse reflected a change in emphasis and paved the way for the important measures to be introduced in the Children Act (England and Wales) (1989). The Enquiry concluded that both social workers and paediatricians had failed to recognise the rights of parents and had intervened prematurely into the lives of families where there were concerns about



abuse. Importantly, children's rights as people were also highlighted in the Enquiry Report:

There is a danger that in looking to the welfare of the children believed to be the victims of sexual abuse the children themselves may be overlooked. The child is a person and not an object of concern. (Butler-Sloss 1988, quoted in Hill and Aldgate 1996)

#### 2.4.3.5 *The Children Act (England and Wales) 1989 and children's rights*

The Children Act (1989) codifies children's rights by: provisions which seek to accommodate children's views; provisions which entitle children to act independently in a legal capacity; and provisions relating to 16 and 17 year-olds (categories devised by Bainham 1990, referenced in Winter and Connolly 1996).

More specifically within Category 1: the court, local authorities, voluntary organizations, and persons running registered children's homes have a duty to have regard to the wishes and feelings of the child, and steps must be taken to ascertain these views before any decisions can be made with regard to them. Where children are already in care, the child's view should be sought before any review of their situation and they should be informed of the outcome of the review. Local Authorities are also obliged to set up a complaints procedure for all children defined as being in need or in the care of the Local Authority.

Within category 2: Children are given the rights to act independently in legal proceedings and to refuse to submit to a medical examination as directed by the court under a range of orders including Child Assessment Orders.

And within Category 3: 16 and 17 year-olds are granted greater autonomy by a number of provisions - for example, they are permitted to refer themselves for local authority accommodation.

While these measures mark a significant step forward for children's participatory rights - and they certainly serve to separate out children as people in their own rights rather than as possessions of their parents - the emphasis is on children's rights to

question state intervention. The Act does not increase children's rights in relation to their parents within the family. Further, all the Category 1 and 2 measures are subject to considerations of age and level of understanding. Thus, as Winter and Connolly (1996) point out, whilst the provisions relating to 16 and 17 year-olds construct them as adults who are responsible for their own actions there are contradictions in relation to the rights of younger children whose rights may be over-ruled by appealing to the child's age and lack of understanding. As the authors note:

Here we see the influence of traditional socialization and developmental models of childhood which construct children as being cognitively unable to make decisions of that nature. (1996:39)

As Franklin and Parton (1996) observe, it is possible that judicial considerations of what is in the best interests of the child could always over-ride the claim of the child to autonomy.

#### ***2.4.4 Health***

It is probably within the domain of the health services that some of the most critical and notable judgements regarding children's rights have been made. Decisions concerning treatments and interventions with people's bodies form the basis of much health service work and these decisions sometimes have life and death implications.

The Gillick principle was established in a famous judgement about a child's right to decide about their own use of contraception (see Alderson 1993). By a three to two majority the Lords ruled that children under 16 can legally give consent to medical treatment, and Lord Scarman stated that:

As a matter of law the parental right to determine whether or not their minor child below the age of 16 will have medical treatment terminates if and when the child achieves a sufficient understanding and intelligence to understand what is proposed. (in Alderson 1993:68)

This principle, which underpins the participation provisions of the Children Act (England and Wales) 1989 (see 2.4.3), was heralded as highly significant by contemporary children's rights movement writers including, for example, Michael Freeman:

For if children can make their own decisions on contraception when possessed of sufficient intelligence, knowledge and maturity, they can make decisions in all sorts of areas: where to live, whether to seek employment, education matters. (Freeman 1987:312)

However, a subsequent court of appeal decision *re. W* (1992) (a 16 year old anorexic woman) seriously undermined the Gillick principle. In this case a judgement was made that a parent could retain the rights to over-ride the wishes of a child who refused treatment - even where the child had been deemed competent to make such a decision (see Alderson and Montgomery 1996).

As Lansdown (1997) comments this judgement had far-reaching implications for all children in all areas of their lives. The only exceptions to this are children who are subject to a Child Assessment Order under the Children Act (1989).

Like children who come to the attention of the social services, children within the health services arena may be the focus for important, life-determining decisions. Yet within health legislation (as in education legislation) there are no parallel measures to the participation provisions of the Children Act (1989). This difference takes on particular significance when one considers that the remit of the health services covers very large numbers of children - extending from the (relatively) small numbers of children receiving hospital treatment (who may be very ill) to the large numbers of well children in receipt of preventive health care in the community in GP practices, clinics and schools.

This final section on health will concentrate on children's rights within health services in the late 1990s. I set this in context with a brief discussion of the recent structural changes to health service delivery.

#### *2.4.4.1 Children's Rights within a changing NHS*

The NHS and Community Care Act (1990) split the functions of purchasing and provision in health and community care services. It also served to promote the establishment of independent self-governing Trusts. Writing in 1989, Woodruffe and Kurtz detail their concerns about the possible implications of this legislation for children. They conclude that health services for children may become more fragmented, that the proportion of expenditure on children may decline, that the internal market may lead to an increase in hospital expenditure at the expense of community care and that socio-economic differences in access to health services for children may increase (in Pugh 1993).

It appears that some of these concerns were realised by the mid to late 1990s. A study by Webb, Naish and McFarlane (1996) found that only seven Health Authorities had named purchasers for children's services and many Authorities were increasing the fragmentation of planning for children by separating the commissioning of primary, secondary and tertiary services. In the exceptional authorities which did have a named person with responsibility for a child health strategy few of these named people had adequate experience of child health. Other 1990s research into the purchasing and providing of child and adolescent mental health services (see Coppock 1997 for details) also points to a lack of coherent, strategic planning and to further fragmentation of already unco-ordinated services. And on the important question of expenditure on children, a 1993 Audit Commission report noted that whilst people under 16 years of age made up 20% of the population only 10% of the total expenditure on hospital and community health services were spent on them (Audit Commission 1993).

Webb, Naish and McFarlane (1996) concluded that as most authorities had no comprehensive planning mechanism for children's services they were failing to comply with the UN CRC. Has this position changed as we enter the late 1990s? Children have no legal rights to participation but have there been moves to increase their participation within health services?

#### *2.4.4.2 Children's rights in contemporary health services*

There are a number of recent developments in health policy and practice which together pose a challenge to the picture painted above. Practice guidance increasingly points to the importance of viewing children (as well as adults) as users or consumers of health services (e.g. see Hart and Chesson 1988; Elliott and Watson 1997; Coppock 1997). Further, recent guidance (e.g. Hogg 1996) recommends that purchasers and providers should have regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in identifying the key principles of a contemporary child health service. These reports also recommend that there should be closer collaboration between health services and other agencies with responsibility for the welfare of children.

Health professionals are increasingly involving some young children in complex and serious health care decisions (see Alderson and Mayall 1994) and arguments are being made for their rights to do so (Franklin 1994; Irwin 1996; Alderson 1993). Alderson and Montgomery (1996) have drawn on research evidence and the views of children, parents and professionals to show the importance of involving children in health care decisions and to demonstrate the inconsistencies between current law and practices. The National Association for the Welfare of children in Hospital has also used skilful advocacy to encourage health service professionals to listen to children (see Davie 1993 for discussion). There has been a substantial overhaul of child and adolescent services since the mid 1990s (see Dof H, DfEE 1995; NHS Health Advisory Service 1995) and similar pressures to listen to children's voices are emerging within this field. For example, during the late 1990s the Mental Health Foundation launched a three-year initiative in child and adolescent mental health aimed at encouraging the development of a user voice amongst children and young people (see Coppock 1997). And finally, with regards to promotive and preventive health care in schools, the British Paediatric Association (1992, 1993) and the Heath Visitors' Association (1992) have stressed the importance of the child being seen as the person to be served and the rights of the child to a confidential service (see also Alderson and Mayall 1994).

### 2.4.5 Summary

This discussion in 2.4 has highlighted the varied understandings of children and childhood which underpin the history and development of British play, education, welfare and health services; and it has also explored the varied emphases given to children's participation within each service.

In summary, I have suggested the following: that in *play* services there is a tension in the discourse of contemporary play workers between a Romantic view of the natural child and the view that play, however 'free' serves a purpose; that in *education*: children's participation rights are largely denied in a service in which parents, rather than children are constructed as the key consumers of services. And that in *welfare* and *health* services there are some positive indications that children are increasingly being involved as participants in decisions that affect their lives. Welfare is the only one of the service areas studied in which children's participation rights are recognised in legislation (Children Act (England and Wales) 1989). However, even here, there are questions concerning the extent to which the Act effectively serves to promote participation in practice.

All four service areas continue to be influenced - though to varying degrees - by developmentalist and welfarist thinking about children and childhood (see 2.2.2) and it is these kinds of dominant understandings which conflict with the idea of children as participants. The idea that play should be purposeful is clearly informed by developmentalist ideas that play has a role in the child's progression through stages; and the concern here is with children's successful accomplishment of this journey as well as with their enjoyment in the here and now. The influence of developmentalism is at its most obvious in education where such thinking imbues policies and practices within the service. Welfare and health services, on the other hand, draw more widely, on welfarist ideas concerning protection of vulnerable (and sometimes sick) children, on developmentalist ideas about children's cognitive (and physical) development, and on legal discourse which is concerned with rights and obligations.

I move on now to Chapter 3 where I build on the conceptual framework of this Chapter, in a consideration of public policy in relation to out-of-school services.

### 3. BRITISH PUBLIC POLICY AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SERVICES

#### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 I discussed ways in which understandings about children and childhood have underlined British public policy making in children's play, educational, welfare and health services. Whilst developmentalist and welfarist ideas have continued to have significant influence across all these domains, there are nevertheless important differences in understanding between them: in particular there are differences - reflected in legislation - in the degree to which children are viewed as actors and as active participants in their own lives.

These differences are important - not just for their conceptual interest - but because they have practical policy implications for the quality of children's lives. In the words of R and W Stainton Rogers:

In terms of the practical realities of our lives and life-world - and, of course, those of children - the significance of treating childhood as a textual production...is not merely theoretical. It carries with it profound implications about how we treat children and act towards them, both as individuals and collectively, including our institutional treatment of the very young through the law, social welfare and state policy. In a very practical sense, the discourses through which we understand the young determine the qualities and nature of the childhood they experience. (1998:184-5)

In this Chapter I build on the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2 in an exploration of recent public policy making in out-of-school hours services<sup>33</sup> for children. In 1990s Britain out-of-school policy has been linked directly with government concerns to improve national economic competitiveness through the expansion of *childcare* to enable more women to work, and - more recently - through the proposed development of *study support services* which aim ultimately to improve children's achievement and hence their 'employability.' These government priorities,

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<sup>33</sup> See note 34 below re terminology.



based on economic concerns and on children's futures as adults, do little to address important questions concerning the quality of children's 'present' lives, and how children's lives should be lived.<sup>34</sup>

Recent rhetoric from the present Labour administration emphasises both the *integration of care and education* services and *universality* to be achieved through the wide scale expansion of childcare and study support. However, children's out-of-school services in this country have a history - to date - of piecemeal development, and such service development as there has been has tended to rely on voluntary sector initiatives, with little in the way of co-ordinated statutory support.

In this chapter I will suggest that this service area, along with its confusing and changing array of terminology,<sup>35</sup> can be viewed as a ground for 'contested' understandings of children and childhood and that these disparate understandings are reflected in some fundamental and inter-related questions which are raised by recent policy-analysis in this field. Such questions include, for example:

- What is the function of such provision? And linked with this:
- Which children is it intended for? Is it for all children who wish to use it or for targeted groups and are these groups to be targeted by age or 'need'<sup>36</sup> or both?
- How far should the State be responsible for this kind of service and how far should this be seen as a private responsibility?

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<sup>34</sup> Though, in a sense they do. The government clearly believe that children should be spending a significant amount of their time in school-based learning.

<sup>35</sup> A range of terms are used to represent services for children out-of-school hours. The almost bewildering variety of terms can be understood as a reflection of the unco-ordinated, fragmented nature of the provision and of fast-changing public policy in this area.

<sup>36</sup> Further questions are raised by the common usage of the term 'need'. What is 'need' and who defines it?

- If the State carries responsibility for any or all of the out-of-school services to which Department does this responsibility rightly belong (social services, leisure, education, health or some combination of these?)
- What is the significance of the terms 'childcare' and 'study support' in the history of policy and practice?
- And what is the significance of children's play and play services in out-of-school service provision and development?

I aim to show here how recent out-of-school policy, whilst based on adult-defined priorities, has been influenced by and reflects a whole range of differing ideas of children: children as in need of protection, children as in need of education, and children as in need of the opportunity to play safely and to have fun; and that these often competing ideas of children belong - in part at least - to the different areas of service provision<sup>37</sup>, to welfare, to education and to play/leisure services. I also aim to discuss the child as participant and as social actor and to consider fully the development of out-of-school policy from a children's rights perspective.

This material will lead on to a discussion of the significance of the Children's Centre model in the light of the broad conceptual framework of both Chapters 2 and 3.

### **3.2 The 1990s and the Expansion Of Out-Of-School Services**

During the 1990s there was increasing commitment within government rhetoric to the expansion of out-of-school services for school-age children both in this country and in many countries within the European Community (see Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community (COFACE) 1995). In 1993 the

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<sup>37</sup> The 'competing' ideas of children which I suggest here are not linked in the same way with health services. Health services have had less input into service development in out-of-school provision, although there are many examples of health-related staff working in schools themselves (most notably school nurses, also counsellors etc) (see Mayall 1996; Ball 1998).

Conservative government launched the 'Out-of-school Childcare Initiative' (OSCI) in which Training Enterprise Councils (TECs) were given the responsibility for developing local childcare provision. In November 1997 the current Labour administration outlined its proposals to expand out-of-school childcare further with a £300m investment over five years (1998-2003) to provide up to 30,000 new clubs; and in July 1998 the government announced that Lottery funding would be invested via the New Opportunities Fund into the development of out-of-school study support services. Study support services are defined broadly by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) as:

learning activity outside normal lessons which young people take part in voluntarily (DfEE 1998:1)

In line with this State interest there has been a clear shift within both the UK and the rest of Europe from 'informal' to 'formal' school age services: and in some countries (including the UK) this shift has been associated with an increasing role of schools in providing the care and/or the premises for this (see 3.4 below; COFACE 1995 for discussion of European data; Smith and Barker 1998 and 1999 for UK data). There has also been an 'increasing interest in finding ways of more effectively co-ordinating the range of services and responsibilities relevant to this area of provision' (COFACE 1995 (Europe); O'Brien and Dench 1996 (the UK). In this country no department had statutory responsibility for the provision of out-of-school care prior to the Children Act, 1989.<sup>38</sup> Under the Children Act (England and Wales)(1989) social service departments are given the duty to provide a range of services including holiday and out-of-school care for children (up to 16 years) although these responsibilities extend only to those who are deemed to be 'in need' (Part 111, Section 17 (1) and Part 111, Section 18, (5).

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<sup>38</sup>In a Kids' Clubs Network survey of after-school schemes researchers reported that this lack of responsibility made the location of schemes difficult (Kids' Clubs Network 1989).

Despite these recent developments the majority of parents - or more accurately, mothers - continue to rely on informal services for their childcare, and actual levels of publicly funded provision have remained generally low. In 1995 Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Portugal all had out-of-school places for fewer than 10% of their 7-10 year olds. Denmark, with places for 40% of its 7-10 year olds in publicly funded services was the only exception to this amongst the six member states studied (COFACE 1995). In the UK the figures remain low although there were increases in the 1990s, primarily in response to the Out-of-School Childcare Initiative (OSCI) but also because of the availability of only minimal funds from a seemingly unco-ordinated range of small-scale government initiatives (see Ball 1998:38 for details). In 1989, before the OSCI, there were places available for less than 2% of school-aged children. By March 1997, 74,000 new school-age childcare places had been created in England alone (Andrews and Vernon 1997:11). The Labour government initiatives of the late 1990s were intended to promote an unprecedented period of growth in childcare places. However, the government target of 750,000 by 2001<sup>39</sup> should perhaps be viewed as rather optimistic, considering the lack of central direction and the low level of funding being offered.

Petrie (1992) and Meijvogel and Petrie (1996) have described how the interest in new service development in Europe has been primarily influenced by State concern to support the childcare needs of growing numbers of economically active women.<sup>40</sup> Petrie also notes that along with the harmonisation of the European market member states with fewer childcare places may find themselves at an economic disadvantage if unable to support increasing demands for these services (1992:12).

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<sup>39</sup> From an announcement by Kids' Clubs Network ('First steps towards a National Childcare Strategy: 29.1.1998).

<sup>40</sup> In the EU (excluding former East Germany, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Portugal and Spain) the proportion of employed mothers (with a child under 10 years) increased rapidly between 1985-1993: from 42% to 51% overall (EC Network on Childcare, 1996, quoted in Meijvogel and Petrie 1996:11).

The Out-of-School Childcare Grant Initiative in this country had just such a market-driven objective, expressly:

to improve the quantity and quality of out-of-school childcare in order to facilitate increased labour market participation, among those who wish to combine work with family life, by parents of school age children (from O' Brien and Dench, DfEE 1996:7)

The present-day government emphasis on out-of-school expansion in childcare continues to be influenced by the same clear economic goal, and it links with broader government strategy as reflected in the Welfare to Work policy, the New Deal for the Unemployed and the National Childcare Strategy (see Smith and Barker 1998). These strategies are essentially concerned with facilitating women's (rather than men's) employment, although much of the associated literature (for example, see O'Brien and Dench 1996) refers to 'parents', ignoring women's key role as prime carers.<sup>41</sup>

Within such a policy framework out-of-school services are premised on adult-based needs (to support the labour market) and the children of working mothers (and fathers) are viewed as in need of care and protection for such time as their main carer is unavailable to them.

However, as Petrie notes (1992:16) there is perhaps a rather more complex set of interests and concerns which has informed both the development and provision of out-of-school services. Out-of-school *care* is broadly understood to have a potentially important role in contributing to the *well-being* of both children and their families (see Meijvogel and Petrie 1996), and, as I will argue, two important new emphases are also reflected in the recent policy drive towards expansion of out-of-school services. These are:

- increasing societal concerns for children's safety in public spaces;

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<sup>41</sup> See also Vincent (1996:77-9) for a discussion of the use of the term 'parent' as opposed to mother (or father) in the literature on home-school relations.

- an increasing government pre-occupation with education and more particularly with educational achievement; reflected in the proposed expansion of study support.

In the following sections I broaden the discussion to look at some of these other key influences on-out-of-school services, and I explore also the part of play and play services. In the course of the debate I examine the extent to which the professed government commitment to *integration of care and education* and to *universalism* is reflected in recent policy development.

### **3.3 Key Themes and Influences: Risks to Children**

The use of children's out-of-school services in this country has not at any time been limited to those children whose parents are either working or in study. Indeed, a range of different kinds of service, both publicly and privately run, has offered a variety of activities and opportunities to school-age children of both working and non-working parents. These include playschemes, adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs and youth clubs. These different styles of service focus on different age groups, employ staff with different skills and training, provide different kinds of activities and have working practices which are informed by varied philosophies and traditions. Importantly, some may provide 'care,' whereby staff act in 'loco parentis' in agreement with parents and carers, and others operate on a 'drop-in' basis where children are free to come and go as they, or their parents, please. The distinction between 'care' and 'drop-in' services is, in some cases, linked to age - for example older children may use youth clubs on a 'drop-in' basis - but importantly, also, it is linked to the nature and ethos of the particular service. Thus many adventure playgrounds operate on a 'drop-in' basis but cater for younger as well as for older children.

A key rationale for many of these out-of-school services - and particularly those for younger children - has been the belief that children 'need' to play (see Chapter 2: 2.4.1) and that opportunities should be provided for them to do so in their non-school 'free' time. Services for older children have more often emphasised the provision of

learning opportunities (see 3.4 below). Underlying all these disparate services, however, is the more fundamental idea that children and young people might benefit from the offer of something *additional* to that which might be available to them otherwise. This can be analysed further by linking in this notion of providing something *additional* with societal preoccupations with '*risks to children.*' There appear to be two key strands of thinking here.

Firstly, there is what Petrie has termed 'a state and philanthropic concern with children in need and their families' (1992:16). This essentially welfarist approach is reflected in the new responsibilities included in the Children Act (England and Wales)(1989) within which children 'in need' (and their families) are to be supported through out-of-school services (see 3.2 above). This carries with it an idea of such services having a *compensatory* function, by giving parents (usually mothers) some respite from the care of their children, but importantly also by providing cultural and developmental experiences to children who might otherwise be deprived of them. Out-of-school services can, in theory here at least, offer children 'in need' some compensation for poverty and for childhood cultural and material inequalities. Such services can arguably serve to protect children from the risks posed by socio-economic disadvantage.

Secondly, an increasingly important strand of thinking has been the idea that children are at risk in public spaces. This idea which is frequently conveyed in the British media and which informs the thinking of many parents - and children - is voiced primarily in concerns about 'stranger danger' and 'traffic danger' (see Kelley, Mayall, and Hood 1998 for discussion). In consequence of this intensifying fear for children's safety in public places their traditional play spaces (e.g. streets and parks) are becoming increasingly inaccessible to them, and this trend has been documented in a number of recent studies (e.g. see Hood, Kelley, Mayall and Oakley (with Morrell) 1996; Hillman 1993). In this 'risky' climate, adults (including those in important

campaigning groups such as the Kids' Clubs Network<sup>42</sup>) are responding to adult-identified children's need for safe play spaces by demanding safe and supervised provision. And further guarantees of safety are sought too. The adults who provide such services are increasingly subject to police checks which aim to ensure that they can be deemed as 'safe' to supervise children, and the buildings where children are cared for are more liable to be subject to security measures.

Within these two strands of thought, therefore, out-of-school services act to protect children from risk, whether via *compensation* or via the *security* which is understood to be offered by adult supervision. However, from a children's rights perspective there may be some tensions in this thinking. Article 31 of the UNCRC recognises children's right to 'engage in play and recreational activities' (see also Chapter 2: 2.4.1) - yet to 'play' within the organised structure of adult supervised provision is arguably a different matter altogether from playing on the streets, at home or in the park, particularly if there is a 'care' element to the institutional arrangement. This line of thinking has been actively promoted in recent months by a UK 'play-lobby' (see also Chapter 2: 2.4.1) who argue that investment should be made in the development of safe, open access and attractive play spaces as an alternative to the more organised forms of out-of-school provision. The development and the current expansion in out-of-school provision can be viewed, from this angle, as an extended 'corralling' of children's time into adult-led and adult/supervised institutions (see also Chapter 2: 2.4.2). And the argument follows that the government policy initiatives which seek to facilitate maternal employment by providing safe care and universal provision only succeed in matching employment patterns to children's daily lives by further institutionalisation of children.

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<sup>42</sup> A Kids' Clubs Network campaign made use of 1996 survey data. The survey, which was conducted in 2000 English schools, reported that 35% of parents were worried about their child's safety after school (see Kids' Clubs Network 1997).



If we consider also the idea of children as *constituting risk* some further questions are raised. As fears *for* our children increasingly make our public spaces less available to them, so our fears *of* children increasingly make them less welcome in the same public spaces (see also Chapter 2: 2.2.2.2). The contemporary societal pre-occupation with risk in public spaces is not solely based on dangers posed by traffic or by adults: it is also voiced in fear of bullying, the threats posed by other children on the streets and the potentially harmful influence of 'street children' (see Hood, Kelley, Mayall and Oakley (with Morrell) 1996). The distinction here *is* often based on age - thus young children are usually seen to be in need of the protection which 'care' provides - but - in the words of a recent DfEE/OCSI report:

With children over eleven, parents are less concerned with care per se, and more with ensuring that they are 'off the streets'. (DfEE / OSCI 1997)<sup>43</sup>

In addition, out-of-school services are increasingly seen to have an important role to play in the prevention of juvenile offence.<sup>44</sup> Within this social climate, it is at least possible that such services may be or may become almost as commonly favoured for their role in 'keeping children off the streets' (and hence 'out of trouble') as they are for protecting children from danger posed by others.

These considerations are intended to introduce a particular conceptual perspective - and not to represent any kind of value judgement about out-of-school services and their quality, or about the skills, dedication and hard work of those who provide them. Indeed, it is possible to adopt a children's rights perspective within a rather different - and much less critical - analysis. As Meijvogel and Petrie note (1996:10) school-age services can be viewed as components of the necessary 'protection and assistance' for family life which is referred to in the preamble to the UNCRC - 'necessary for the 'growth and wellbeing of all its members and particularly children' (UN 1989). The duty to provide out-of-school services to children 'in need' in this country, (as legislated for in the Children Act (England and Wales)(1989), certainly implies the

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<sup>43</sup> This referenced report actually uses the phrase 'off the streets' (apparently uncritically) in its title.

<sup>44</sup> The present government announced new funds in this area in February 1999.

idea of protection from risk through compensation; but the broader framework of family support within which this duty is encompassed also has a rather more 'proactive' 'positive' and 'developmental' emphasis. Additionally, in line with this, the Children Act (1989) gives Local Authorities the right also to provide out-of-school services *for all children* (and not just those 'in need') (Part 111:Section 18:(6)). These emphases are far removed from some of the more traditional 'deficit' models of welfare within which individualised and pathologising explanations are given for families in difficulty or in need of support (see Chapter 2: 2.4.3). Indeed they suggest a universalist, participative model of service provision which builds on the existing strengths of children, their families and local communities and which offers children a range of complementary (as well as compensatory) opportunities.

### **3.4 Key Themes and Influences: Education**

A more recent and I think, a critical shift in emphasis, has been the increasing role played by the concept of education in the out-of-school policy debate. This influence is complex and at some points difficult to disentangle. It is manifested in various ways in the UK: in a remarkable increase in the use of schools as the site for out-of-school services, but importantly also in a contemporaneous shift in policy-direction from the promotion of school-based *childcare services* (more often run by non-school organisations) towards the promotion of school-based *study support services* (where schools will play a key role). Importantly, these developments appear to reflect a greater emphasis on the role which out-of-school services can play in supporting the goals of the curriculum and formal school-based education, as opposed to supporting a rather broader concept of learning outside the school.

Further, whilst the government has professed a commitment to the development of 'close links' between childcare and study support services, it is difficult to understand the precise financial, organisational and substantive mechanisms by which this professed government commitment to increased integration of care and education will actually be realised in practice.

This section begins with a chronology which illustrates the inter-relationships between *the use of the school as a site for out-of-school centres* and the *changing policy direction which has informed this use*. I follow this with a critical analysis which explores these particular developments both within the broader context of recent education policy, and from a children's rights perspective.

### ***3.4.1 Chronological development of school-based out-of-school centres***

Prior to the OSCI (1993) some schools - and most notably community and primary schools - provided after-school clubs on their premises funded by Local Authorities, voluntary agencies or by schools themselves. Some of these provided a range of extra-curricular activities to complement the school curriculum, and others offered care. However, the total number of care centres was small (Andrews and Vernon 1997) and schools were only one of many sites used. For example, a 1989 Kids' Clubs Network survey of after-school schemes found that just 16% of centres used school premises; other sites included, for example, youth centres, church halls, community centres and nurseries (KCN 1989). During the late 1980s the potential for schools to develop further as sites for after-school care was outlined in government guidance to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and LEAs were encouraged to offer their premises for after-school and holiday playscheme use (see Titman 1992).

As a result of the injection of funding provided by the OSCI many of the growing numbers of care schemes were set up on school sites (and particularly at primary schools).<sup>45</sup> Smith and Barker (1998 and 1999) describe how during the 1990-1997 expansion of out-of-school childcare there was a substantial increase in the use of

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<sup>45</sup> Although funds from the OSCI were available to all school-age children, the first three years of the Initiative gave priority to children aged 5-12.

school premises (indeed this was by far the largest growth area in premises). However, the authors also note that the increase in clubs which were actually run by schools during this time was much less noticeable - thus other organisations tended to make use of school premises (primarily of voluntary and charitable status). Often, schools charged these organisations for the rental of premises, and charges were passed on to parents and carers in the form of fees.

What was the perceived nature and function of these school-based centres during this period of expansion? Clearly, a primary goal of government was the provision of safe care to support the needs of the labour market (see 3.2 above). In their practice guidelines Kids' Clubs Network recommended that centre staff should offer both a range of age-appropriate activities and opportunities for play in care centres, but also that they should try to provide a quiet space for homework and study (in Ball 1998:39). This emphasis on homework may be significant here: though clearly focussing on *care* provision - the OSCI was nevertheless funded through the DfEE and the expansion of care services *on school sites* may well have been linked to the goals of formal school-based education as well as to more immediate labour-market priorities. It is of interest here also that a study of OSCI schemes by Andrews and Vernon (1997) refers to connections between the use of care centres and improved self-esteem in children - but suggests that there may be educational benefits associated with care. The authors comment that out-of-school childcare in schools can have benefits to parents and benefits to children: parents (often mothers) are enabled to work, children can enjoy themselves and take part in new activities. And children who use such centres can improve their attitude to school and to learning. Andrews and Vernon describe a mutually beneficial 'triangle' in which schools themselves are improved: with more resources, better relationships, reduced vandalism and improved attendance and behaviour. Furthermore, their study suggests that children's higher levels of motivation links with improved achievement in school.

This understanding of the preventive and potentially *integrative* role of school-based out-of-school services - particularly for secondary children - has featured increasingly in the policy direction of the current Labour government. However, whilst a number of studies certainly *suggest* that these services may have beneficial effects on children

(see Andrews and Vernon 1997:14 for details), many of these studies rely on participants' perception of change and provide little hard outcome evidence. Though a large-scale longitudinal study of 10,000 children is currently aiming to find correlations between attendance at out-of-school centres and school achievement (Macbeath and colleagues, Strathclyde University) there is, to my knowledge at least, no sound research evidence to date to prove the kinds of relationships identified by Andrews and Vernon and thus to support this current policy-direction.

In July 1998 the government announced its plans to help establish programmes of out-of-school learning - or 'study support' - in at least a quarter of all primary schools and a half of all secondary schools by 2001. Study support is described as:

an inclusive term, embracing many activities - with many names and many guises (DfEE 1998:1)

The DfEE describe its rationale as follows:

Its purpose is to improve young people's motivation, build their self-esteem and help them to become more effective learners. (DfEE 1998:1)

This is not far removed from some of the key outcomes described by Andrews and Vernon (1997). However, the study support initiative is explicitly concerned with the provision of learning activity (as opposed to play and 'age appropriate activities')<sup>46</sup> and the goal of improving achievement has, by this time, moved into central place:

Above all it (study support) aims to raise achievement. (my emphasis) (DfEE 1998:1)

Furthermore, the government envisages that schools themselves will have an increasingly significant role to play in the provision and co-ordination of study support services. They plan a large-scale out-of-school expansion<sup>47</sup>; in which services will continue to be provided on school sites, but where schools and teachers are being

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<sup>46</sup> Many childcare centres aim to provide a range of 'age-appropriate' activities and play - as recommended by Kids' Clubs Network (Ball 1988:39).

<sup>47</sup>The DfEE intend that, by the year 2003, every 'community' will have access to study support.

positioned in a central role. The DfEE proposes that teachers be paid at a modest rate for their involvement in study support<sup>48</sup> and that parents and people from local voluntary and community groups can also be recruited although the issue of payment for these other people is left unclear.

### *3.4.2 Analysis*

On a practical level there are many immediate benefits to the use of a school site for activities at the end of the school day - for example, ease of access, use of school equipment and facilities, and these advantages have been well documented (e.g. see Andrews and Vernon 1997; Ball 1998). Further, as Ball notes also there are some more fundamental reasons why the development of services on school sites makes sense. Almost all children attend schools and schools exist in large numbers and therefore:

As a unit of social organisation the school presents an attractive foundation upon which to build.  
(1998:3)

However, the development of such services also raises key questions about the relationships between education policy, the goals of the school-based services and the goals of the school itself.

The education policy of the present Labour government and of its Conservative predecessor has been primarily directed towards increasing state intervention in the content and range of provision and increasing deregulation in order to stimulate an internal market. The recent educational 'revolution' (see also Chapter 2: 2.3.4 and 2.4.2) has been underpinned by two related concerns of government: a concern to improve educational standards and a concern to increase levels of parental choice and involvement in education. In response to this, the present administration has sought to

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<sup>48</sup>Teachers can be paid at an hourly rate of £9.72 (DfEE 1998:40).

determine how schools can be improved and what makes a school '*effective*'; and *effectiveness* here is determined in terms of children reaching required National Curriculum attainment levels.

As part of its strategy to improve school effectiveness and in line with the OFSTED Inspection Framework the government has, amongst a range of measures, promoted 'school inclusion' practices (see Ball 1998). These give schools a more prominent role in supporting and linking in with families and the local community; and such strategies are viewed as particularly important in areas of high social stress and educational underachievement. In the section that follows I explore the development of school-based out-of-school services within the broader context of both the expectations that are placed upon schools by recent educational legislation and by these school inclusion policies, and I suggest that there are clear links between these. The development of out-of-school services is understood within this analysis, to 'fit' with school inclusion policy.

Amongst other measures the Education Reform Act (1988) delegated financial and management control from LEAs to school governing bodies, reduced LEA services to schools and introduced the National Curriculum (see Chapter 2: 2.3.4). It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that the increase in the use of schools as sites for out-of-school services in the early 1990s followed closely upon this. As noted previously government guidance in October 1989 outlined the potential for the use of school sites. And schools themselves were perhaps particularly likely to welcome external agencies onto their premises in order to raise income to support the school budget. Moreover, the provision of a range of activities on the school site could offer easily accessible opportunities for children to engage in some of the activities which were - as a result of the reduction in LEA services and the introduction of the National Curriculum - given less emphasis in the school day (e.g. Physical Education (PE), music, drama).

In her recent survey of 'school inclusion' Ball identifies a typology of current inclusive practices: including increased representation of parents and community representatives on school governing bodies; increased communication between the school and the

home about the child's progress; support provided by schools to help families discharge their responsibilities (e.g. health, guidance, home-school support posts); family and community help for schools; schools' encouragement of learning activities at home; collaborations and exchanges with community agencies that provide access to community and support services for children; and the promotion of community education services (1998:56-7). Ball notes, however, that development is slowest in the latter two categories which are furthest from the curriculum culture. Importantly, for the purposes of this analysis of out-of-school policy, she notes the tensions which are created for schools in attempting to work inclusively whilst at the same time fulfilling the demands of the National Curriculum. Schools are hard-pressed for time, space and energy to develop work outside the immediate curriculum remit and the recent government emphasis on social inclusion creates some intractable dilemmas:

At a time when the school's part of the (social) contract has been clarified in a National Curriculum - a set of standards and an apparently agreed agenda for the 'effective school' - along comes another set of demands, not part of that agenda but without which, it seems it cannot be achieved. (Ball 1998:54)

I would suggest here that the study support initiative represents a neat '*policy solution*' to these conflicting demands which are placed upon schools. In many respects the initiative 'fits' with inclusive practices. Study support is offered out-of-hours on the school premises; parents and representatives from local community groups and agencies may be involved and may work as 'partners' in collaboration with schools; centres aim to improve self-esteem and children's interest in and capacity for learning as well as to improve educational achievement; and study support services may also be integrated with care services. However, in other key respects the initiative is tailored centrally around schools' priority to teach the National Curriculum and to improve achievement. As a school-co-ordinated, and school-based venture aimed at raising standards, it is entirely in keeping with this goal.



### 3.4.3 *The links between childcare and study support*

In 'Extending opportunity: a national framework for study support,' the DfEE describes how close links between providers of study support and childcare can:

enhance the quality of both...and are essential if all pupils - especially those who go to childcare after school - are to have the opportunities of taking part in study support (1998:15)

The DfEE goes on to note that:

In some cases schools and childcare providers work together to provide an integrated scheme offering both study support for all pupils and childcare for all those who need it. (1998:15)

However, on closer analysis of the most recent childcare and study support initiatives, it is difficult to understand *the precise financial, organisational and substantive mechanisms* by which this professed government commitment to increased integration of care and education will actually be realised in practice. There appear to be two separately funded initiatives - £300m for out-of-school childcare (1998-2003) and £200m of National Lottery money from the New Opportunities Fund for study support. Whilst the government has set up fifty pilot projects (£1m from the DfEE, working in collaboration with business supporters), and some of these combine childcare and study support, it is unclear how any out-of-school models which emerge from this pilot will be funded.

Interestingly, on this point, the DfEE framework document notes some key differences between the two types of service:

Study support will normally involve qualified teachers and explicit links to schools and school development plans, but these are not essential components of quality childcare. The amount of study support provided for any one pupil is likely to be one or two hours a week on average; childcare needs to be available regularly and for the hours when parents are engaged in work, education and training. Study support is normally free to pupils, while charges are usually made for childcare. (1998:15)

These different emphases surely raise problems for service integration in practice. For example, what charging systems will apply in integrated schemes, and who will be seen to be offering which services - and to which children - when?

#### ***3.4.4 Children's participation rights***

This wide scale expansion of out-of-school services on school sites for broadly educational purposes raises some important questions in relation to children's participation rights. And if study support centres are to be available in every community - as is planned - then this almost amounts to a universalist service: and certainly a critical intervention in the lives of many children.

Arguably, these developments represent a further 'corralling' of greater numbers of children into institutions - in this case, the institution of the school. The study support initiative emphasises a key role for school managers in co-ordinating study support and for teachers in its provision. Together, this could be understood as effectively amounting to an extension of the school day (and an expansion of the time that children will spend in the social environment of the school which is not conducive to their rights as participants (see Chapter 2: 2.4.2). Of course, the counter-argument may be made that schooling is compulsory whereas study support is entered into voluntarily. However, this in turn, raises further important questions about the real degree of choice which children have about how and where they spend their time, particularly where adult fears limit children's use of public spaces. And if government plans to integrate care and study support are implemented, then children's choices may be further compromised where parental work hours requires attendance at an out-of-school centre.

Perhaps what is really at issue in this debate about study support - and in the wider discussion so far - are some more fundamental issues, namely:

- What is meant by the term 'education' in relation to children? And

- Who should participate in setting and implementing this educational agenda?

Few people today would be likely to dispute the view that education amounts to more than the sum of a child's learning within the school environment. Educationalists - like psychologists - commonly recognise that children learn from birth through a range of different experiences and in a range of contexts; from parents, from siblings, and from social relationships that are developed outside the immediate family. And whilst government policy as long ago as the post-war years tended to equate education with schooling (for discussion see Macbeth and Ravn 1994) successive governments since the Plowden Report (DES 1967), have recognised the considerable opportunities for learning that are offered outside the school, and particularly within the home. Nevertheless, as Ball observes in her discussion of *current* education policy:

The preoccupation of education {ie education officials} with what goes on inside the school premises has shifted the balance away from the development and learning opportunities that individual children and young people may find elsewhere. (1998:54)

Importantly also, the increasing policy emphasis given to the promotion of positive home-school relations since the late 1960s - *though founded on a recognition of children's learning outside school* - has been ultimately directed towards improving educational achievement in school-defined terms.<sup>49</sup> And in 1990s Britain where educational achievement is defined in direct relation to test results in Key Stages and to GCSE exam performance, and where the time for arts, drama, music and other non-core curriculum subjects is constrained, these terms are increasingly narrow.

In making these points, I do not intend to suggest that seeking to maximise educational achievement is in itself an undesirable policy goal. Children themselves may wish to excel in these school-defined terms and to benefit in the long-term from the enhanced employment prospects that accompany exam success. Rather, I wish to contextualise the influence of current education policy on out-of-school service development within the broader conceptual framework of this chapter - and to raise

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<sup>49</sup> A recent example of this is the DfEE Home-School Agreement initiative (see Chapter 2:2.4.2).

some of the dilemmas which this poses for children's participation. In particular, I would suggest that present-day education policy reduces the time available to children to participate in learning outside the National Curriculum and largely ignores children's rights both to participate in determining the kinds of learning opportunities that are offered to them and to contribute actively to the ethos and environment of schools (see also Chapter 2: 2.4.2). The study support initiative has been introduced within this broader policy context. I would suggest that this initiative - though *universalist* and *complementary* in intent and design - is primarily founded around a *compensatory* model of service provision, within which children who are '*at educational risk*' are provided with opportunities to make up for their educational disadvantage.

### **3.5 Key Themes and Influences: Concluding Thoughts**

The discussion of out-of-school policy and service development in this chapter is both informed by and raises some critical questions about how and why children should be spending their time. Should they be extending their time in schools, at 'out-of-school' study support centres, in order to raise their levels of achievement for future employment gains? Or should they be going to out-of-school centres, perhaps in non-school settings, for other kinds of broader learning opportunities? Should children be offered instead opportunities for free play in a less formal adult-organised environment? And what are such services ultimately for? Are they primarily to serve the needs of the adult-labour market? Or are they predicated more centrally on adult-defined ideas about children's 'needs': an investment for the benefit of children's time-future? And what about children's time-present? For example, how much is the recent policy focus on raising children's self-esteem linked with ensuring that children live happy childhoods in the here and now - and how much is it an acceptable means towards the priority goal of improving test and exam results? And whose perspectives on these questions should count? Those of elected government and of policy-makers? Those of parents and carers, or those of service providers and developers? Or those who have been commonly constructed as the passive recipients of services - the children themselves?

I have illustrated the key influence of societal concerns about risks both to and from children and government pre-occupation with educational achievement on recent out-of-school service development. My analysis gives separate consideration to these influences, but both are underpinned by the prevailing ideas and understandings about children discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2.2). The expansion in childcare services is premised upon ideas that children need safe places where they can be offered care and protection whilst their carers are unavailable to them. Such services - it is argued - may act to compensate for social and (to a degree) educational disadvantage. And the expansion in study support represents an increasing emphasis on the role of out-of-school services in compensating for educational disadvantage. Both these initiatives combine a welfarist focus on 'at risk' children with a developmentalist concern with children's time-future. Founded within this conceptual framework, they largely ignore the question of the role of services in children's time-present and the role of children as social actors in contributing to the development and operation of such services.

In contrast to this our Children's Centre idea is underpinned not by welfarism and developmentalism but by work in the sociology of childhood (see Chapter 2: 2.2.3). The final section of this chapter explores the conceptual and policy-significance of the Children's Centre model in the light of both Chapters 2 and 3.

### **3.6 The Children's Centre Model**

As I outlined in Chapter 1 (1.5) the Children's Centre concept emphasises two key inter-related features which are the focus for this thesis. The concept:

- is underpinned by the basic principle that children should be active participants in service development;
- builds not on the remits of individual services (health, welfare, education) but crosses these, emphasising integrated, non-stigmatising and universal service provision.

Additionally, the Centre concept:

- crosses the traditional age divide between primary and secondary school.

The first and perhaps the most critical point to be made here is that - with its emphasis on children as participants - the Children's Centre concept is *not based* on pre-determined adult-based ideas about either: *what* children in general '*need*', or *which* particular children may be '*in need*'. Berry Mayall and I envisaged that a range of broadly educational, recreational and health/welfare services would be developed at the Centre but that the programme content was to be determined through a process of responsive consultation with the children who used it, rather than in response to adult ideas about which services children *should have* or which services they *might benefit from*. We thought that the Centre should be established in a socio-economically deprived area and that it should be open *to all children* aged between 8-14 in the site school and in three of the local feeder primaries. Thus, children would not be identified and targeted as 'in need' or as 'problems' - and - as far as is realistically possible given established adult-child power relationships - it would be the children themselves who would choose whether or not they wished to attend. Importantly, they would not be the object of a 'referral process' led by concerned adults, but rather they would be active agents expressing their own needs and wishes. Whilst we recognised that the Children's Centre might ultimately offer some *compensation* for social disadvantage the model gave emphasis to *complementarity* - and to children's choices in defining how they wished to spend their time.

The original idea for the Children's Centre was refined into a proposed operational framework through the process of feasibility study consultations with children, with parents and carers and with local agency staff (see Chapter 1: 1.6 and Hood and Mayall 1997). In response to parent and carer views we proposed that the Centre should offer a care service as well as a drop-in. Thus like other out-of-school care centres, it would provide safe accommodation for children and might facilitate maternal employment and study. However, whilst we envisaged that the care provision would be mainly required by parents and carers of primary children and the

drop-in would be mainly used by secondary children, we saw no necessity for strict age demarcations between the two services. The children themselves suggested a wide range of topics that they might wish to learn about in a new centre. Most of these were non-curriculum topics, suggesting that children were enthusiastic about the possibilities of extending their opportunities for learning beyond those offered within formal schooling. Many children were keen to have greater opportunities to participate in sporting activities than were currently available to them either at school or outside it. Children also indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to talk privately with an adult about day-to-day issues and difficulties that were concerning them and our proposals for the establishment of a centre suggested that - in response to this - staff may wish to develop a 'Listening Ear' service - a readily accessible, non-stigmatising opportunity for an individual child or a group of children to meet and talk with a sympathetic adult.

Essentially, Berry and I were developing a social experiment - to see if it was possible for an out-of-school service to be developed in participation with children and in a way which crossed the traditional service boundaries between the services that usually work with them. This was not a *care service* aiming to facilitate maternal employment and improve children's well-being, nor was it a *study support service* aiming to improve children's self-esteem and their educational achievement. Rather, the model combines and integrates care, education and health elements, and the balance between these is determined in response to service users. There is the potential, therefore, that the model - once operationalised - can lead to the development of a wide range of services: to curriculum based and complementary learning opportunities, to opportunities for play, to a variety of health and welfare services. This innovative model assigns children a position as social actors with a role to play in influencing the development of services, rather than a position as passive subjects and recipients of services. The conceptual framework here is notably distinct from the welfarist and compensatory thinking which has had a key influence on out-of-school service development and within which children are deemed to be 'at risk' or 'in need' of something additional to that which might otherwise be available to them. Instead, the Children's Centre model draws on the principles of universality and complementarity. It emphasises also an idea of education which is broader and less instrumental than the

understanding of education which informs current education policy and the study support initiative. Above all it affirms the importance of children's rights to participate in deciding what kinds of activities to engage in and how their out-of-school lives should be lived.

The picture is of course much more complicated than this. Within a children's rights perspective, it might also be argued that if children had any real degree of choice they would opt perhaps to play out with friends, to play football endlessly, or to go home - and that they would not choose to attend any form of organised out-of-school provision. Following this line of argument, the proposed out-of-school centre might be understood as just one more example of the institutionalisation of children; and further the decision to base it on a school site and employ staff who worked closely with the school might represent little more than an extension of the school day. Such arguments are important and must be recognised as having value. They reflect some of the complex ground that is entered into when one begins to try to link theory with practice in the pre-existing socio-economic world and to debate some of the dilemmas in the implementation of 'children's participation'. They link directly also to some of the key questions for the research. We were interested to find out whether children would choose to attend an out-of-school centre on a drop-in basis; we were interested to discover what kinds of opportunities and activities they would ask for; we wanted to find out whether and how far staff would be able to respond to children's expressed needs and wishes; and we were interested to see whether it was possible to develop an out-of-school centre on a school site which nevertheless had a quite separate function and identity from the school.

The discussion in Chapters 1 to 3 has been, in the main, conceptual. Chapter 4 focuses on bridging the gap between theory and practice. It provides a discussion of key issues in the implementation of children's participation, and it draws on some practice examples in education, welfare and health services to suggest constraining and helpful factors within this implementation process.



## 4. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION RIGHTS: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

### 4.1 Introduction

Of particular interest to me is the expectation generated by and among children's rights advocates that the legal system will somehow be able to deliver this utopia, that by transforming what amount to moral precepts into law, the matter becomes one of simply having the will to enforce the law against those who hold out against it, the rights deniers. (King 1997:161)

Michael King's rather cynical statement about the prospects for implementation of the UNCRC encapsulates a critical concern which has become the subject of recent literature by children's rights writers and others writing about children's services, namely: How can the measures which are introduced in the Convention be translated into policy and into practice? And what factors serve to promote or impede this process? (see for example, Lansdown 1998b; Cowie 1994; Sinclair 1996; Cloke 1995; Himes 1993)

This chapter examines and discusses conceptual, policy and practice issues in the conceptualisation and implementation of children's participation rights both *within* and *across* children's health, welfare and educational services. The Chapter has three sections.

In the first section (4.2) I discuss the inter-relatedness of children's participation rights to provision and protection rights and I look at differing interpretations of children's participation. I follow this with an exploration of some of the structural measures and attitudinal shifts which may be required in the implementation of children's participation rights, and I briefly review progress to date in the UK.

In the second section (4.3) I draw on some practice-based initiatives in education, welfare and health services where the aim has been to promote participative and multi-agency ways of working.

I end in 4.4 by highlighting some of the findings about constraining or helpful factors and with a brief summary of some of the key practice issues.

## **4.2 Children's Participation and the Implementation Process**

### ***4.2.1 Participation rights: interrelatedness with other rights in the Convention***

As I suggested in Chapter 2 (2.3.2), provision, protection and participation rights are related and should be analysed, therefore, in the context of one another. This inter-relationship has practical implications for implementation, a point discussed in some of the children's rights literature (e.g. Wintersberger 1996; Agathanos-Georgopolou 1993; Luckner-Babel 1995). Wintersberger argues that it is not possible to honour children's participation rights without first honouring their rights to provision and protection (1996:204). For example, in some parts of the world there are fundamental barriers to children's participation because of poverty, slave labour, malnutrition and ill health. And in this country it might be argued that we make inadequate provision in services and resources for children, that children are constrained and oppressed; and so that we provide few arenas or opportunities for children's participation.

In a similar vein Agathanos-Georgopoulou notes that provision, protection and participation rights:

cannot be studied or practiced in isolation of the other, while their order of priority may depend on political, social, group or individual circumstances (1993:70)

She comments that in some cultures, children and young people are not allowed to speak in front of adults, thus to promote these children's participation may in effect increase their need to be protected. Of more immediate relevance to this country, she uses the example of sexually abused children being heard in the adult-oriented court environment to illustrate that upholding the principle of participation (as laid out in

Article 12 of the Convention (see Chapter 2: 2.3.2) may not always be in children's best interests. The author goes on to note that:

The issue of children's participation - a major point of the Convention - needs delicate and thoughtful interpretations to avoid its development into situations of children's victimization and exploitation for the interests of adults and of the system itself. (1993:70)

These points about the *inter-relatedness* and *context-specific* nature of children's participation are important both in the wider international context and for the purposes of this analysis of implementation in UK services.

Micha de Winter (1997:37) suggests that participation has been variously interpreted (in Western countries) as:

- a serviceable means of integrating young people into a given social structure without enabling them to exert any influence themselves;
- a way to strengthen the social influence and power of young people;
- instrumental in giving young people a chance to develop into competent, independent and responsible fellow citizens - or 'education in democratic citizenship.'

These interpretations reflect the very different 'purposes' to which the participation articles (12, 13, 31) (see Chapter 2: 2.3.2) can be deployed in practice. The first has much in common with ideas of 'token' representation of marginalised groups within consultation processes and on decision-making bodies. Arguably, the second is more representative of the true spirit of the Convention. However, this interpretation raises questions about the extent to which young people's power *can* be strengthened and *should* be strengthened - and both of these questions have prompted considerable debate amongst adults. De Winter's third interpretation is interesting because it emphasises the importance of participation rights in preparing children for their future as adults. But, children's participation can also be understood by means of Article 12

to include the promotion of children's political rights *in the here and now* within a democratic society (see Verhellen 1993:62-64 for discussion) an interpretation which has more in common again with the second of de Winter's categories.

#### ***4.2.2 Participation rights and a cross-service perspective***

If children's participation rights - as a way to 'strengthen the social influence and power of young people' (de Winter 1997) are to be fully honoured then the implementation process must also develop a 'cross-service' perspective, in place of a perspective which views children's participation as belonging to one service, but not to another (see also Chapter 2: 2.3.1). A quotation from a Minister provides a useful exemplar here:

When asked in the House of Commons about the discrepancies relating to participation between the Education Bill (for the Education Act 1993) and the Children Act (England and Wales)1989 (see Chapter 2: 2.3.4 and 2.4.3), the Minister in question replied:

The answer is that the (Children) Act ranges much more widely on welfare issues, inter-personal relations and the child's existence in a social environment, whereas the Bill deals with more strictly educational matters. It is at least arguable that there is a difference between taking full account of a young person's attitudes and responses in a social and welfare context and asking the child to make a judgement, utter an opinion or give a view on his or her educational requirements. (Hansard 1993a cited in Hill and Aldgate 1996:96-7)

This is a prime example of 'compartmentalised' thinking, underpinned by conflicting assumptions. The child in the 'social environment' inhabits a different world from the child in education: and the child's view concerning 'personal' matters in the social context is given greater value than his or her views concerning education. What rationale might underlie the Minister's statements? The comments appear to reflect an idea that children cannot judge the kinds of knowledge that they need (their so-called 'educational requirements') when, being children, they do not possess the knowledge to do so. Reflecting the government's increasingly instrumental understanding of

education (see Chapter 3: 3.4), they also suggest a related idea that children are incompetent to comment on the knowledge they require because they cannot (or should not) be commenting on the wider employment/societal needs which education is designed to meet.

In an article on the interpretation of Article 12, Lucker-Babel notes that:

The more the decision to be taken has imminent and heavy consequences on the child, the more the child's opinion deserves an important consideration. (1995:399)

The word 'imminent' is important here. Decisions about children's lives in the welfare sphere often involve critical matters - changes in parenting, support, residence - which have implications for the child's *present* life (as well, of course, as their future) (see Chapter 2: 2.4.3). It appears that distinctions between time-present and time-future may also underpin the Minister's comments. Children are deemed competent to have a view on *personal* and *present* issues, but incompetent to comment on issues that are constructed as *less personal* (societal) issues of time-future. Such compartmentalised thinking is rarely made so explicit but it serves to contextualise some of the challenges for cross-service implementation of children's participation.

#### ***4.2.3 Implementation: developing a model for analysis in the UK service context***

The relationship between the articulation of children's participatory rights within the Convention and the use of participatory practices within services 'on the ground ' can be analysed in terms of the inter-relationships between government and policy-makers; research (*researchers*); practice (*service managers, practitioners*); and children themselves. Within such a model, the implementation process will be constructed through the intersections of these sets of interests; and will be influenced by the prevailing UK political, economic, cultural, historical and social climate.

As Cloke notes:

Ideally there should be a seamless link between policy, research and practice with each component informing the other, thereby leading to improved provision to children and young people. (1995:276)

However, neat divisions cannot be made between these interest groups - and they do not relate to each other as equal and consensual partners. There are important power and status differences between children and adults and between the adult groups; the interests of children and adults are not always harmonious; and researchers, policy-makers and practitioners may also have differing and conflicting agendas (see for example, Hood, Mayall and Oliver 1999; Cloke and Davies 1995).

Further, in focussing on the process of implementing change *in services* this kind of model gives insufficient weight to the *family domain* and to the relationship between children's status in inter-generational relations in the private sphere of the home and their status in the public sphere. The implementation of children's participation rights involves a shift in traditional adult-child power relations across a range of spheres - changes in parent-child relations as well as changes in adult-child relations within particular services.<sup>50</sup>

#### **4.2.4 Key 'ingredients' for implementation**

There are, nevertheless, a number of structural, organisational and practical measures which can be understood as a 'pre-requisite' for implementation; and the model above provides a useful starting point for categorisation into measures which may be taken by government and policy-makers, and measures which may be taken by service managers and practitioners.

The Convention and associated implementation guidelines and documents (e.g. Ruxton 1998; Hodgkin and Newell 1998; Association of Metropolitan

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<sup>50</sup> And the two domains are, of course, linked. It is of interest here that the Children Scotland Act (1995) includes a much more detailed definition of parental responsibilities than the Children Act (1989). Under the Scottish legislation parents are obliged to consult with children (taking account of their age and maturity) when making decisions that affect them.

Authorities/Children's Rights Office 1995) suggest that measures by government and policymakers should include:

- mechanisms for distribution of basic factual information about children's participatory rights to both adults and children;
- mechanisms for gathering statistical data on children and their status;
- organisations and people with responsibility for actively promoting participatory policies and practices, and for monitoring progress;
- written policy and practice guidelines.

And at the professional/practice level the literature suggests that there should be:

- training for service-managers and practitioners on children's rights issues;
- resources - to give practitioners the necessary time and space to develop new practices.

And what of children themselves?

In an essay on the implementation of the Convention Himes (1993) notes that:

In working towards a sustained commitment to children's rights, and the achievement of intergenerational equity, it is critical that children themselves, both as young citizens with rights as their own and as future adults and parents, participate in this process of building awareness, understanding and involvement relating to children's rights. (1993:9)

Clearly, children are to a large degree dependent on adults and adult-led actions to improve their rights by virtue of their low social status and lack of access to adult resources. Indeed, some might even argue here that the children's rights movement is

largely led by adults on behalf of 'unwilling' children.<sup>51</sup> However, even within these constraints, there are many examples of children playing an active role both in research (sometimes as researchers) and in campaigning groups to change policy and practice (see 4.3 below).

Whilst Himes and others (e.g. Save the Children 1995) recognise the importance of children's active involvement in implementation, it is ironic that some of the children's services literature appears to emphasise the kinds of measures that *adults* might take, and gives little attention to the role of children as social actors within this process.

#### 4.2.5 *Structural measures*

As I noted in Chapter 2 (2.3.1) the UK's record in developing structures at national and at government level for the implementation of children's rights has fallen far short of that in many other countries. There is little attempt by government to collect annual statistics on children.<sup>52</sup> And whilst Scotland and Wales have designated ministers for children, there is no such post in England.<sup>53</sup>

Different ratifying countries have adopted a range of approaches to the Convention requirement to disseminate information about the UN provisions to both adults and children. In Sweden, for example, the government has given a substantial grant to voluntary bodies to provide information for adults and children. There has been no such wide-scale investment in information distribution in Britain. And a recent study by Alderson (2000b) has highlighted a widespread lack of knowledge about the Convention and children's rights amongst children themselves.

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<sup>51</sup> These arguments are in a similar vein to earlier critiques of feminists who campaigned on behalf of other women. (A critical difference here is of course that all women share adult status).

<sup>52</sup> However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, research studies have increasingly focussed on collecting data about the status of children (eg Childhood as a Social Phenomenon - see Chapter 2 (2.2.3)).

<sup>53</sup> Though, as I also noted in Chapter 2 (2.3.1), the office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights has been established in London in 2000.



The Children's Rights Office in this country has, however, encouraged Local Authorities, Health Authorities and voluntary organisations to formally adopt the Convention and use it as a tool for auditing policy and practice. Writing in 1998 Gerison Lansdown notes that over 400 organisations had already done so and that organisations in both the voluntary and the statutory sector were beginning to develop strategies for promoting participation (1998b). Children's rights officers appointed in some Local Authorities have made an important contribution.<sup>54</sup> There are also a large number of written policy and practice guidelines on implementation of the Convention (e.g. Ruxton 1998; Hodgkin and Newell 1998; Association of Metropolitan Authorities/Children's Rights Office 1995; Local Government Association/Children's Rights Officers and Advocates 1998; British Paediatric Association/Royal College of Nursing/The International Child Health Group/CRDU 1995).

#### *4.2.6 Attitudinal change*

What emerges from the literature on implementation is a consensus that no number of structural measures will bring about the implementation of children's rights without some more fundamental shifts in attitude, understanding and behaviour both *amongst* and *between* adults and children in both the public and the private domain.

As Carolyn Hamilton, the Director of the Children's Legal Centre, observes in relation to public services:

There have been institutional and government responses to the rise of children's rights. But it is not clear that those dealing with children on the streets, in schools, in the police station, in the courts or social services departments have understood the meaning of children's rights or changed their attitude towards children. (1996:1)

These fundamental shifts include: changes in adult attitude and behaviour towards children, the development of shared understanding of the meaning of children's

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<sup>54</sup> However, as Cloke notes, children's rights officers have tended to focus on children who are in residential care, rather than on the rights of children generally (1995:273).

participation *amongst and between* adults and children; and a commitment amongst both adults and children to its promotion both as a principle and in practice. Save the Children (1995) suggest that adults need to *re-orientate* themselves in relation to the way they think about children: that we (adults) should regard children as a social group who contribute through their presence, through their construction of relationships and through their use of time and place; children should be seen here as a 'resource' for society rather than as a 'cost' to society. Further, Save the Children (1995) argues that instead of individualising and pathologising children (see Chapter 2 : 2.2.2 and 2.4.3) we should think of children as a minority social group who inter-relate with adult groups; and we should use this framework to consider how their lives are conditioned by adult norms and policies, how far they are powerless, and how far they can participate in decision-making.

Such changes are difficult to achieve. In the context of UK children's service provision, children's rights training for social work and health staff is limited and there is no such training for teachers. Resources are limited in over-stretched services. Further, as Cloke notes:

Practitioners - social workers, police, teachers, doctors, nurses and whoever else is working with children and young people - are not practising in isolation. They are as much influenced by the prevailing attitudes, ideology and system of values as the policymakers, politicians and indeed the rest of society. (1995:271)

As I have shown in Chapter 2 *developmentalist* and *welfarist* thinking continues to dominate much adult thinking about children and their status; adult-child power relations confirm children as unequal; changes in attitude are problematic to effect because they imply a clear threat to long-established patterns of inter-generational relations; and institutional and professional behaviours and practices are often deeply entrenched. To aim to develop '*shared understandings* 'of the meaning of children's participation' raises the important question of whose understandings. Whose perspectives are being included here?

And the experiences of children may also shape their attitude to the possibilities of improving their rights. Recently collected data supports the view that children do actually think of themselves in *rights terms* (Alanen, Mayall et al. forthcoming). But adults consistent failure to meet children's rights - to listen to them and to hear them - is frequently reflected in poor response rates from children - when adults seek to involve them in consultation or research; a potentially 'vicious circle' described by a researcher seeking to consult with children on a Children's Service Plan:

The most striking factor emanating from this research was that the expectations of young people were uniformly low and that they did not believe that their opinions were sought or valued. They were suspicious of why we were interested in their opinions and experiences and believed that it would have little or no effect. The negativity of their reported experiences reflects, among other things, their first opportunity to express what it feels like to be a young person using services. (cited by Willow 1997:103)

Finally, as I have suggested in 4.2.1 above, the concept of children's participation is open to very different interpretations with radically different practical implications. De Winter's categorisation suggests some of the broader purposes which might underpin adults participatory practices with children. Her categorisation - specifically about children - has features in common with Arnstein's 'ladder of citizen participation.' Arnstein (1969) suggests that citizen participation can be rated on a 'continuum' from a position of non-participation (and at its most extreme this amounts to manipulation) to a position of citizen power (where those concerned are in control and totally responsible for decisions). His model and a similar model by Hart (1997:41) have been adopted for analysis of the extent to which children are positioned as active participants within an organisation.

### 4.3 Children's Participation: Examples from Practice

#### 4.3.1 Introduction

Some of the most innovative and creative examples of children's involvement as participants in policy and service development are to be found in community development and related projects in Third World settings<sup>55</sup> (e.g. see Save the Children 1995; Johnson, Hill and Ivan-Smith 1995; Kefyalew 1996; Van Beers 1996). The Save the Children Alliance has been particularly active in developing work with children as researchers, for example, in capacity-building programmes in Ethiopia where children aged 10-12 took an active role in carrying out the research (see Kefyalew 1996). And Save the Children (UK) has also been at the forefront of promoting children's participation in community development in this country.

Despite the relative lack of progress on structural implementation measures and despite the lack of training and resources (see 4.2.4 above), there is a growing number of initiatives in the UK which aim to increase children and young people's active participation in planning and decision-making. Many of these are in community development projects and in local government. Willow (1997) for example, lists over 50 cases of corporate strategies and long and short-term projects which aim to increase children and young people's participation in local government. There are many projects also where children have played a key role as researchers in documenting and improving their local services (e.g. see Howarth 1997; Miller 1997; Alderson 2000a).

It is within this exciting though fragmented and unco-ordinated framework of changing practice, that I turn now to examine developments within and across education, welfare and health services.

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<sup>55</sup> Children form a large percentage of the population in Third World countries and they often participate as workers in village life.

#### ***4.3.2 Participation in practice: education, welfare, health services***

My search of recent literature suggests that research and practice initiatives within education, welfare and health services can be divided broadly into two groups; those initiatives which have the primary aim of: increasing understanding of children's experiences of services (e.g. studies which explore how far children view themselves as participants); and those which more explicitly set out to promote and increase children's participation in practice. There appear to be considerably more examples of the former than the latter. This is probably not surprising: it is considerably easier to demonstrate children's experiences of - and lack of - participation, than it is to implement participatory practices; and of course, the two kinds of studies are related - we need to increase knowledge of children's experience as a basis for action. One logically follows the other.

The literature search also reveals references to the value of working in participation with children and young people, within education services:

There is a consistent body of evidence that giving children opportunities to exercise responsibility, to contribute their views, to participate in decision-making enhances teacher-pupil relationships, improves school discipline, and therefore creates an environment more conducive to effective education. (Lansdown 1998a:9)

within welfare:

Research into the decision-making processes of social workers suggests that when children and young people are involved decisions are more likely to be based on accurate and complete information, are more likely to be implemented and are more likely to have beneficial outcomes. (Sinclair 1996:91)

and within health:

It is still unusual for people in the health service to consult consumers in planning though this concept is gaining credence. It is even rarer, although not unheard of, for children and young people to be asked. However, where it has been done effects are beneficial, resulting in better and

more appropriate information, better targeted services and resources, and improved self-esteem amongst all those involved. (British Paediatric Association 1995:20)

The message from these quotations is clear and remarkably consistent across the services: that there are good reasons to involve children in service development and in decision-making. Interestingly, but again unsurprisingly, children's participation is justified primarily in terms of service outcomes,<sup>56</sup> rather than in broader terms of principle or rights. This almost certainly reflects the increasing pressures on public services to prove themselves by developing measurable outcomes (see Chapter 2: 2.3.3.3). Within a climate where 'outcomes' take precedence issues of value or principle may be given less emphasis; further, arguments based on principle alone may have limited effect, particularly where adult attitudes to children are hard to shift (see 4.2.6 above).

Arguably, however, there are two potentially conflicting strands of thinking about children which are reflected here. Whilst the principle of children's rights to be involved in decisions is increasingly accepted and supported across the three service areas, professionals who are preoccupied by outcomes continue to lay heavy stress on the *impact of services on children*. Children are thus positioned both as *active participants* in decision-making within services but as *objects* or *passive recipients* of services.

#### 4.3.2.1 Education

In Chapter 2 I discussed the development of children's councils in schools (2.4.2). Other examples of 'participative' trends in education include an increase in the use of structures within which older pupils are involved in peer mentoring and support / counselling roles with their peers and with younger children. More recently, there are examples of peer-led sex education projects (e.g. see Phelps et al 1994; Frankham 1993) and of schemes (including those involving peer counselling) where students themselves have been involved in tackling the problems of bullying (e.g. see Cowie and Sharp 1992) and other behaviour issues. In primary schools, particularly, there

have been moves to develop the use of 'quality circles' to improve the school environment and to involve younger children in learning games from older children in breaktime (see Cowie 1994). Also, there are examples of schools where pupils are involved in landscaping and gardening (Titman 1994; also see DES 1990) and where children write articles for school newspapers.<sup>57</sup>

Initiatives on bullying and on whole-school behaviour policy development appear to reflect positive responses to the Elton Report's (DES 1989) emphasis on involving children as participants (see also Chapter 2: 2.4.2); and the other initiatives noted above allow for children's increased participation in shaping some aspects of the social and physical environment of the school. However, such initiatives closely define and prescribe the limits to children's participation to specific areas of school life. They do not allow for children to have significant influence, either as individuals or as a social group, on what they learn, how they learn or on the ways in which the school operates. Like many of the more long-standing initiatives on parental involvement in schools they adopt a model of participation which is primarily founded on supporting the prevailing culture and values of the school (and schools in general), rather than one which offers participants any significant opportunities for increased influence and power) (see also Crozier 1998; Vincent 1996).

There are, however, two interesting examples of education initiatives which illustrate the potential for different interpretations of children's participation:

'Changing our school' (Highfield School and Alderson 1997) is an account by school staff and children of the processes by which Highfield Junior School (in Plymouth) changed its ethos and social environment. Prior to the initiative, the school had low academic achievement, a history of behaviour and discipline problems, and a record of exclusions. Staff recognised and drew on children's potential for actively contributing to change and, using a combination of class circle time, mediation and a whole school council, staff and children together developed an approach within which children took

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<sup>56</sup> There are parallels here with earlier moves to involve parents and carers as participants in decision-making and service development in public services.

direct democratic responsibility for the school management and ethos. After the initiative was well established, there were no exclusions and children, rather than adults, were taking prime responsibility for sorting out behaviour difficulties; academic achievement also improved. Children's involvement extended to many aspects of school operation, including the recruitment of teaching staff. The account provides a detailed and discursive description of the change process at Highfield school, noting problems encountered along the way.

The Participation in Education Group (PEG) is a group of young people aged from about 8-25 which has been involved in research and campaigning work toward improving children's democracy within education and schools. The group has carried out its own research into topics such as 'the unhealthiness of schools'; chaired and run meetings to plan conferences; and has made representations to adult professionals and to the Department for Education and Employment (see Alderson 2000a).

Together, these two initiatives suggest that children can play an active role as participants in contributing to the running of individual schools *and in* contributing to education policy itself. The PEG group is particularly interesting because it offers an extremely unusual example of children forming an alliance outside the context of the individual school to campaign on issues pertaining to schools and education more broadly.

#### 4.3.2.2 *Welfare*

Many practical initiatives to promote children's rights in welfare services have been developed by children's rights officers appointed in local authorities, by other groups set up to represent the interests of children in care (e.g. the National Association of Young People in Care (NAYPC) and the Voice for the Child in Care) (see Lansdown 1995) and by national voluntary organisations such as Save the Children UK, National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). There are also examples of initiatives which have drawn

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<sup>57</sup> 'Kids Can Hack it', The Guardian, 5.11.1997: cited in Mayall 1999:21.



extensively on children's views in designing methods of monitoring service provision (see, for example, Davies and Dotchin 1995).

During the early to mid 1990s a range of research studies sought to ascertain how far children's rights to participation - as framed in the UNCRC and in the Children Act (England and Wales)(1989) - were being realised in practice. Fletcher (1993) highlighted the extent to which young people in residential and foster care felt marginalised from decisions affecting their lives; and the NAYPC pointed to consistent failure to involve young people in decisions about: children's home policies and closures, placement and family contact, and the development of child care plans and moves towards independence. Willow (1995) suggested that young people in residential care were realistic when asked for suggestions about the service they received; and that there was a relationship between children's participation and their levels of self-esteem.

Several studies have indicated that aspects of social work practice are changing in response to the participation measures in the Children Act. Children and young people are more routinely invited to attend planning or review meetings; and children, as well as parents, are increasingly invited to child protection conferences (e.g. see Katz 1995). However, studies seeking children's views have shown that procedural changes alone are inadequate. For example, children may not be comfortable with attending large and official gatherings (Buchanan 1995; Westcott 1995) and sometimes they may have preferred some of those present at reviews to be absent but felt unable to say so (Buchanan 1995). Studies point also to the importance of finding appropriate channels for listening to all children; and to the importance of readily available and accessible information, including information about rights.

Much of the current debate in the social welfare field focuses on the barriers to implementation of children's participation: including difficulties that may be experienced by professionals in supporting and working with both parents and children; the tensions between professionals commitment to the protection of children and their role in facilitating their participation; the confusion that exist between ideas of 'empowerment' and participation; and the problems for implementation which are

associated with attitude and with lack of staff training and resources (e.g. see Cloke and Davies, 1995). That this debate is taking place at all, reflects significant progress. And the Cloke and Davies (1995) edited collection 'Participation and empowerment in child protection' offers a thorough, in-depth look at some of these complex and difficult issues which implementation poses for practice.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Health*

As I discussed in Chapter 2 (2.4.4) it appears that many of those working in the health service profession have largely accepted that children have rights as consumers to participate in decision-making about their own health (unlike in education). There are many examples of health service practice which indicate that considerable emphasis is now being placed on involving children (including young children) in decision-making about their treatment both in hospital and in the community (see for example, Goodwin 1994; Wilson 1994 and Judd 1994). And practice guidance increasingly supports and promotes children's participation rights (see Chapter 2: 2.3.3; Hogg 1996; NHS Executive 1996; Brothie (forthcoming).

Goodwin (1994:31) notes that the implementation of children's participation involves a change in professional attitude; a belief that children can cope even with negative information; an individualised approach and the provision of ongoing support. Practice examples and guidance also confirm the importance of attitudinal change; and of information and time for full and sensitive discussion of proposed treatments with children:

Children having sufficient understanding depends largely on the skills and willingness of adults to allow them the information and discussion they require. (British Paediatric Association/Royal College of Nursing/The International Child Health Group/CRDU 1995:18).

However, many of these encouraging developments in the health arena focus on the *decisions of individual children concerning their individual treatment*. They also focus on very ill children rather than on the experiences of the (majority) of children who are well. And though children and young people are increasingly involved as contributors to preventive health-related initiatives in the community (e.g. see school

peer-led sex education in 4.3.2.1 above; and Waldman and Hague 1996) they make little contribution to the broader planning of community health services. My exploration of the literature finds only limited reference to projects or initiatives which aim to involve children as active participants in *shaping* the health services they receive either in hospital<sup>58</sup> or in the community.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.4 Conclusion

In Chapter 2 I suggested that varying understandings about children as participants underpinned professional thinking in education, welfare and health services, and (at the beginning of Chapter 3) that these understandings had direct implications for practice.

My brief discussion of practice in the three service areas reflects these variations.

In summary: in *education* the opportunities for children to exercise rights of participation are limited; and there is no strong professional culture to support and promote children's participation although exceptional initiatives such as Highfield School and PEG suggest different possibilities. In response to the Children Act (England and Wales)(1989) *welfare* studies have documented the extent of children's participation; and research (some of it involving children themselves) is playing an important role in the development of implementation initiatives. *Health* service practice reflects a growing acceptance that children have a right to participate in decisions about their treatment although the extent to which children collectively influence service provision is questionable.

But there are also common themes which cut across the service boundaries: common understandings of constraints and helpful factors in the implementation process.

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<sup>58</sup> 'Kids Count' is an unusual example of an initiative in which a range of methods were used to access children and young people's views of hospital (see Brotchie (forthcoming):151).

<sup>59</sup> Adults are also offered little opportunity to participate in planning and shaping the health services they receive.

Constraints include: lack of resources: money and time; lack of information about services and about children's rights; lack of training; unwillingness to change attitudes; resistance to change within organisations; varying understandings about the meaning of children's participation; fear of losing control to children; and fear of consequences of involving children in decision-making and planning. Helpful factors (often the converse of constraints) include: the availability of time, money and information; access to training; a common understanding of what is meant by children's participation; a willingness to listen to children; and a willingness to change.

I return to some of these in Chapters 6-9 of the thesis when I analyse the processes of children's participation in the shaping of the Children's Centre service. I move on now to Chapter 5 which focuses on methodology.

## 5. THE PROCESS AND PROGRESS OF A SPACE: METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 (1.8) I described the key differences between the focus of this thesis and the focus of the Children's Centre Studies.<sup>60</sup> Essentially, the thesis draws on the studies (and particularly the main study) in order to provide an exemplar for a wider exploration of conceptual, policy and practice related issues in the implementation of children's participation. It does this primarily through Chapter 6, 7 and 8 where the progress and process of the Centre is described and analysed with a focus on the implementation of children's participation rights. The remit of the thesis is, therefore, considerably more extensive than that of the Studies.

This distinction between thesis and studies is also relevant to this chapter. Whilst carrying out the Children's Centre Studies I was concerned with the methods as part of the process of doing the research; my focus here in the thesis is to explore some of the methodological issues arising from revisiting the research from a time distance. The Chapter was written in the Autumn of 1999, more than six months after the completion of the main study. It draws, however, on an earlier piece which I drafted in the Spring of 1998. Arguably, the analysis of methodological issues is facilitated by hindsight: as I write up the thesis itself I am 'freed' - to a degree, at least - from immersion in the research process. And the distinction between 'method' and 'methodology' is, of course, central here. Method may be defined simply as 'a mode of investigation' and methodology as 'the science of method' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary definitions) or, alternatively, 'a theory and analysis of how research should proceed' (cited in Brooks, 1994:95).

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<sup>60</sup> As a reminder to the reader: There were two consecutive studies: known as the feasibility study and the main study. I refer to these two studies together as: the Children's Centre Studies.

The Chapter is structured in three parts (see below) but in its entirety it explores the links between the research role and function, the research process and the Centre's development; with a principal focus on the main study. It is underpinned by two inter-related assumptions: firstly, a belief that the researcher cannot be entirely detached from the research process; he or she is a constituent part of those processes which are under study; and secondly, an understanding that analysis of the research process and personal reflexivity in the research role can and do serve to produce important sources of data.

During the (main) study I aimed to develop participative research methods with children in keeping with the key principles of the Children's Centre idea. Such methods aim to involve children as active subjects in the research process (see Chapter 2: 2.2.3.1 and Chapter 4: 4.3.1.1; Morrow and Richards 1996; and Mayall 1999 for discussion). But the development and application of participative research methodologies (like participative practices) is not easy. The researcher, like the practitioner, is both positioned in and influenced by prevailing patterns of child-adult relations. And in practice, 'participation' can be interpreted in a range of ways spanning from the involvement of children in shaping the research agenda and carrying out the research, to simply ensuring that children's perspectives are sought within a study. Further, this was an unusual piece of research carried out in a centre which was deliberately set up to run along democratic lines rather than in the more usual settings of home or formal institutions where access to children is typically controlled by adults. And I was concerned to collect data from both the adults who were involved in developing the Centre and the children who used it. Drawing on my experiences as researcher in this unusual 'halfway' setting, the Chapter illustrates the tensions which emerged in my attempts to work *in collaboration* with my adult research subjects *whilst also promoting children's rights as participants* within the research process.

Research is also a political activity in which the research and the researched are themselves positioned within and influenced by the wider economic and political context; where the interests of policy-makers and funders come into play, and the research process is constructed and reconstructed through the intersections of these

interest groups who may have different and sometimes competing values and priorities (see Chapter 4: 4.2.3 and Hood, Mayall and Oliver 1999). The Chapter documents and discusses the changing relationship between the research, the researched, the funders and policy-makers (primarily the DfEE) over the course of the main study. It will show how, significantly, where the research promoted the value of children's participation as a key principle in out-of-school service development, the funding of further research at the end of the study was linked directly to an expression of interest from the DfEE. Of prime concern to the DfEE was not the principle of children's participation but the question of service outcomes or impacts (see also Chapter 3 and Chapter 4: 4.3.2).

The Chapter concludes by suggesting that both the data collection process and the research and policy-making processes in this study reflected tensions between the agendas of adults and the interests of children. Thus it offers a methodological debate which mirrors and is embedded in the substantive concerns of the thesis itself.

### *5.1.1 Organisation and structure*

The three sections of the Chapter parallel the chronology of the research process:

The first (5.2) is a brief section which draws on my early account (Spring 1998). I describe and discuss my original conception of the research, its role or purpose and its methods; and I focus on the relationship between the research role or function and my positioning as researcher in relation to the researched.

The second section (5.3) explores my experiences of gaining access and collecting data: from Steering Group members, from the Centre team and from children.<sup>61</sup> I look

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<sup>61</sup> Whilst I collected some data from parents and carers, I do not draw on this here, as, in line with the substantive concerns of the thesis, the chapter focuses on data collection from children and on the processes of collaboration between the researcher and the researched.

particularly at the difficulties I experienced in developing participative methods with children whilst at the same time working in collaboration with the Centre staff.

In the third section (5.4) I explore the relationship between the research, the researched, the funders and out-of-school policy; documenting the influence of the professed government commitment to the expansion of out-of-school provision on the research process. The section ends with a discussion of the parallels between my experiences of data collection (5.3) and of negotiating a role for the research within the policy-making process (5.4).

It is important to note that as the Chapter is primarily focused on process it does not provide the reader with details of all the data collected in the course of the (main) study. However, this information is provided in Chapter 6 (6.1) where it provides a context for the discussion of the research findings which form the basis for Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

## **5.2 The Main Study: Purpose, Methods and the Role of the Researcher**

### ***5.2.1 Definition and research role***

During the feasibility study a clear model was developed for a new Children's Centre and this was summarised in 12 key features in the full proposal (see Chapter 1: 1.6). The main study was designed to focus on the Centre team's development of this model in practice, addressing the broad question:

*What are the characteristics of the processes involved in the development and operation of this universalist service, which requires multi-agency participation and in which high value is placed on children as participants in the shaping of the service? (see also Chapter 1: 1.7)*

In line with this question a range of research methods was identified with the broad aim of 'describing the process of the development of the Centre' (see 5.2.2 below).



The study was to be primarily concerned with researching processes, with a focus on understanding 'how' the Centre developed rather than on the 'outcomes' or 'results' obtained through the Centre's work. The research also aimed to consider how far the Centre developed in accordance with the 12 key features. This added an 'evaluative' element to the descriptive element of the study as it was expected that some kind of judgement or evaluation would be reached about 'how far' the Centre had developed in line with the original concept. This combination of the focus on process with an evaluative remit meant that the study could be appropriately defined as a 'process evaluation' as described by Michael Patton:

Process evaluations are aimed at elucidating and understanding the internal dynamics of how a program, organization, or relationship operates. Process studies for program evaluation focus on the following kinds of questions: What are the things people experience that make this program what it is? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program? How are clients brought into the program and how do they move through the program once they are participants? What is the nature of staff-client interactions? (1990:95)

In her discussion of the use of qualitative research methods Janet Finch (1986) distinguishes between an 'engineering' model of social research and an 'enlightenment' model (see also Harland 1996 for discussion). Finch notes, however, that in principle, there is no contradiction between research being both policy-oriented and theoretical (1986:228). And our research was geared towards affecting policy and developing understanding.

In summary, Berry and I aimed to:

- improve understanding and knowledge of children's participation and multi-agency working by documenting the opportunities and constraints which emerged in the establishment and operation of the Children's Centre service;

but we also aimed to:

- influence policy and practice by providing a model for the future development of out-of-school provision.<sup>62</sup>

Importantly, the two goals - though clearly different - were linked. Thus, the improved understanding and knowledge of children's participation and multi-agency input would be used to inform the model (see also Janet Finch (1986) for discussion of how these goals can be combined).

Patton observes that process evaluations are particularly well suited to the goal of developing models:

Process evaluations are particularly useful for dissemination and replication of model interventions where a program has served as a demonstration project or is considered to be a model worthy of replication at other sites. By describing and understanding the dynamics of program processes, it is possible to isolate critical elements that have contributed to program successes and failures. (1990:95-6)

And research which engages directly with the social world and which is geared towards change is also a political activity - in the words of MacDonald:

Evaluators do not only live in the real world of educational politics; they actually influence its changing power relationships. Their work produces information which functions as a resource for the promotion of particular interests and values. (1987:43-4)

Our study can also be understood as 'political' (in MacDonald's sense of the word) because it aimed to provide a new and innovative model for the development of children's services. Furthermore, the study served to promote 'particular interests and values.' Perhaps the most important principle underlying the original concept was the promotion of children and young people's participative rights. A number of other key principles can also be identified, notably, universality and collaborative working.

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<sup>62</sup> The relationship between research and policy is in itself a topic of considerable debate, often analysed in terms of 'models' (eg see Smith and Smith 1992). This issue will be addressed in this Chapter (5.4).

### 5.2.2 *Methods*

There were four sub-questions in the main study (see also Chapter 1: 1.7):

- a) How far and in what way do the various agencies which contribute to the Children's Centre share ideology, ethos and policies and, in the light of the extent or lack of congruence, how are practices shaped at the Centre?
- b) How far and in what ways do the agencies' remits and philosophies impact on the understandings developed at the Children's Centre of the meaning and value of children's participation?
- c) What are the processes by which children are actually involved in planning and developing the services at the Centre?
- d) What are the principal factors that affect the development of the Centre?

I aimed to address these questions - and to explore how far the Centre developed in line with the original 12 features - by studying the process of the Centre's development with:

- representatives from Hackney agencies;
- the Steering Group members;
- the staff team at the Centre (including sessional staff);
- the children and young people (primarily the users of the Centre, but also non-users who were eligible to attend - in total 1,020 children);

- the parents and carers of user children.

All these 'constituents' of the Children's Centre project were viewed as contributors to the complex developmental processes via intra-relationships within each group and via inter-relationships between some of the groups. I also aimed to explore these processes by collecting three different kinds of data from people in the five<sup>63</sup> constituents. This was data consisting of:

- 'what was said' (gathered from *interviews* with representatives from Hackney agencies, with Steering Group members, and with core and sessional staff; from *small group discussions* with children; from *attendance* at Steering Group meetings, staff meetings and multi-agency meetings, and Centre programme operation);
- 'what was done' (from *observation* of behaviour and actions of staff and of children during attendance at the Centre programme); and
- 'what was written or produced' (from minutes of staff meetings, reports, statistical data).

In addition, I planned to gather some data from parents and carers and from children using self-completion questionnaires. I was hopeful that triangulation of these different kinds of information from the five groups would generate rich and useful data and would go some way at least towards addressing validity.

### ***5.2.3 The research role or function and my positioning as researcher in relation to the researched.***

Clearly research methods are appropriately selected in relation to purpose. My chosen methods were designed to fit with the overall goals for the study. However, the

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<sup>63</sup> All the representatives from Hackney agencies who participated in the study were also Steering Group members. In the final event, therefore, there were just four groups - and not five - as originally envisaged.

picture I have presented so far neglects the more complex question of the relationship between the research role or function and the research process. How was I as a researcher planning to access and relate to the research participants in order to obtain my data?

This was not a 'once-off' collection of data from one source. I was to be involved in long-term contact with the research participants over an extended period of time. Thus, I would need to develop an appropriate research relationship and maintain this over the course of the study. I would also need to give thought to the degree to which the key values of collaboration and participation which underlined the children's centre concept should and could be upheld within the research itself. And it was important that I considered the means and processes by which the research might actually influence the development of policy and practice. Below, I outline my early thinking and resolution of some of these issues. I end the section with some brief conclusive comments before moving on to look at the data collection process in 5.3.

#### 5.2.3.1 *Early methodological and ethical dilemmas*

In the latter part of the feasibility study much of my time had been taken up with developmental work towards the establishment of the Centre (see Chapter 1: 1.6 for summary) and I recognised that - with the appointment of centre staff who would take over the 'development' role, and with the new research focus on description and evaluation, I would need to make a transition to a role that was - to a degree at least - more neutral. However, I saw a range of potential ethical and methodological problems in this concept of 'neutrality'; both in relation to the overall research purpose, and with regard to my role as researcher in relation to the researched. As I have outlined above the research was both political and oriented to policy-development; thus it was not 'value-free'. In order to collect the data as planned I would be making frequent visits to the Centre over a considerable period of time. It was important that I found ways of collaborating constructively with the adults who were involved in setting up the project, both in order to collect the data I needed and in line with the collaborative, consultative methods which had informed the feasibility study. Further, as Janet Finch points out policy-oriented qualitative research is likely to:

decisively reject the model of the detached researcher, collecting data to hand over to the powerful, in favour of the research process which accords the researched a more active role (1986: 231).

In my early account, I discussed these issues in the following terms:

To make as full as possible a transition from 'shaping' process to observing and monitoring process would have meant a 'giving up' and a 'letting go' of personal investment in the Children's Centre idea. The idea of shifting from a developmental role to a more 'neutral' observational role was also problematic in relation to the Steering Group. This had been the key forum for centre development prior to this date. How far could I include Berry in any detached observations of the workings of this group? And was it possible for me to comment as a 'detached' observer on the relationship at Steering Group between funders, the research team and members of Hackney Council? (my account: Spring 1998)

I asked myself whether it was possible to give up my developmental role at this point, and whether it was appropriate to do so. I also asked the related and important question: How far was this main study intended to be a 'summative' evaluation - in which the researcher prepares a final report at the end of the study - and how far was it a formative evaluation in which the researcher gives intermittent feedback with the possible intention of influencing action in the short-term as well as the long-term? Furthermore, might this actually be a piece of 'action research' in which the research findings were regularly used to influence the direction of the team's practice (see Patton 1990; Elliott 1991; Carr and Kemmis 1986 for discussion).

I was not in favour of the idea of developing a project, seeing whether it operated in line with a given model and 'feeding back' in the form of a summative report at the end of the study. This process implicitly denies that the researcher may have any personal and/or political investment in the project developing in any particular direction (at least until the point of the final report which may of course make recommendations concerning future development). But perhaps there are even more important ethical and practical considerations here. To repeatedly visit the Centre and

collect data whilst delaying feedback from those visits until the end of the study seemed both ethically unacceptable and extremely difficult to accomplish.

However, I was also clear that if the research was to fulfil its dual goals (see 5.2.1 above) then it should *not* seek to impact directly on the Centre's development.

I was concerned that if my findings were regularly used to influence practices then the 'natural' course of events would have been disrupted. This, in turn, might have implications for the goal of influencing policy or action as it would be difficult, in these circumstances, to propose the model as replicable elsewhere.

However, secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I believed that if I adopted this particular kind of 'action research' approach, I would be increasingly likely to ally myself with the interests and perspectives of team members. My research role would change, therefore, from being one in which I sought to study the processes of the Centre's development in order to increase understanding and knowledge of children's participation and multi-agency working: to one in which I effectively became an 'agent' of the team. In so doing, I would be understanding the processes of developing participative working practices with children from the perspective of team members alone, rather than from the perspective also of the other research participants: Steering Group members, parents and carers, other Hackney agency staff and most importantly, in this study of children's participation, of children themselves.

#### *5.2.3.2 Resolutions*

I resolved these concerns by deciding to feedback my 'findings' to research participants on a regular basis and by adopting an approach which borrowed from 'illuminative' evaluation (Parlett 1981; Parlett and Hamilton 1987) and from 'democratic evaluation' (MacDonald 1987).

Where a researcher uses illuminative evaluation it is possible that action may result as a consequence of the feedback to the researched. However, this is not the explicit intention of the research. The researcher aims primarily to represent a range of views and he or she:

assumes the position of being an orchestrator of opinions, an arranger of data, a summarizer of what is commonly held, a collector of suggestions for changes, a sharpener of policy alternatives (Parlett 1981: 224-5).

And the 'illuminative' researcher does not make direct recommendations for action:

Illuminative evaluators do not act as judges and juries but, in general, confine themselves to summing up arguments for and against different interpretations, policies and possible decisions. (Parlett 1981:224-5)

Democratic evaluative approaches are founded on a recognition that the researcher, who gathers data from diverse groups, holds considerable power by virtue of his or her knowledge across group boundaries. The approach emphasises the importance of 'feeding back' and 'checking out' data with research participants throughout the course of the evaluation. Importantly also, the democratic researcher takes account of differences in power and status between the different groups and attempts, therefore, to compensate for such variations - for example, he or she may feedback and 'check out' data with the least powerful groups before presenting this to the most powerful (see Burgess 1989).

I thought it important to develop appropriate confidentiality measures in feedback both within and between the groups of research participants, but also that the feedback process itself worked in a way which recognised and (as far as possible) adjusted for the differences in power and status between the groups. Clearly, there were differences here between the Steering Group (which was comprised of senior professionals); and the Centre staff and parents; and, perhaps most importantly, *between the adults and children themselves*. In practice, this meant that I planned to check out my analysis of data from centre team members with the team before feeding it back to the Steering Group. Similarly, I planned to check out my analysis of data from children with children before feeding this back to the Centre team and then to the Steering Group.



#### *5.2.4 Concluding comments*

These early methodological and ethical dilemmas illustrate a tension between my wish to collaborate with my adult research participants (for reasons of principle and in order to gain meaningful access) and my concern also to avoid unhelpful alliances with those adults. My early account ends with the following statements:

The theme of multi-agency collaboration is central to the original Children's Centre concept, to the research and developmental processes of the feasibility study and to the organisational framework that was devised for the Centre. The crucial question of the role and place of research within this collaboration underlies much of the previous discussion in this account. How far is the Children's Centre a partnership between Hackney Council and the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts which is being studied by the SSRU research team - or how far is it a three-way collaboration in which the research team are key contributors to the developmental processes?

I have made the case that aiming for 'full' detachment is problematic; equally, this is not a piece of action research in which the researcher aims to influence development. I suggest that it is the researcher's delicate positioning 'betwixt' the two positions - neither 'in' nor 'out' of the development process that promotes the understanding of that process. This crucial tension will be of relevance at all 'levels' of the study: at the broadest 'macro' level of organisational collaboration (as discussed above), at the level of the research involvement in the Steering Group, in my positioning as researcher in relation to the staff at the Centre and in relation to the children and young people who use it. I aim to understand the processes of each group (the Steering Group, the staff group, the young people) by being 'in' the group but not 'of' it' (my account: Spring 1998).

In summary, I aimed:

to be unobtrusive without being secretive; to be supportive without being collusive; and to be non-doctrinaire without appearing unsympathetic (Parlett and Hamilton 1987: 69)

I move on now to next section of this Chapter. Through an exploration of the process of data collection from key research participants, I consider further the links between the research role and function, the research process and the two themes of collaboration and children's participation.

### 5.3 Access and the Data Collection Process

#### 5.3.1 *The Steering Group*

As I noted in Chapter 1(1.6) the multi-agency Steering Group was appointed to oversee the development of the Children's Centre in March 1997, several months before the Centre staff were appointed to their posts. Myself, Berry, the Chair, the Children's Plan Co-ordinator and Sainsbury representatives were key players on the group and in this developmental work during the last months of the feasibility study. Also represented on the group (at different stages) were senior staff from the participating schools, from Hackney Youth and Play services and from City and Hackney Health Authority.

During the main study I proposed to collect two kinds of data from the Steering Group: process data from attendance at meetings, and data from individual semi-structured interviews with group members (see also 5.2.2 above). But, accessing the Steering Group posed some interesting issues for my positioning as I had been previously associated by group members with a developmental rather than a more 'neutral' research role; and because members themselves were now newly positioned as research participants within the design of the study (see also 5.2.3 above).

In the early weeks of the study I outlined the research design with the Group and discussed my shifting role. I explained that I was primarily concerned to document the proceedings of the Steering Group as a means towards describing the process and progress of the Centre's development. It was agreed that there should be a regular 'slot' for the research at Steering Group meetings; and that I would use this to provide information about the progress of the research (e.g. what I had done and what I was planning to do); and to feedback on the themes which were emerging from data collection. On the whole, I would participate only minimally in general discussions, and I had no *explicit* aim to impact on the Centre's development.

Despite these explanations I believe that some Steering Group members had difficulty in understanding (or accepting) the shift in my role away from development. For example, on occasions, when I was taking notes, I was asked if I could use my notes to provide the minutes of the meeting. I was also asked to come along to planning meetings where I believe that I was expected - as previously - to play an active role. I also think that group members had some concerns about being 'researched' and that these concerns might have been linked to issues of power and status. All representatives were in very senior positions within their respective agencies; and many would have considered their position as 'higher' than mine. And the presence of Berry and two funding representatives on the group raised some complex issues which were highlighted by my plans to hold individual interviews with group members to explore their views on the progress of the Centre and the role of the Steering Group itself. (it is unusual, to say the least, for a researcher to interview her funders and her PhD supervisor as part of the research !).

These early experiences illustrate the tensions which I experienced in positioning myself in an appropriate position in relation to the Steering Group and its members; and in reaching a workable balance between being neither 'in' nor 'outside' the developmental processes. As the study progressed I believe that I was able to reach a position in which I was sufficiently detached from the group to allow me to understand its processes as part of the overall process of centre development, but sufficiently involved for group members to accept my presence. I return to the research relationship with the Steering Group in my discussion of research and the policy-making process in 5.4 below. I move on now to consider access and data collection with the Centre staff where some parallel issues are raised.

### *5.3.2 Centre staff*

#### *5.3.2.1 Introduction*

When the four members of the Centre core team took up their appointments during the early Autumn of 1997 they were faced with a challenging task of developing a

project 'from scratch' along pre-defined lines. Additionally, their work was to be the focus of sustained and intensive research. I aimed to collect data from the Centre team by regular attendance at and documentation of their meetings, by holding individual interviews with team members, and by reviewing a range of team policy and practice documents; and I hoped to interview sessional staff (as and when they were appointed) and to spend time at the Centre programme, observing its operation and talking with children and staff (see also 5.2.2 above).

Whilst all the core team members had been given basic information about the research and had agreed to co-operate with this element before taking up their appointments, there is clearly a considerable difference between agreeing to something on a piece of paper and putting this agreement into practice. I was aware that staff might experience the research presence as an additional burden and, further, that they might view my attendance at the programme as particularly threatening as here I would be witness to 'what was done' as well as to 'what was said' (see also 5.2.2). As I noted in Chapter 4 (4.3.2) initiatives which are set up to promote children's participation are relatively unusual and it is easier to debate the problems of implementation, than to implement change. Would I be casting judgement, in this unusual situation, on the attempts of staff to develop more democratic styles of interacting with children? What exactly was I interested in documenting, and what feedback processes would I use?

If the study was to succeed it was critical that the staff and I developed a mutually trusting relationship within which I would be granted 'meaningful' access. Central to such a trusting relationship would be a clear and shared understanding of the purposes and processes of the research.

#### 5.3.2.2 *Autumn 1997*

During the first few weeks of the study I tried to ensure that centre staff had all the available information from the feasibility phase; and that they were clear about the goals of the research and my intention that it would not seek to actively influence the Centre's development. The Director set up weekly team meetings to plan the Centre's work and I agreed with him and the team that I would attend these meetings. I explained that I hoped to use my attendance as a means of gathering data about the

development of the Centre; and as an opportunity to discuss and plan the ongoing research with the team (and this paralleled my positioning with the Steering Group). I told team members that I saw my role in 'their' part of the meeting as primarily observational, but that I did not intend to be a silent observer: for example, I might ask questions to clarify what was being said in a discussion, or if the discussion turned to research I might offer a comment or clarification. Similarly, I clarified that (when the programme began) I would play a role of participant observer in some of the sessions, observing what was going on but also chatting to staff and children. I also noted my wish to hold individual interviews with core (and sessional) staff in order to explore their views about the Centre's development.

Staff appeared to welcome my attendance at their early meetings and to not feel unduly discomforted by my presence. However, working with the team in the early months sometimes proved challenging. Members expressed some disappointment and frustration at this time with what they saw as an inadequate budget, a lack of willingness on the part of other agencies to become actively involved, and a lack of support from Hackney council departments (see also Chapter 6: 6.2.1). As someone who was closely involved with the establishment of the Centre *and* who spent a lot of time there, I found myself acting as data collector but also as supporter and 'friend'. It was sometimes difficult to know whether to just listen or whether to offer to act; a dilemma which reflected some discomfort with my new found 'in between' role.

And, although team members expressed considerable enthusiasm about being part of a research study, they were also clearly concerned about the 'evaluative' element of the research. From their perspective surely Berry and I *wanted* to see the children's centre idea realised. Would I not therefore be making value judgements in which the measure of success of the team would be determined by how far members could develop a centre in accordance with the 12 key features. Further, if Berry and I did want to see the idea realised - then why did we not propose to actively assist with this process, joining with the team in an action research project?

It was perhaps not uncoincidental that the team appeared to be most concerned about the research during the same month as the Centre opened its doors to children, when

there were extreme pressure to 'perform' well (November 1997). Around this time members also raised questions about how their work would be represented in research reports. They were worried that the credit for their achievements might be removed by accounts which emphasised the link between the original development of the 12 key features and the research. In response to this I stressed that whilst Berry and I had played an earlier developmental role, we saw our role now in terms of reporting what helped or hindered the progress made by team members in operationalising that idea. The part of team members in this would be fully acknowledged: indeed, I viewed such reporting as a collaborative process. I emphasised, however, that I was not carrying out the research on behalf of the team in order to assist with development; rather I was seeking to document the views of all concerned with its progress.

#### *5.3.2.3 Spring Term 1998 - onwards*

By the Spring of 1998 some of these initial difficulties were resolved, and a positive and constructive relationship developed which was, on the whole, maintained throughout the course of the entire study. I was increasingly provided with team reports and minutes; and, interestingly, my role was at times compared to that of a 'critical friend': a person who can add to the organisation's capacity for self-development and analysis by offering a view which is formulated through being neither 'in' nor 'outside' the organisation.

A number of factors may have contributed to this improvement. I believe that I had shown myself to be empathetic (though not enmeshed) with the team's feelings of being unsupported; I had established a degree of individual trust with team members in individual interviews (November 1997); and members may have been convinced as time progressed that I was not using my time at their team meetings or on the programme to make critical judgements about their work. My attendance at the programme had, I think, contributed to some constructive dialogue between myself and team members (as I was able to discuss my understanding from my observations with them). I had also fed back my first research report to the Steering Group in December 1997, but had checked this out carefully with team members first.

However, and perhaps most importantly, it was notable that our relationship also improved in line with the Centre's increasing success in attracting large numbers of children to an expanding programme (see also 5.4 below) and in line with the development of a collaboration between myself and the team to document the team's progress. During the Spring Term of 1998 we spent dedicated time over a series of meetings on a review exercise in which I presented the team with my view of progress so far in line with the 12 key features; we discussed this fully in order for me to develop a more substantial, shared account and staff then agreed an action plan for each feature.<sup>64</sup> This exercise formed the basis for an Interim Report which was directed at influencing the policy-making process (Hood and Mayall 1998); and I used a similar collaborative process in developing a further publication during the final months of the study (Hood and Mayall 1999) (see also 5.4 below).

The concurrence of the improved partnership between myself and the team with the increasing popularity and policy-significance of the Centre, raises several interesting points for this analysis of the research process. And it is worth considering how the working relationships between myself and the team (and myself and the Steering Group) might have evolved had the Centre been notably less popular and less successful. How might the research have then documented the processes; and to what purposes might the research have been deployed? These questions cannot, of course, be readily answered, but they highlight the positioning of the research and the researched within the wider political and economic context (see 5.4 below).

### **5.3.3 *The children***

#### **5.3.3.1 *Introduction***

As a researcher I was interested in studying the emerging relationships and inter-relationships between children, staff and Steering Group in the progress of the Centre's development. I was also committed, as I observed in 5.2.3, to developing

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<sup>64</sup> The research was undoubtedly having some impact on development here, but I was careful to exclude myself from the action planning stage, and to avoid an alliance with the team which might be prejudicial to the interests of the children or of the Steering Group.

methods which 'adjusted' for power imbalances between these groups and more particularly between adults and children: methods which promoted children as active participants (rather than passive objects) within the research process itself.

I have noted that a constructive collaboration between myself and the core team was critical to the establishment of meaningful access for data collection (and therefore to the success of the project as a whole). It was important that my methods were negotiated so that they complemented, rather than conflicted with the team's developing new practices. However, adults who work with children in public spaces commonly take up positions as gatekeepers in the research process, and often in the guise of protection (see, for example, Hood, Kelley and Mayall 1996). And even in this unusual setting where adults were attempting to develop democratic practices, I thought it possible that staff might be 'protective' of the children they were working with, particularly where the researcher was not allied with them as an 'agent' of the team (see 5.3.2 above). A key aim, therefore, at the beginning of the study, was to develop lines of contact and communication with children which were not simply channelled through and controlled by the core team. My discussion begins with the question of consent and moves on to look further at access and data collection.

#### 5.3.3.2 *Consent*

This issue posed a number of complex ethical and methodological dilemmas. Although children and young people had been consulted in the feasibility phase - and had contributed to the operational framework - these same children were unaware that a future centre would be the subject of ongoing research. Further, the children who chose to attend the Centre would not necessarily have taken part in the feasibility study.

The study design also included a range of methods, each with their own consent issues. I planned to talk with children in small focus groups but the design also included ongoing observation of the Centre programme. I believed that I would need to obtain consent from all attenders for this observation element. This was a challenging task in a setting where approximately 1020 children were eligible to attend; and where it was likely that different children would come on different nights.



At a later date I also planned self-completion questionnaires as a means of gathering information about the out-of-school experiences of the children who were eligible for A Space (see 5.3.3.5 below).

Integral to my thinking about children's consent were some related questions. How could I find the best means of providing children with information about the study: and was it possible to obtain their 'informed consent' as opposed to their assent? Morrow and Richards (1996) usefully distinguish between 'assent' where a child agrees or assents to be a subject in research and 'informed consent':

the process whereby someone voluntarily agrees to participate in a research project, based on a full disclosure of pertinent information (1996:94)

In her writings on consent to research with children Alderson observes that beliefs about whether children are incompetent or competent are central to the question of whether they (children) should be involved in making decisions about taking part in research (1995:75). Alderson suggests that one way around the difficult question of assessing competence is to assume that school-aged children have competence - thus leaving the onus on adults to prove incompetence (1995:76). I also started from this point: believing that the children aged 8-14 who would be attending the Centre would be largely competent to consent. I wanted children to know that research was a key element of the children's centre; to understand what the research was about and why it was being done.

The issue of children's informed consent is further complicated by the related question of parents' consent to their child's participation in research. This is a complex and difficult area with widely varying practice (see Edwards and Alldred 1999:266 for discussion). However, in this instance, where my concern was to treat children as active and competent subjects of the research, I judged that it would suffice if I tried to ensure that parents and carers were informed about the research; and that they were made aware that children would be asked if they wished to participate in particular elements (e.g. the focus groups).

I approached these concerns in several ways. During November-December 1997 the Centre staff developed a newsletter for children and parents in the participating schools. I used this as a vehicle for the distribution of information about the research. Using simple language which I hoped might be accessible to both adults and children, I outlined the background, aims and design of the study; and stated that research was an integral part of the project. In the same months, the staff and I collaborated in the design of an information leaflet about the new Centre which included basic information about the research. I addressed the issue of consent for *all attenders* by including a statement about the research on the Centre's registration form to be signed by parents and children, by talking to large groups of children and of parents during staff organised events, and by chatting informally to children during the Centre programme about my role and about the study. I hoped that many of the children who attended would become familiar with both me and my role.

These measures, though varied, were in many ways inadequate. Some children didn't sign the registration form but it was unclear whether this was an omission or an indicator of unwillingness to participate in the research; staff did not always go through the form with children; and there was no guarantee that the information I distributed was either accessed, read or understood by children (or indeed by parents and carers). Also, as the numbers of attenders increased quickly in the early months, I found it increasingly difficult to develop a familiarity with them all. Staff were making use in their pilot programme of notice boards in the Centre hallway to advertise activities and events (November-December 1997). I chose to set up a separate research noticeboard; attaching a photograph of myself and research information (see Appendix 1). I updated the information on this board regularly, as a means of informing children of my progress and plans, and I suggested that they could chat to me at the Centre and ask me questions about the research. I also used this board as a means of recruiting children into focus groups during February 1998, asking for volunteers to sign their names up if they were interested to talk with me (see 5.3.3.3 below). This process also mirrored the staff's practices as children were asked to sign up for their preferred sessions at the Centre.

Consideration of the question of informed consent by children raises some further questions of interpretation: arguably, it is one thing to give one's agreement having understood what is involved, but it is another to agree on the basis that the research is perceived as having some *value*. It remains possible that, despite my efforts, many children may have remained unaware that the research was taking place. But even where children did know about the study, did they view it as having any real significance or meaning either for their own lives or for those of other children? Clearly, this is a difficult question to answer. Edwards and Alldred (1999) suggest that whilst researchers have given considerable emphasis to the empowerment of children, there has been little attention given to studying children's views of research and the relationship between their views and their participation. In a recent paper on the case of research on home-school relations the authors argue that:

Children's and young people's views of research are strongly linked to the meaning of the topic to be investigated in the interlocking personal, local and wider societal contexts of their lives. (1999: 277)

In the case of this study I had some concerns about children's views and understanding of both the research goals and my research role. The Centre was based on school premises and there was the potential initially for my role as an adult on school premises to be confused, like that of the Centre staff, with the role of a teacher in a position of authority. Further, though based at a school, the Centre was not part of the school: even where Centre staff became distinguished from teachers (e.g. by their more democratic approach) children might understandably view me as part of the Centre team. After all, I spent time on the programme, I attended Centre staff meetings, I used similar practices to engage them - 'being around' and chatting (see 5.3.3.2 above) and - in the early days at least - I was often to be seen in the building. Finally, many of the things that I appeared to be interested in were, on the face of it, remarkably similar to the issues that staff sought their views on.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> This was particularly so as centre staff aimed to develop practices which promoted children's participation.

### 5.3.3.3 *Small group discussions -February 1998*

I aimed to set up a number of informal focus groups with children in order to explore with them their early experiences of the Centre; their likes and dislikes; their ideas about the activities and the staff; and (to get at their thoughts on participation) their ideas about how and whether being at the Centre differed from being at school, or at home. I hoped to talk with a reasonably representative sample of about 25 children - both boys and girls from different year groups, although I recognised that it may be difficult to achieve a balance.

These research plans raised some further dilemmas. As I have suggested, my methods were developed to complement the practices of the Centre team and it was important that I negotiated the best way of setting up the groups; but I wanted to resist the possibility that staff should take on the recruitment process for me, as their selection process might differ from mine; and as children might also then perceive the research as allied directly with the Centre and the staff. I was particularly concerned here that my research interests, in many ways, paralleled the interests of the staff who were themselves seeking ways to consult with children at this time regarding their preferred activities and their views about the Centre's development. Ideally, I wanted children to volunteer freely, without being encouraged to do so by staff.

Consideration of the timing and venue for the groups raised other issues. If groups were to run in centre programme time, then something in the programme might have to go. And some staff suggested that children would be unlikely to come if this meant 'missing out' on a favourite centre activity. I viewed these initial staff reservations about whether and how the groups would take place as reflecting valid practical concerns. However, I think they might also have been informed by anxiety about: the potential threat posed by the research to the operation of the Centre programme; and posed by my separate research relationship to their relationship with the children and young people.

In the end, a compromise between these positions was reached. My notice on the research board stated that I would like to talk with some boys and girls from each of the different year groups on specified days. I left space for the children to sign up their

names if they were interested in taking part. 14 children signed up; but I had to rely on staff to encourage others to talk with me. In the final event, I talked with a total of 20 children (in small groups). These children broadly represented the participating schools, although boys were under-represented.

#### *5.3.3.4 Confidentiality; feedback processes and adjusting for power imbalances*

At the beginning of the discussions I told children that I would be feeding back the general themes from the sessions to staff and to Steering Group members; but that none of them would be identified or identifiable within this process. I also said that before this feedback to other groups, I wanted to meet with them again to 'check out' that my understanding of the key themes was accurate (see 5.2.3.2 above: democratic evaluation). In the event, this was an interesting exercise. Though happy to participate and eager to correct some of my interpretations, I thought many of the children seemed bemused by my wanting to talk with them again. One child may have been speaking for many when she said 'why are you telling us what we've already told you?' And I was left wondering whether I had needlessly taken up these children's time in the interests of the principle of empowerment:

Empowerment is not simply a matter of transferring power from one group (researchers/adults) to another (research subjects/children), where the group with the power perceives this as beneficial. Power is not packageable and therefore giveable in this sense, and indeed such conceptions can serve researchers' self-interest and fantasies of being empowering. (Marks 1996, cited in Edwards and Alldred 1999: 267)

Interestingly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this attempt to redress power imbalances seemed more effective when used with staff members in the core and sessional teams.<sup>66</sup> Some of these staff had openly expressed their sense of exclusion from decision-making processes; and, as adults, they were perhaps less taken aback by my methods of addressing this (see also Chapter 4: 4.2.6).

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<sup>66</sup> I was careful to check out my reports to the Steering Group with core team members before presenting them to the Group. I also checked out my analysis from individual interviews with sessional staff with the sessional staff team before feeding it back to the core and sessional team together.

### 5.3.3.5 *The questionnaire data - July 1998*

With my plans to collect data by questionnaire from much larger numbers of children I re-addressed these issues of consent, confidentiality and feedback in a different context. I wanted to know about the out-of-school experiences of all eligible children for A Space (both users and non-users: N=1020) and the most logical means to collect such data was via the school classroom. However, the pressures on my time became too great to allow me to administer the questionnaires myself. They were instead distributed by teaching staff and completed in the classroom.

Two points about children's participation are important here. Some children were not given the opportunity to participate at all, as it appears to be the case that not all teachers co-operated with the distribution of questionnaires. My notes to class teachers emphasised the importance of children's informed consent to participation. However, it is undoubtedly the case that where children *were* provided with the questionnaire they may have felt constrained into participation both by the setting of the classroom and in the presence of the teacher.<sup>67</sup>

### 5.3.3.6 *A participative approach?*

This discussion of children as participants in the research process has highlighted some of the difficulties that I faced in gaining children's informed consent to the main study research; and in actively involving them as participants in the study. It is undoubtedly ironic that in a study which upheld the value of children's participation - children were not, in the end, involved as very active participants in the research process. Despite all my efforts, I think that I was largely unsuccessful in engaging in a distinctive 'dialogue' with children about the research; nor was I wholly successful in engaging them as active subjects (rather than objects) in the study. Barriers to both included: the practical difficulties of involving the large number of children who attended the Centre in varying patterns; and the accessing of children in a way which

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<sup>67</sup> Towards the end of the study I designed a further questionnaire which had not been included in the original research design. This focussed on Year 7 children's experiences of transition (as this was an area of increasing priority in the work of the Centre). Again, the questionnaires were administered by teachers in the classroom but with a much better response rate. It is possible that the subject matter was viewed by the adult gatekeepers as more important here (and it is also possible of

complemented the developing practices of staff, yet was distinctive enough to be understood as different and separate.

In some respects I addressed the problem of involving the large numbers of A Space users by developing and using a questionnaire for both users and for non-users, but this, in turn, placed limitations on the consent process as the questionnaires were administered through teachers in the classroom (see also Morrow and Richards 1996). Criticism might also be levelled at my choice of questionnaires as a method at all as these are not usually favoured amongst those who promote participative research with children or reportedly amongst children themselves (e.g. see Smith and Barker 1999). My response here would be to propose that when worded appropriately questionnaires can provide a useful method of data collection with children *alongside* other methods if careful thought is given to the processes by which they are administered. And working alone on an intensive study (which involved data collection at a range of levels with both adults and children) I viewed their use as the only method open to me for gathering data from the total group of children who were eligible for the Centre. It is possible also that I might have more successfully elicited the views of more children (than those I spoke to in the focus groups) by involving children in a discussion of the most appropriate methods; and/or by adopting other methods such as the use of cameras, video or drawings (e.g. see Hill 1997 and Smith and Barker 1999). However, again, here my time was limited: and data collection from children was just one element of the study.

## **5.4 : The Research, the Researched, Funding and Out-Of-School Policy**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

The first two parts of this chapter have provided an analysis of the positioning of the research in relation to key research participants; and I have discussed my attempts to

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course that the administration of the questionnaires was less complex owing to the smaller numbers of classes involved).

meet the goals of the study through the adoption of illuminative and democratic evaluative approaches. The former approach demanded that I take up a position in which I was neither detached from nor directly aiming to influence the process and progress of the Centre; and the latter that I did not ally myself with any one group of research participants, but that I sought - by the use of participative methods with children - and by the use of appropriate feedback mechanisms - to adjust for differences in power and status between the groups; and particularly, between adults and children.

But:

Research does not and should not take place within a vacuum but instead develops within the wider social and political context. (Cloke 1995:274)

And Berry and I had originally envisaged that the new children's centre might provide a model for others who wished to set up centres elsewhere (see also 5.2.1 above). However, whilst we were completing the feasibility study in the Summer of 1997 we could not know of future policy developments which would impact considerably on the policy-significance of the Centre and the research (see Chapter 3: 3.4). In the final section of this chapter I document and discuss the relationship between the direction taken by government out-of-school policy and the research process.

#### ***5.4.2 The changing policy scene, the research and the researched***

In the same month that the Centre opened its doors to young people (November 1997) the Labour administration outlined its proposals for the expansion of out-of-school childcare; and eight months later came the announcement about out-of-school study support services (see also Chapter 3: 3.2). This professed government commitment to expansion of out-of-school services meant that there was increased scope for using the research to propose a model for the development of services elsewhere.



Berry and I published an Interim Report in July 1998 on the work of A Space (Hood and Mayall, 1998) (see also Chapter 1: 1.1 and 5.3.2.3 above). We concluded that the Centre's experience indicated that an out-of-school centre could be successfully developed in the light of three key principles: involving children as participants in service development; crossing the traditional primary/secondary divide and crossing traditional service boundaries. We sent copies of the report to the DfEE and an official from the 'study support' section arranged a visit to the Centre to learn more about its work.

In November 1998, towards the end of the study, we organised a dissemination conference for around 80 participants: including policy-makers, practitioners, and people from a range of agencies with an interest in out-of-school provision. Also invited, and well represented were the Departments of Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Department of Health.

I noted above (5.3.2.3) how the anxiety about the 'evaluative' nature of the research was replaced, in the light of the Centre's success and of government policy, by a remit for the Centre team and myself to collaborate closely to inform the policy-making process. This collaboration was particularly in evidence around the time of the conference: where both the Centre Director and I gave presentations. The dissemination process itself served to reinforce this alliance further as I was aware that policy-makers and service developers would want to hear the benefits which were associated with the Centre's experience, and that analysis of some of the complexities and difficulties of working collaboratively and in participation with children was not an immediate 'selling point'.

#### ***5.4.3 Funding, the research, the researched and policy***

By late Summer 1998 the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts had given their agreement, in principle, to provide further core funding for the Centre. In my view, this agreement was linked both to the excellent work of the team, and to the research function in describing and promoting it at a time when it was increasingly significant.

The funders were clear, however, that any decision to fund future research would be dependent on the professed interest of the DfEE in the Centre and its policy import. Berry and I requested to meet with representatives from the DfEE to discuss the research element of the project, and we did so in late January 1999. It was clear from this meeting that whilst the DfEE saw some value in the principles of children's participation and multi-agency working; their prime concern was with the impacts of services on the children who use them; and more specifically with whether or not children's out-of-school services might play a role in improving educational achievement (see also Chapter 3: 3.4). In keeping with this, officials were particularly interested in the Centre's transition work because of their concern about the 'dip' in academic performance in the early years of secondary school.<sup>68</sup>

Following this meeting I prepared a new research proposal for a study which sought to evaluate the *perceived impact* of the Centre service on the children who used it; their parents and carers and on the participating schools. In the study design I was careful to maintain the collection of process data on children's participation; and to prioritise discussions with children about their experiences of the service. This study has now been funded - again by the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts - and it runs from June 1999 - December 2000 (see also Chapter 1: 1.6).

#### **5.4.4 Discussion**

Looking at the dissemination and funding process with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to conclude that the research became increasingly allied with the Centre staff's work in order to inform the policy-making process (thus effectively 'selling' the Centre); and that policy-makers were only willing 'to be sold' something which could be further researched in terms of its impacts on children. And clearly, there are parallels here with my experiences of collecting data. Just as there were implicit tensions in this process between my collaboration with adults and children's participation, so - in the relationship between research, the researched, the funders

and policy - adults concerns about the future impacts of services on children did not sit comfortably with the idea of giving priority to the role of services in children's time-present or to the role of children as social actors in contributing to the development and operation of such services.

However, in offering such an analysis, I am not in any way suggesting that Berry and I were unsuccessful in combining our dual goals of increasing understanding of children's participation and multi-agency working; and of influencing the policy-making process. In an article and a report written since the July 1998 publication we have offered critiques of current government out-of-school policy which analyse such policy from a children's rights perspective (Hood and Mayall 1999; Mayall and Hood, forthcoming). And, in the new study, which focuses explicitly on the adult concept of impacts, my colleague Gill Poland and I are adopting a pluralistic evaluative approach. Such an approach acknowledges that consensus may be absent and:

rather than struggling to force the illusion on unwilling subjects brings centre stage the multiple, possibly conflicting criteria of different parties to the process (Cheetham 1992:34).

Thus, our discussion of adults perspectives will be informed by an understanding of children as participants and we will give weight and value to children's perspectives-even if these extend no further than the suggestion that the Centre is 'fun'.

I would observe finally that in a socio-political context where the link between research and policy is tenuous and complex - and where developmentalist and welfarist ideas about children are firmly entrenched, the Children's Centre Studies have achieved a measure of success by developing a centre which children both use and enjoy - and in promoting the idea of children as participants in service development within out-of-school policy. This Chapter has also shown the challenges faced by the researcher in using methods which uphold the values of children's participation. The development of these methods requires considerable time; a willingness to change and be flexible; a capacity to be reflexive; a capacity to

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<sup>68</sup> Personal communication from DfEE officials (see also Schagen and Kerr, 1999) for discussion of

negotiate together with clarity about what one wishes to achieve; a capacity to admit mistakes; and a capacity to be open and forthright. As I discuss in the conclusion to Chapter 4 (4.4), many of these are also required in the implementation of changing practice.

## 6. THE PROCESS AND PROGRESS OF A SPACE: CHILDREN AS PARTICIPANTS

### 6.1 Introduction

This is the first of three chapters (6,7 and 8) which are based on the findings from the Children's Centre Studies (principally from the main study).

In this chapter I provide an account of the process and progress of A Space from the Summer of 1997 (shortly before the beginning of the main study)<sup>69</sup> to the end of 1998 (when I stopped collecting data). My principal focus is the description and analysis of the processes whereby children were involved as participants in the shaping and development of the Centre service. In the two subsequent chapters I consider the process and progress of collaborative working (Chapter 7) and I explore the issues of collaboration and participation in greater depth using 'case studies' of three centre services (Chapter 8).

My plans for data collection in the main study were described in Chapter 5. In the final event, I collected data as follows:<sup>70</sup>

*From the Steering Group:* notes taken during the meetings (throughout the study); copies of minutes of these meetings; individual interview data from nine (of ten) Steering Group members (March 1998).

*From centre staff:* notes taken during team meetings; copies of minutes of these meetings; individual interviews with the four core staff (November 1997); individual interviews with six (of seven) sessional staff (April/May 1998); attendance and note-

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<sup>69</sup> Although I focus on the main study my account will refer also to the development phase of the feasibility study (April - August 1997).

<sup>70</sup> Data collection was largely in keeping with my original plans. However, as I discussed in Chapter 5, accessing children was not easy.

taking at full staff meetings (sessional and core staff); copies of minutes of these meetings.

*From children and young people* small group discussions with twenty children and young people (February 1998); questionnaire data from a sample of 423<sup>71</sup> children drawn from the participating schools (July 1998); and questionnaire data from 169<sup>72</sup> Year 7s (users and non-users of A Space) (October 1998).

In addition I used a self-completion questionnaire with parents/carers (June 1998); attended (and observed) a number of centre meetings with parents and with children; attended (and observed) multi-agency meetings and centre fund-raising meetings; attended (and observed)<sup>73</sup> the Centre programme on a regular basis; and gathered a wide range of documentary data including, for example, the termly Centre programme, minutes of multi-agency planning meetings and reports by staff on their work. Collection of data from *Hackney agency staff* was carried out primarily through the Steering Group and via attendance at other multi-agency meetings. This was in part related to my wish to prioritise the amount and type of data collected and was in part a reflection of the ways in which multi-agency work actually developed at the Centre (for discussion see Chapter 7).

This data classification was appropriate to the purpose and content of Chapter 5. For the purposes of this chapter the data can be more usefully classified into two types: *descriptive process data* used to describe the process and progress of the Centre (e.g. from programme attendance; centre team, Steering Group and other meeting attendance; and documentary analysis) and *participant data*<sup>74</sup> collected from members of participant groups in order to *elicit their views* on the process and progress of the

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<sup>71</sup> This questionnaire was intended for completion by the whole group of children who were eligible to use A Space (N=1,020). The figure completed represents a low response rate (41%).

<sup>72</sup> Questionnaires were distributed to all children in Year 7 (N=210). The response rate of 169 was high (80%).

<sup>73</sup> I was not a silent observer in any of these settings. See Chapter 5 for discussion of my role.

<sup>74</sup> My use of the term 'participant' here derives from the concept of research participants. It should not be confused with children's participation - the substantive concern of the thesis.

Centre (e.g. interviews with core and sessional staff and Steering Group members; discussions with children; questionnaires with children and with parents and carers).

This Chapter is in four sections and draws on research reports (of both descriptive and participant data) completed during the course of the main Children's Centre Studies.<sup>75</sup>

In the first two sections (6.2 and 6.3) I provide a summary of the history of A Space over two early time phases: September-December 1997 (6.2) and January-April 1998 (6.3) and for each phase I offer an analytical commentary which focuses on children's participation. In the third section (6.4) I *briefly* describe developments from May-December 1998 (this time period is also covered by the case study material in Chapter 8). I conclude in 6.5 by summarising some of the key themes which emerge from the analysis as a whole.

It is important to note that though my account (both here and in Chapters 7 and 8 to follow) makes frequent reference to *the views* of research participants, I have chosen not to use *direct quotations* to illustrate these views (see also Chapter 1: 1.8). I am well aware that this approach may leave me open to criticism, particularly as it could be understood to conflict with the principles of collaboration and children's participation which underpin the research itself - and which are discussed at length in Chapter 5. However, I have decided to take this course for, what are, in my view, good reasons.

Firstly, my detailed analysis of the extensive Children's Centre Studies data formed the basis for separate research reports also completed during the course of the Studies. It is these reports on which I draw now<sup>76</sup> in order to present a detailed description and analysis of the processes whereby children were involved as participants in the shaping and development of the Centre service (see also Chapter 1:

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<sup>75</sup> As in Chapter 5, I do not draw on the analysis of data from parents; and this also applies to Chapters 7 and 8 to follow.

<sup>76</sup> This process has parallels with secondary analysis (further analysis of data which has already been analysed).

1.8). Whilst it would be possible to select quotations from children, Centre staff and Steering Group members to support my account, the considerable extent of the data means that it would be difficult to do so in a manner which did not either appear 'tokenistic' or which added usefully to the account without unduly extending it.

Secondly, and most importantly, the focus of the thesis is *children's participation* and not *children*. I am aiming in the thesis to develop knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of participation (as evidenced in the public policy context and in the multiple A Space data sources) rather than to directly represent the views of children.

## **6.2 The Development and Running of a Pilot Programme: September - December 1997**

### **6.2.1 Introduction**

My account of A Space in its early days 'takes off' from where I left it in Chapter 1 (1.6). There, I summarised the feasibility work which led to the recruitment of four core staff, the securing of premises in Kingsland School, and the establishment of a management agreement between Hackney Council and the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts which specified that centre running costs and staff salaries were to be managed by the Education and Leisure Department of the Council.

The centre Director, the two development workers and the Centre administrator brought a wide range of skills, experience and training to their new posts (see Chapter 1:1.6 for details). However, the team was made up of people from varied disciplinary backgrounds who had no prior experience of working together. Their task was to set up a centre, paying attention to a framework outlined in 12 key features (see Chapter 1:1.6). They were to have the use of self-contained premises on a secondary school site. These premises comprised a large hall area, two offices, a kitchenette and a storage room. An additional office was occupied by a school employee and the hall was still needed for some lessons in the mid-afternoon.



The challenges here were considerable: further, the Centre was established at the same time as the Hackney Education, Learning and Leisure Department was going through a period of enormous upheaval and change. Staff appointments were delayed well beyond the planned date of September 1<sup>st</sup>,<sup>77</sup> and the team experienced early difficulties and delays in obtaining financial and health and safety advice from the Council. Concerns were expressed by team members about whether the project funding was sufficient to meet its proposed remit<sup>78</sup> and members also thought that insufficient 'groundwork' had been carried out to facilitate some of the tasks that were expected of them (for example, they would have welcomed some preliminary agency audit work and some detailed information about the participating schools).

Nevertheless, by the end of November 1997 the team had carried out sufficient work to allow the Centre to open; and children and young people attended a pilot programme from 24.11.97. My account in this first section focuses on the work which preceded the pilot programme and (more briefly) on the programme itself.

### *6.2.2 Team development work which preceded the opening of the Centre in November 1997*

In a report to Steering Group (December 1997) I classified the early development work of the team into 5 key areas. In summary, these were:

1) learning to work together (see also Chapter 7:7.2)

2) setting up appropriate internal team structures to facilitate work

These included regular team business and planning meetings; information circulation and storage; staff supervision and finance and administrative procedures.

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<sup>77</sup> The four core staff took up their appointments between 15.9.97 and 6.10.97.

<sup>78</sup> There was particular concern about whether sufficient funds had been allocated for sessional staff.

### 3) ordering and purchasing essential furnishings and equipment

This included office equipment and equipment that would be needed in order to make the Centre appropriate and viable for use by children and young people.

### 4) developing liaison with the participant schools, with parents and children (see also 6.2.5 below and Chapter 7:7.3.3)

Team members focused on the development of working relationships with the participant schools: in order to 'access' children and young people and their parents, to discuss building, security, room and equipment use (Kingsland), and to establish some clarity about how the schools and the Centre might best work together. The team also developed their own lines of contact with children and young people (see 6.2.5 'developing a programme' below).

### 5) developing liaison with other agencies (see also Chapter 7:7.2.3)

Team members developed relationships with a range of other statutory and non-statutory community agencies in order to publicise the Centre's existence, to build a framework for multi-agency collaboration, and to explore the possibilities of recruiting sessional staff with the skills and experience to meet the requested needs and wishes of the children and young people.

## **6.2.3 *Children as participants: early dilemmas and practices***

Staff were aware that some prior planning would be necessary before the Centre opened to children. However, they also recognised that they needed to work in a way which was consistent with the principle of children's participation. Questions concerning implementation were implicit - and sometimes explicit - in many of the early staff debates about how best to go about the tasks outlined above.

Perhaps the most prominent question was that of *how much to plan in advance* versus *how much to allow for a process of development in which children and young people were actively involved?* Thus, when staff were considering how to 'present' the new

Centre to other agencies (see 5 above) they were sometimes torn between their wish to convey a clear and coherent identity and their view that that identity should develop slowly and with the involvement of children and young people.

This dilemma was also evidenced in debates about naming the Centre and in discussions about the design of a notepaper letterhead (there were good arguments for obtaining a supply of notepaper quickly but this would exclude children as contributors to the letterhead design). It was epitomised in staff discussions about whether and when they should prepare *a mission statement* for the Centre, detailing its aims, objectives and underpinning philosophy. Additionally, the staff debated whether it was necessary to put key policies into place before the Centre opened.

Furnishing, decorating and equipping the non-office areas of the Centre raised similar more tangible issues. The staff were clear that they wanted the children and young people to contribute to the physical appearance of the Centre but, at the same time, they asked themselves whether a bare site would act as a disincentive to newcomers. They were also keen to convey to children that the Centre (although sited at a school) was not *the same* as the school and to do so required some changes to the existing decor. Parallel issues were raised with regard to equipment: it was essential that something was in place for the first children to use; but it was also important not to purchase too much. Children's future wishes were also an unknown quantity - with unpredictable budgetary implications.

#### ***6.2.4 How did staff resolve these dilemmas?***

During the feasibility phase the Centre had been referred to as *Kingsland Children's Centre*. However, this failed to reflect the primary school involvement in the project. The new name 'A Space'<sup>79</sup> was chosen at a Steering Group meeting in late September 1997. Children had no active involvement in this process. However, the name was intended to reflect the provision of 'a space' which would be 'filled' by the ideas and

activities of the children and young people collaborating with staff to develop a service (see also Chapter 1: 1.6). In addition, centre staff envisaged that the name might be changed, in consultation with children, at a later date.<sup>80</sup>

The premises were cleaned and brought up to an improved standard of decor and safety (e.g. appropriately marked fire exits) and it was agreed that a sufficient level of furnishings and posters should be used to make the rooms welcoming, attractive and *different from school*; but that planning for any further changes to the appearance of the Centre should be carried out with children and young people. Similarly, a small sum was spent on basic equipment (e.g. sports, arts provisions) but further purchases were delayed until after the Centre opened.

The Director emphasised that the 12 key features from the feasibility phase should provide a fundamental underpinning to the Centre's work. However, he also agreed (under some pressure from other core staff) to prepare a draft document which outlined the philosophy behind A Space. He made it clear that this should serve as an internal working document only as it represented the views of the adult staff involved - and not the children. In relation to policy development, the team agreed that the only policy that would precede the involvement of the children and young people would be one for health and safety as this was required in law. It was also agreed that the team should abide by Hackney Council's Child Protection Procedures.

These dilemmas reflect some of the inherent tensions in the implementation of children's participation in a new project. It would have been far easier for the staff to put a service in place *for* children, than it was to develop a service *with* them, particularly where there were pressures to work quickly. Staff would also have felt more comfortable in their professional roles if they were able to convey a clear 'mission' for the Centre to adult professionals in other agencies, but to do so would

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<sup>79</sup> The 'A' in the name was also intended to represent words such as 'activities', 'after-school' and 'arts' which could be incorporated into a letterhead.

<sup>80</sup> Both children and school staff showed very mixed reactions to the name 'A Space' (as evidenced in small group discussions with children, and in reports from A Space staff). The name has, however, remained.

necessitate making statements about the nature of the service before this was explored with children themselves.

The final resolutions incorporate balances between the interests of adults and those of children: *in the new name*: a compromise which incorporated the notion of children's participation and which recognised the potential for children's future involvement; *in relation to the premises*: an understanding that the importance of attracting children to the Centre in the first place, and of securing their physical safety outweighed the need to involve them in all decisions concerning the Centre's environment; *and in relation to the philosophy*: an understanding that staff's wishes for role clarity should be recognised in the development of internal philosophy statements as long as this didn't serve to preclude children's involvement at a later date.

#### **6.2.5 Developing a programme**

The children consulted in the feasibility research had suggested a wide range of activities that they would like to see in a future centre (see Chapter 3: 3.6) However, team members thought it essential to carry out their own process of consultation to update and develop the feasibility work, but importantly also to make themselves known to potential users.

The team's access to children was largely arranged through and dependent on the development of channels of communication with the participating schools (and there are parallels here with the research experience, see Chapter 5). Each of the development workers adopted a liaison role with one of the primaries and with some of the Kingsland Year Heads; the Director aimed to liase regularly with the management team at Kingsland; and school staff were invited to drop-in meetings at the Centre. However, these links took time and effort on the part of the team to develop and - with school staff focusing on other pressing agendas at the start of a school term - liaison plans were sometimes cancelled or changed.

Despite these setbacks, team members held a well-attended meeting for Kingsland School Council representatives (where the feasibility findings were used as a starting point for discussions with young people about what should be provided); they visited school assemblies and they put up posters advertising the Centre in the schools. Additionally, in early November, members developed a newsletter as a vehicle for collecting feedback from children and young people as well as a means of providing information about planned centre activities. The team was also careful to keep an 'open door', and in the first weeks, small numbers of Kingsland children visited the Centre, and chatted to staff. The children were interested to find out whether they (the Centre staff) were teachers - on discovering that they were not, some began to talk to them about the 'pros' and 'cons' of school life. These first contacts suggested that the lines of communication between the Centre and children need not always be mediated by school staff. This is an important issue with regards to children's participation - and I shall return to it in the course of the Chapter (see also Chapters 7 and 8).

During the early weeks, Centre staff were preoccupied with whether it would be possible to meet the expressed needs and wishes of young people in a future programme. Would their wishes exceed what it was in the powers of the Centre to offer? And could a programme meet the wishes of the minority as well as the majority? If there was a need to prioritise here, by what and whose criteria should this be done? These concerns were usually contextualised in relation to four inter-related constraints:

- available funding (the Centre might not be able to meet the financial costs of meeting children's wishes);
- the numbers of staff (there were just two development workers and securing sessional staff was taking longer than originally envisaged);
- a possible lack of staff skills (staff might not have all the skills necessary to meet the expressed wishes of children);

- and to the realities of timetabling (it might not be possible to provide everything either *in time* for the first programme, or within the programme itself).

A related issue was the question of whether the Centre should be aiming to provide a service to *all* the eligible children who wanted it (as is suggested by the underpinning concept of universalism) or whether it should 'target' particular groups of these children (e.g. those who were socially and/or educationally disadvantaged) (see also Chapters 3 and 4). Staff concerns were expressed also about whether it would be possible within existing resource constraints to provide both an open-door and a care service, and a service which catered for both the primary and the secondary aged children together.

Additionally, there were important decisions to be made before opening about: the processes by which children would be accepted for a place at the Centre, about the kinds of records that should be kept regarding individual children and their attendance, and about the precise need for sessional staff and for escorts.

#### **6.2.6 Resolutions**

The Centre team agreed that the initial programme should be a pilot: giving staff opportunities to consult further with children in order to inform the structure and content of a full programme to be operated from January 1998. The model that was eventually chosen included an after-school service for up to 10 children from Years 5 and 6 from each of the primaries (N=30), and for up to 30 children from Years 7 and 8 of Kingsland, and a lunchtime drop-in for Years 9 and 10 from Kingsland. Year 4s were to be involved from the New Year.

A registration form was developed which sought basic information (name, age, address, telephone number) and this was distributed to all the schools, to be signed by parents and children and returned to the Centre (see also Chapter 5: 5.3.3). As places on the pilot were limited they were to be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis,

and a waiting list would be set up for places on the January programme. Users would be asked for an initial registration fee (£2.50) and daily charges were to be 35p (for those on free school meals) and 50p otherwise.<sup>81</sup>

It was agreed that escorts would be required for the primary children and that these children would be provided with 'care' whereby the Centre staff were in 'loco parentis' until their parent or carer collected them after the session. (The application form asked if parents gave permission for their children to go home on their own - and almost all of the primary parents declined).

The after-school programme was to include a range of unstructured activities in the open hall area: including 'A Space of One's Own' (for reading, homework, art work); a wide range of board games, and 'Making A Space' (where children would be provided with writing and drawing materials to record their ideas for future centre development). Additionally, there were to be several more structured groups: 'Creating A Space' (an art workshop focusing on the appearance of A Space), sports activities, craftwork, computer work and 'Express Yourself' (a group where children could use art as a way in to talking about their feelings and experiences). These activities of the after-school pilot programme were *largely* derived from the expressed wishes of the children, although clearly, in a small-scale programme where staffing resources were limited, staff prioritised the most commonly voiced ideas.

The programme was to be staffed by the core team, and by three sessional workers who were located via the Hackney Play Association ( a local voluntary organisation). The process by which these first sessional staff were recruited clearly upheld the principle of children's participation as here the Director sought to find people who had the skills and experience to run the activities suggested by the children.

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<sup>81</sup> Staff found that some children were experiencing difficulty in meeting these costs. The charges were consequently reduced to 20p for after-school sessions, with exemptions for those who said they could not pay.



### 6.2.7 *The pilot in practice*

The pilot programme ran for four weeks. The Centre was filled to (planned) capacity, and the lunchtime drop-in was very well attended, seeming to provide a welcome space which was *in* school - and away from the playground - but not the same as school.

The after-school programme was particularly popular with primary children. However, some activities were notably more successful (by the staff's definition) than others. Staff said they found that children were not 'ready' or 'willing' to involve themselves in 'Making A Space' and 'Creating A Space': and more particularly, that children found it difficult to think about what kind of centre they wanted A Space to be, preferring instead to use the groups to socialise and have fun. It is of interest for this analysis of children's participation that these 'less' successful groups were established on 'adult' ideas about how to involve children in developing the *future* ethos and environment of the Centre, rather than as a direct result of children's expressed wishes.<sup>82</sup> As staff themselves acknowledged, it is also probable that they were grounded in too abstract notions of 'creating' an ethos, and that they took place too early in the life of the Centre.

Small group (research) discussions with children (see also Chapter 5: 5.3.3) suggested that they (children) were very pleased with the range and type of activities on offer; that they believed that staff had listened to their ideas in planning the programme; and that they thought that decisions about 'what happened' at A Space<sup>83</sup> were made by staff and children together.

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<sup>82</sup> Though children were, of course, expressing a view.

<sup>83</sup> It is difficult to design questions which effectively get at children's ideas about decision-making processes. In asking 'who decides what happens at A Space?' I was interested in all kinds of decisions (not just those about the type of activities). I am not convinced that all the children interpreted the question so broadly.

### 6.3 The Development of Centre Policies, Practices and Ethos: January-April 1998

#### 6.3.1 Introduction

The Spring Term witnessed:

- the development of a full programme categorised (by staff) into a range of broadly educational, recreational and health/well-being activities;<sup>84</sup>
- the development of a pilot peer mentoring project and the beginnings of a 'Listening Ear' service (see also 6.4 below and Chapter 8);
- increasing numbers of children using the Centre;<sup>85</sup>
- and the expansion of the staff team to include two further sessional workers and two volunteers.

The pilot programme had given the new team an early opportunity to test out their working relationships and practices. However, the introduction of more staff *and* increasingly large numbers of children to the Centre's programme raised many new questions both about the aims and objectives of the Centre and about how team members should best work together. A principal focus for the team during this period was the development of centre policy, practice and ethos.

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter 7 (7.4) for a discussion of this categorisation and multi-agency working.

<sup>85</sup> 75 secondary and 64 primary children were registered to use the after-school provision by July 1998. Numbers attending on any one evening varied - however, attendance was often up to 55 per evening. Up to 70 secondary children were using the lunchtime drop-in on any one day (and an estimated 125 children had used the drop-in in total).

### 6.3.2 Centre policy, practice and ethos development: children as participants

In 6.2.3 above I described the tensions between staff wishes to have a clear 'mission' for their work and the concept of allowing children themselves to contribute to that mission. These tensions were more clearly in evidence with the recruitment of further sessional staff for the full programme. For example, core team members thought that they should perhaps be 'inducting' the sessional members into an agreed centre mission but, if children were to make an active contribution, there was limited scope for a conventional induction programme.

Even more pressing, however, when a full and increasingly popular programme was underway, was the question of *how staff were to relate to children on a day-to-day basis* on the Centre programme. What ground rules - if any - should be in place - and how were these to be established? What were to be the accepted ways of working: and the agreed limits to behaviour (for both children and staff)? Were written policies to be used here? (see also 6.2.3) And how should all this be determined?

Of interest for our analysis also was the related issue of the links between Kingsland school and the Centre. Whilst the Centre had self-contained premises, staff were keen to use school resources and rooms. Should the Centre follow some of the school rules or policies, or should it operate independently? And what were the implications of this for children's participation? (see also 6.5 below and Chapters 7 and 8)

The programme generally operated as follows: After school, on arrival at A Space, children registered, paid their fees and spent the first half an hour in the main hall area, chatting, playing board games and taking refreshments from the Centre canteen.<sup>86</sup> During this period they were encouraged to 'sign up' for their chosen activities from a list (derived from their own wishes). They went into their preferred activity groups for the remainder of the evening, but were free to remain in the main area if they wished. A Space sessional and core staff were attached to the activity groups and one staff

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<sup>86</sup> Children took it in turns to sell refreshments at the canteen.

member stayed in the main area. An A Space staff co-ordinator held responsibility for overall co-ordination of each evening.

During January-February 1998 staff discussed how to manage a range of situations which presented themselves during the course of the programme, including, for example, children running in corridors<sup>87</sup> as they moved from the hall area to an activity, and children who were disrupting a group activity. Was it acceptable, for example, for staff to raise their voices; and what kinds of negotiation strategies might be used? The difficulties of managing such situations with (what was perceived as) an absence of ground rules was discussed; and some staff noted that children expect that adults will set boundaries for them and that they (children) may not be 'ready' for consultation on this process. The significance of relationships with adults in other contexts was also raised as a concern here: if children are provided with clear rules for behaviour at school - then will *the absence of school-type rules at a centre on the school site* - be seen as a licence to do 'as they like'?

Interestingly, in the light of this, some children in the research discussions observed that they liked A Space because 'you could do whatever you liked' - giving the examples of running around and talking in loud voices. However, sessional staff - with backgrounds in play (and particularly in adventure playgrounds) commented (in interview) that they considered that the school environment might place limits on children's free expression.

### 6.3.3 Resolutions

In relation to children's behaviour, staff quickly introduced a rule that children should not run or shout in school corridors (and the same rule applied in school itself). They also adopted a strategy whereby children who were disrupting groups should be asked to leave the group if their behaviour did not improve. These children were asked to

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<sup>87</sup> In school, rather than A Space areas.

return to the main hall area and they were not permitted to join a group activity again until they had met with a member of the core team and discussed their behaviour.

In relation to centre policy development, the team planned a series of policy workshops in February-March 1998 in which children and staff were to work together to develop centre policies on behaviour and on equal opportunities, anti-bullying and drugs and weapons. Children were invited to sign up to take part and were asked to commit themselves to the whole series of workshops. In the event some workshops were more heavily subscribed than others; and children were sometimes reluctant to make a commitment to the series. Some children also appeared unprepared for this involvement in what may be commonly understood as 'adult business', showing a reluctance to come forward with ideas (see also 6.2.2 above and Chapter 4: 4.2.6). Nevertheless, a range of written policies were successfully produced as a result of these workshops.

*In a concurrent process* the Centre Director drafted two key documents: 'The Way We Work at A Space' and 'The Project's Aims and Objectives'. The former addressed the issue of staff behaviour in relation to children. It described an approach within which staff were encouraged to work with children and young people to help them manage their behaviour and their emotions.<sup>88</sup> 'The Project's Aims and Objectives' set out a number of key aims for the Centre as a service provider for children and young people. These documents, whilst discussed with staff, were not (to my knowledge) either developed with or distributed to the children and young people.

Importantly, these resolutions suggest that a distinction was being made at this stage in the process of the Centre's development between permitted *levels of children's participation*: Children were to be key participants in determining the activities of the Centre, and - if they so chose - its appearance, ethos and identity (although school rules would influence this). They were also to be involved in devising the policies within which the Centre would function. However, the task of setting out *the overall goals and function of the Centre* (its agenda) was to be taken up *primarily* by adults.

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<sup>88</sup> A draft A Space policy was also written concerning the holding and restraining of young people.

But this distinction - though useful for the purposes of analysis - is probably too simplistic. Arguably, if staff draw on children's expressed needs and wishes to determine the programme content, and if they reflect on this content in setting out the Centre's goals, then children act as participants in this process. But the relationship between children's agendas and their interpretation by adults is complex. And it is precisely the *relationship between children's expressed wishes and needs and adults interpretation of these* - both in terms of *what is provided* and the *rationale* which is made for this provision - which is of interest for this discussion of children's participation. Also of interest is the changing pattern of this relationship in response to circumstance: for example, is it possible to provide a programme to meet the interests of *a changing and growing population of children who use the Centre?*<sup>89</sup> How far can a workable balance be reached *within available resources* between these children's wishes, and the skills and interests of the adult staff team? And how far can the interests and agendas of other adults - such as school staff, staff from other agencies and Steering Group members - be taken into account in determining the programme content and the Centre's rationale?

In the remainder of this section 'Who sets the agenda?' I explore some tensions between the understandings and agendas of adults and of children using two examples from A Space, the lunchtime drop-in and the Easter programme.

#### 6.3.4 *Who sets the agenda?*

As I noted in Part 1 *the lunchtime drop-in* was established by the core team as part of the pilot programme. Team members thought that if young people were attracted into the project through the drop-in they might be able to develop relationships with them - which in turn might lead to them using the project after school.

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<sup>89</sup> Children sometimes commented that parts of the programme were prioritised in a way which did not reflect their wishes (eg some thought there was too much emphasis on sports; others that the programme was too oriented to younger/older children).

It was of interest, therefore, that the drop-in proved to be an enormously popular session in its own right. The informal, relaxed setting offered both an indoor alternative to the school playground and opportunities for chatting, meeting up with peers and playing board games. Children reported liking the games, and the chance to 'get out of the rain and cold' and be with friends.<sup>90</sup> It is possible, also, that the planned, staffed and resourced environment of the drop-in contrasted positively with the relatively unplanned and residual character of the playground.<sup>91</sup> It became increasingly clear to the Centre staff that the drop-in was fulfilling an important role for an expanding user group and that the majority of young people who used it did not wish or intend to come to A Space after school.<sup>92</sup>

In the early months staff debated whether they would need to place a ceiling on numbers; they also spoke of a need to balance out *quantity* and *quality* within the service provision. Whilst team members recognised that large numbers of young people might be enjoying the social aspects of attendance, implicit in the concern about 'quality' were ideas that they as staff should be providing 'something more' (see also Chapter 3: 3.3). Clearly, this example highlights the question of quality for whom, and by whose understandings?

In the final event, the lunchtime drop-in remained in place on the programme.<sup>93</sup> Staff set an upper limit for numbers attending on any one day, to reflect both the limitations on space and what they perceived to be an appropriate adult - young person ratio. Of key significance to this discussion, however, was the process by which additional elements of the after-school programme - such as homework support, the 'Listening Ear' service and 'Express Yourself' were gradually introduced into the lunchtime drop-in slot.<sup>94</sup> This process was undoubtedly informed by the wishes of *some* young people. However, it was also informed by staff concerns to provide additional 'welfare' and 'educational' opportunities in this informal setting.

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<sup>90</sup> Direct reports from children gathered during my time spent at the lunchtime drop-in.

<sup>91</sup> This is a hypothesis. I do not have sufficient data to support this.

<sup>92</sup> This perception was supported by findings from the July 1998 questionnaire for children and young people.

<sup>93</sup> The drop-in has continued and still operates at the time of writing (December 1999).

The feasibility research had suggested that children's (and parents and carers) prioritised holiday provision over both after-school and weekend activities, and holiday provision was clearly identified as an aspect of the Centre's service in the 12 key features. In response to this the staff planned a 1998 *Easter holiday programme*. They debated whether and how the activities on offer should differ from the regular termly programme and from the kinds of activities which were provided in Council-run holiday playschemes. In the final event the two-week programme combined a range of sporting, music, arts and crafts activities with off-site sports and an away-day at the seaside. It was very popular and filled to planned capacity.

Reviewing the Easter scheme some core team members expressed concerns that the programme was too similar to a playscheme, observing that the Centre had an *additional function* beyond that of providing recreational opportunities (and care for parents and carers). And interestingly, in the light of this, the Summer scheme of 1998 was markedly different. Eligibility was limited to children from Years 5-8, the session times were considerably shorter,<sup>95</sup> children were expected to attend key aspects of the programme,<sup>96</sup> and (in line with the age limitation) the scheme had a focus on transition.

Critically, the two schemes were separated by the Summer Term. The distinctions between them reflect two related developments during the term:

- the appointment in June 1998 of a home-school link worker,<sup>97</sup> whose role would include working with families to ease the transition and who would be based both at A Space and in Kingsland school;

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<sup>94</sup> These elements were all provided at lunchtime by July 1998.

<sup>95</sup> The shorter sessions meant that the Summer scheme was less useful as 'care' for working parents and carers.

<sup>96</sup> These aspects related to sports education and transition work (see Chapter 8).

<sup>97</sup> This worker was jointly appointed by Kingsland and A Space.



- a growing conviction amongst core team members that a key function of their work should be to ease the transition from primary to secondary school.

The lunchtime drop-in and holiday scheme examples also reflect an increasing emphasis amongst A Space core staff on their role as '*social educators*' offering children a range of activities as vehicles for interactive social learning (see also Chapter 8 for discussion). This role is already implicit in the Project's Aims and Objectives document (March 1998) (see 6.3.3 above). It is increasingly referenced henceforth in team discussions, in Centre documentation and in the process of participant data collection.<sup>98</sup>

#### 6.4 May - December 1998

During the Summer term of 1998 the work of the team continued to expand and diversify. In this latter phase children were increasingly involved in taking on responsibility for some aspects of the Centre's operation. They worked, for example, on the Centre newsletter, they recruited other children through their schools into the Centre and they inducted newcomers to the Centre programme. Plans were also put in place for the development of a children's forum where children were to debate and have an input into planning for the Centre.<sup>99</sup> Staff envisaged that this might provide a step towards children's eventual representation on the Project Steering Group.<sup>100</sup>

By the Summer of 1998, the after-school activity programme included the following activities:<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For example, in individual interviews some of the sessional staff described their role in A Space in terms of 'social education'.

<sup>99</sup> A children's forum started in March 1999.

<sup>100</sup> At the time of writing (December 1999) children are, as yet, unrepresented on the Steering Group. Parents have been represented since September 1999.

<sup>101</sup> The activities are grouped under categories which were used by centre staff, but see Chapter 7:7.4 for discussion.

*Educational:* Tutored computing sessions; ongoing policy development work; homework support (run by the newly appointed home-school link worker and an A Space development worker) and drama workshops.

*Recreational:* Arts, crafts, indoor and outdoor sports, off-site sports, structured games and activities, an open activity area with a range of board games.

*Health/Well-being:* 'Express Yourself,' girls and young women's work, home-link work.

During the Summer and the Autumn terms a firm basis was also laid for three key additional elements of the A Space service: *the 'Listening Ear' service, the peer mentoring service and the transition programme.* The development of these services raises interesting and complex issues for this discussion of children's participation: both in terms of the underpinning staff rationale for each of the services, and in terms of the particular balances that are reflected within each between the interests and agendas of adults and those of children (see also 6.3 above). Essentially, the debate focuses on the tensions that exist between adults' concerns to prepare children for their 'time-future' (as implied in a social education agenda) and the value that children may attach to the time-present (see also Chapters 2 and 3). These issues will be fully discussed, however, in Chapter 8.

## **6.5 Summary and Key Themes**

This chapter has used the exemplar of A Space to introduce some of the challenges which confront adults when they try to develop services in participation with children. I have shown how the concept of children's participation may be variously interpreted in practice at different levels. Children may contribute, for example, to these various elements:

1. the activities that are provided;
2. the physical environment;
3. the ethos and identity;
4. the policy framework;
5. operational aspects;
6. definitions of the goals or functions of the service (its agenda).

I have suggested that the children and young people at A Space have been involved as participants in *the first five*<sup>102</sup> of these elements, and that the Centre staff experienced dilemmas within this process. In essence, their dilemmas were focused around the question of how to balance the interests of adults with those of children. And implicit in the practical resolution of these dilemmas were workable compromises between these interests. The complex question of children's participation in defining the goals and functions of the service - *the sixth element* - increasingly defined by staff in terms of *easing the transition* and *social education* - is a critical issue to be explored in depth in Chapter 8.

The analysis of children's participation in this Chapter has focused primarily on the balance of interests between adults and children. However, it is important to re-iterate that *within each group* there may be varying and sometimes conflicting agendas and these differing agendas will themselves influence the implementation process (see 6.3 above). For example, my data suggest that children at A Space differed in the extent to which they wanted free choice or boundaries on their choices and behaviour; and that they differed also in the ways that they chose to use the Centre. Some were attracted by opportunities to socialise and have fun - to enjoy the 'time-present',

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<sup>102</sup> However, they were not necessarily fully involved in all of these; eg the 'Listening Ear' policy framework was devised without children's participation (see Chapter 8 for discussion).

whereas others sought help from the Centre staff, and others still were keen to benefit from some of the learning activities on offer.

The relationship between core team and sessional team members provides an interesting example of differing adult agendas. The sessional staff were all part-time, paid on a sessional basis and recruited on short-term contracts to meet the expressed wishes of the children and young people. Paying for them to take part in team meetings and other 'non-contact' time activities was 'expensive': and as a consequence sessional team members had far less involvement in planning than members of the core team.<sup>103</sup> Ironically, there were tensions, therefore, between their role as *adult participants* in developing the Centre's work and their role (as understood by the core team) in *promoting children's participation*.<sup>104</sup>

Also of interest in relation to adult agendas - is the changing relationship between the school staff (especially Kingsland) and centre staff over the course of the Centre's development. Central to this was the question of how far school and centre staff viewed the Centre as *part of* or *as distinct from* the schools. How far were school(s) and centre to work together as partners, and would a 'partnership' between them mean - in turn - that they had to develop a shared agenda? And critical here was the issue of whether the Centre was to operate a service for the schools - with direct referrals of children from them - or whether it was to maintain a policy of refusing such referrals, accepting only the children who 'referred' themselves.

These examples are directly linked to the analysis of *collaboration in the progress and progress of A Space*. They will be addressed further in Chapter 7 (and in Chapter 8) to follow.

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<sup>103</sup> For example, resource constraints - and lack of time - meant that whole team meetings (of core and sessional staff) were infrequent; and, from May 1998, the Centre Director was unable to offer regular individual supervision to sessional staff.

<sup>104</sup> In individual interviews some sessional staff described being less involved (than core staff) in deciding what happened at the Centre.

## 7. THE PROCESS AND PROGRESS OF A SPACE: COLLABORATIVE WORKING

### 7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6 I described the development of A Space with a focus on the implementation of children's participation. However, the original Children's Centre concept combines this participation principle with an emphasis on multi-agency, collaborative working. It introduces the possibility of children having access to integrated and holistic services developed in response to their expressed wishes and needs (see also Chapters 1 and 2). And, as I noted in Chapter 3 (3.6), the Children's Centre model can potentially lead to the development of a wide range of services: to curriculum based and complementary learning opportunities, to opportunities for play, and to a variety of health and welfare services.

This Chapter focuses on collaborative work in practice at A Space. My aims are twofold:

- to describe and analyse the process and progress of collaborative working during the course of the Centre's development, and to
- discuss the relationship between these practices and children's participation.<sup>105</sup>

The Chapter is in three sections and, like Chapter 6, it draws on research reports of both *process* and *participant* data.

In the first section (7.2) I provide a summary of collaborative working at A Space. I suggest that this operates in a number of different ways and at a number of different

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<sup>105</sup> See also Chapter 5 for a discussion of collaboration, children's participation and the research process.

levels. I also discuss some terminological issues here, clarifying what I mean - in the context of A Space - by terms such as *collaboration* and *multi-agency*.

In the second section (7.3) I focus in more depth on the involvement of welfare,<sup>106</sup> health and education agencies in the history of A Space. I describe the progress of the relationship between each of these agencies and the Centre, and I explore the links between these developments and children's participation (see also Chapter 6).

And finally I conclude (in 7.4) by summarising some of the key themes which emerge from the Chapter as a whole. In particular, I focus on the extent to which the characteristics of collaboration at A Space can be understood to promote or to conflict with children's participation.

It is important to re-iterate here that there is an extensive and expanding literature pointing to a variety of factors which both impede and promote collaborative work (e.g. see Leathard 1994; Sutton 1995; Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991; see also Chapter 2: 2.3.1). Diverse and conflicting professional ideologies, traditions, languages and assumptions are frequently described as barriers to collaboration within and across different disciplines, departments, agencies and services; and effective communication and support structures, training and resources are commonly viewed as promotive factors. However, whilst I acknowledge the relevance of this literature to this chapter, I do not intend to explore it in any detail; as space is limited, the thesis foregrounds participation, and my prime interest is in exploring how children's participation is understood and operationalised across services affecting children.

## **7.2 A Summary of Collaborative Work at a Space**

### **7.2.1 A word on terminology**

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<sup>106</sup> I include here play, youth and social services.

Writing about the relationships between professionals in health and welfare services Leathard (1994) lists a total of no less than 52 terms which are used to describe what she describes as 'inter-professional work'. In many respects this 'terminological quagmire' (Leathard 1994:5) reflects the changing and developing world of public policy<sup>107</sup> and the increasing topicality of what are relatively 'new' styles of working. But, where different terms are favoured within different service areas,<sup>108</sup> it can also be understood as a reflection of the varied traditions, ideologies and languages which I refer to above.

I do not wish to get waylaid here, however, in a discussion of terminology. I make these comments to emphasise the context-based 'situational' nature of these terms: and as an important prelude to an account of what I have chosen to call 'collaborative' practices at A Space. By this I mean simply 'people working closely together' - often (though not always) - towards a common goal. In the course of my account I will specify whether such collaboration is, for example, between adults from varied professional backgrounds or disciplines; and/or from varied agencies ('multi-agency'); and I shall describe its particular forms.

### ***7.2.2 The context for collaboration***

I noted in Chapter 5 (5.2.4) that:

The theme of multi-agency collaboration is central to the original Children's centre concept, to the research and developmental processes of the feasibility study and to the organisational framework that was devised for the Centre (my account: Spring 1998)

Thus, as I have already described (Chapter 1: 1.6 and Chapter 5: 5.3.1), even before A Space opened, a Steering Group comprising representatives from a range of

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<sup>107</sup> See also Chapter 3 (3.1) concerning the large number of terms used to describe 'out-of-school' provision.

<sup>108</sup> For example, the term multi-disciplinary is commonly favoured in health care.

agencies was in place; and a framework of 12 key features proposed that the new centre would:

cross traditional service boundaries by providing educational, recreational and health/welfare facilities and opportunities, and

be committed to multi-agency collaboration to provide the best possible services to children.

Berry Mayall and I envisaged that the Centre services would be provided by a core team, whose members would bring considerable and diverse experience to their new posts; and that the work of this team would be supplemented by sessional staff drawn from local statutory and voluntary health, welfare and education agencies (see also Chapter 1: 1.5).<sup>109</sup> The proposed structure thus comprised three 'teams' or groupings of people: a small core team which was *in itself* constituted from people with varied work experience and skills, working together with a similarly diverse sessional team, with a 'multi-agency' Steering Group in an overseeing role.

The new core team members were appointed by a panel of Steering Group representatives;<sup>110</sup> and the person specifications for the development worker and Director posts stated that applicants should have broad professional experience in one or more relevant fields, to include teaching, youth work, social work, play and community work. Whilst there were areas of 'common ground' between the new members - for example, all clearly had some experience in working with children and young people - there was also variation; for example, in the extent to which individuals had worked with older and with younger children. There were also some differences between the ideologies, training and traditions of team members: perhaps most notably between youth/play work and the more psycho-dynamically oriented art therapies (see Chapters 8 and 9 for further discussion).

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<sup>109</sup> Feasibility consultations with staff in health, play, youth services had led us to believe that there was some possibility that existing staff might be deployed for occasional sessional work at A Space.

<sup>110</sup> The panel also included a representative from Hackney Personnel Department.



Of interest for the research were the *inter-relationships* that would develop *within and between* this core team, the sessional team and the Steering Group. And more particularly:

How would the professional backgrounds and experience of core and sessional team members be reflected in the particular 'blend' or 'balance' of services to be offered at the Centre?

What contribution might the Steering Group and other Hackney agencies make to the development of the programme and the service?

And, finally, of key concern for this chapter, how would children's participation be understood and operationalised within and across the project as a whole? <sup>111</sup>

### ***7.2.3 Collaboration at A Space: a summary***

The early work of the core team can be categorised into four forms of 'internal' and 'external' collaboration: (see also Chapter 6: 6.2.2):

- i) learning to work together as a team;
- ii) developing links with external agencies; and, as part of this,
- iii) beginning to recruit sessional staff and
- iv) developing relationships with the participant schools (this will be discussed in 7.3.3 below: education).

i) In the first weeks, core team members were extensively involved in role negotiation and definition. This involved both understanding and learning about each others skills,

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<sup>111</sup> By this I mean across the core and sessional teams and Steering Group.

and discussing internal communication processes. Members commonly drew on their previous work experience when making suggestions about how to proceed (for example, tried and tested playcentre methods were suggested in planning the application procedure for the Centre) and they were keen to find ways of putting their particular skills to use, (for example, via a role designation for programme development and operation which drew on individual skills). Implicit in team members' wish for role clarity at this early stage was a strong concern to validate and confirm their existing skills (see also Chapter 6:6.2.2).

ii) During September and October 1997 the team spent considerable time and effort in developing an 'agency audit': gathering information about the role and function of a wide range of local statutory and non-statutory agencies. This exercise also allowed for publicising of the Centre (see Chapter 6: 6.2.2) and for an exploration of the potential for future collaboration with local voluntary and statutory agencies. Included in the audit were discussions with agencies which were also represented on the Steering Group, e.g. youth, play and health services.

iii) By late October 1997 it had become clear to the Centre Director that statutory health, play, social and youth<sup>112</sup> services would not be able to release any of their existing staff to provide sessions at A Space. Whilst senior staff in these agencies were supportive of the idea in principle, they commented that they would be unable to justify such arrangements in financial terms because of their increasingly overstretched - and, in some cases ring-fenced - budgets. With plans for the pilot programme well underway, the Director approached Hackney Play Association and obtained the names of several people with backgrounds in youth and play work and additional specialist skills which supplemented those of the core team (see also Chapter 6: 6.2.6). Applicants were interviewed at A Space and recruited on short-term contracts, in a similar model to 'agency' staff, to work part-time on the Centre's programme. The make-up of the sessional team has changed over the life of the project,<sup>113</sup> but key

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<sup>112</sup> Youth services were not directly involved in the November 1997 programme. However, they collaborated with A Space in the development and operation of a pilot peer mentoring programme which ran from February 1998 (see this chapter (7.3.1) and Chapter 8 (8.2.2).

<sup>113</sup> However, some of the first sessional staff have stayed on working at the project.

skill areas and the mode of recruitment on short-term part-time contracts has remained. Together with the core team, these sessional staff have played an important part in the day-to-day operation of the Centre's programme.<sup>114</sup>

These developments reflect a rather different course from that which was originally envisaged. With the benefit of hindsight, it was perhaps unrealistic to think that local Hackney agencies might be willing to release their staff within weeks to work at a new centre<sup>115</sup> - despite all the work of the feasibility phase (see also Chapter 1: 1.6). Clearly, severe financial constraints were an important factor within the statutory sector; but three further important points are also suggested here:

- There is a considerable difference between what I shall term 'developmental collaboration' (where external agencies offer an indirect contribution to the planning and implementation of services at the Centre; including, for example, advice, supervision, multi-agency planning and development groups, joint fund-raising exercises) and what I shall term 'operational collaboration' (where external agencies contribute directly to running services).
- Voluntary agencies may experience less constraints on collaboration than statutory agencies.
- Collaborative practice *of any kind* requires time and trust on both sides to plan and effect.

In summary, the process and progress of A Space from November 1997 - December 1998 shows a very wide range of developmental collaborations and a growth in such collaboration over the course of the project. It also shows a chronological progression from *developmental* to *operational collaboration*; a progression which has

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<sup>114</sup> However, as I suggested in Chapter 6 (6.4), the working conditions of sessional staff limited the extent to which they were involved in planning.

<sup>115</sup> Although the idea of the Centre was not new to *some of* the senior statutory staff (as they had participated in the feasibility study) the A Space team was unfamiliar.

accompanied a gradual build-up of trust between A Space and other agencies<sup>116</sup> and which has frequently been the direct result of developmental work (for example, joint fundraising exercises have resulted in funding for staff, such as the home-school link worker, who have contributed to centre operations).

By the Summer of 1998, A Space was offering a wide-ranging programme of activities which the team grouped into broadly recreational, educational and health/well-being activities (see also Chapter 6:6.4). As the chart in Appendix 2 shows,<sup>117</sup> more than 30 statutory and voluntary agencies were contributing to both the development and operation of this programme. During the later months (Autumn 1998 onwards), there was evidence also of a third model of collaboration: when external agencies began to offer their services on the A Space site.<sup>118</sup>

To describe the chronological process of *all* this collaborative work would be difficult, time-consuming and not entirely useful, given the number of agencies concerned and the complexity and diversity of the relationships involved. In 7.3 below I focus on the particular contributions of welfare, health and education agencies<sup>119</sup> to the Centre's development.

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<sup>116</sup> It is important to note that (as with many typologies) this classification is intended to clarify complex processes. There is considerable overlap between the categories: thus, an agency which has offered advice to A Space staff might often contribute directly to running the programme at a later date. In some activities, A Space staff take most of the responsibility for development and operation; in others external agencies may play a substantial role in one or both of these areas.

<sup>117</sup> The A Space Director kindly provided this chart.

<sup>118</sup> For example, a voluntary counselling agency has offered its services to over 12s on the A Space site.

<sup>119</sup> My focus on welfare, health and education is deliberate as these broad divisions of services for children both reflect and reify thinking about children and their 'needs' (see also Chapters 2, 3 and 4). I recognise that my account does not do full justice to the extensive contribution of a range of voluntary agencies to the work of A Space. However, some of their contributions are referenced in my account.

### 7.3 The Contributions of Key Agencies to the Work of a Space

#### 7.3.1 *Welfare (including social, play and youth services)*

##### 7.3.1.1 *Social services*

The Borough's Social Services Department did not volunteer to sit on the original Project Steering Group despite some initial expressions of interest from the service development manager for under 12s.<sup>120 121</sup> This probably reflects low priority given to the work of A Space in a context where the energies and resources of the department were taken up with statutory child protection work; and where it might be expected, therefore, that contact between the two agencies would be limited to liaison around any child protection concerns (see also Chapters 2, 3 and 6). However, during the Summer of 1997, the Social Services Department funded a new Family Support Team with a remit to research and develop family support initiatives.<sup>122</sup> A Space staff explicitly identified themselves as having a role to play in 'early prevention' work with children and their families<sup>123</sup> and they were keen to engage, therefore, in *developmental collaboration* with the Family Support Team.

In the Autumn of 1997 a multi-agency collaboration group was established by a member of the Family Support Team and an A Space development worker. The group held monthly meetings and members of the local area social services were represented along with members from the Child and Family Consultation Services, the East London Schools Fund and the Community Health services. This group *with strong representation from social services*, played a key role in advising on the development of the A Space 'Listening Ear' service (see Chapter 8: 8.2.1) and in instigating the June 1998 appointment of the home-school link worker (see also 7.3.3 below, and

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<sup>120</sup> As part of major re-organisation in the Council's services, the post of children's service development manager for under 12s was also removed at a later date.

<sup>121</sup> The second chair of the Steering Group was, however the Hackney Children's Plan Co-ordinator, a joint education and social services post.

<sup>122</sup> The creation of this new team in Hackney may have been influenced by recent research. A number of national research studies had pointed to the emphasis that social services were giving to child protection investigation at the expense of family support (eg see Department of Health 1995).

Chapters 6 and 8). Towards the end of 1998 staff from the Child and Family Consultation services also became directly involved in *operational collaboration* at A Space, contributing to the running of groups for the parents and carers of transition children.

The process of collaboration between social services and A Space raises some complex questions concerning the *universalism* of the Centre's services (see also Chapter 6: 6.2.5). The family support remit of social services has increasingly developed in terms of 'targeted' support services to those who are deemed to be most 'in need' or most vulnerable. And this concept of 'targeting' is also implicit in some of the jointly developed A Space services - most notably in the home-school link work and the transition programme (and arguably in the 'Listening Ear' service). This reflects the existence of a prevailing mode of thought - both at A Space and more generally - about the goals of services, and how money should be spent. However, the notion of targeting is at some remove from the principle of 'universality' upon which the Centre was established.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the work of family support agencies often focuses directly on parents rather than children (e.g. in the example above, the Child and Family Consultation services offered groups for parents and carers). This, in turn, raises some complex questions about children as participants (see Chapter 8 for full discussion).

#### 7.3.1.2 *Play and youth services*

Hackney Play and Youth services were both represented regularly on the Project Steering Group. The representatives played an important role in offering immediate advice to the Centre Director, and in pointing him towards appropriate staff within their respective services for additional advice and information. (For example, the Play service offered guidance on health and safety issues and on fees, and the Youth service offered advice on issues concerning the employment of sessional staff). Staff from Hackney Youth services also contributed extensively to both the development and operation of the A Space peer mentoring project (see Chapter 8:8.2.2).

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<sup>123</sup> They identified this role for themselves in centre documentation.

It is clearly important also that play and youth work were both strongly represented in the backgrounds of A Space core team members and sessional staff (see Chapter 6: 6.2.1 and 7.2.2 above). However, I return to this in 7.4 (Discussion and Conclusions).

### 7.3.2 *Health*

There are some clear parallels in the involvement of Health Services and Social Services with A Space - namely, both agencies were financially constrained; both consequently developed an advice-giving role;<sup>125</sup> both became involved in *developmental collaboration* with A Space through the auspices of a multi-agency group; and both engaged in some limited *operational collaboration*. However, it is undoubtedly the case that the Health Authority was more consistently involved with A Space than the statutory Social Services. The Authority was well represented on the Project Steering Group (with two members), and these members were regular and committed attenders who demonstrated a keen interest in the progress of the Centre (particularly the 'Listening Ear' and the research element).

In May 1998 Kingsland School, the Health Authority and A Space were brought together through the establishment of a multi-agency group which was chaired by the Kingsland Head teacher and included A Space representatives, the Kingsland school nurse, school doctors, health promotion and education welfare staff and the home-school link worker. *With strong representation from health and health-related services* this multi-agency group had a remit to develop constructive collaborations in work with Kingsland young people and to ensure clear inter-agency referral procedures. However, it is of interest for this analysis of collaboration that the group first met in response to the concern of A Space staff that arrangements had been made, without their knowledge, to re-introduce a sexual health drop-in to the school;

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<sup>124</sup> And as I noted in Chapter 6 (6.2.5), the question of targeting versus universality was debated in the core team.

<sup>125</sup> Health service staff offered advice concerning procedures for the A Space 'Listening Ear' service (see Chapter 8: 8.2.1)

and that clear links between the Health Authority and Kingsland School<sup>126</sup> had *pre-dated* the opening of A Space.

This example suggests the importance of taking into account that collaborative projects such as A Space do not start in a vacuum: they begin in situations where *collaborations already exist and working relationships are already made*. In this context, it was probably easier and more comfortable for the health agencies and the school to renew existing collaborations *without* the involvement of A Space: a centre whose staff were still relatively new,<sup>127</sup> their professionalism 'untested'. It was likely that Health staff were unclear how to understand and to work with this newly formed team of people with an unusual combination of youth, play and art therapy backgrounds; and that they may have been concerned about whether the team had the skills to run the proposed innovative Centre, and, particularly, to offer a 'Listening Ear' service (see Chapter 8: 8.2.1). Such suspicions take time to be allayed. However, by the Summer of 1998 there is evidence of greater trust between Health services and A Space, with health promotion staff contributing directly to the training of sessional staff and to peer mentoring and a voluntary counselling agency working on-site (see also 7.2.3 above).

The 'Kingsland' focus of the multi-agency group is also of interest. This is clearly linked to the pre-existing relationship between the Health Authority and the school. However, the chairing of the group by the Head teacher, and not, for example, by the A Space Director,<sup>128</sup> effectively ensures that all agencies, *including A Space*, are oriented to and 'comply' with a school agenda. I move on now to describe the key role of education in the development of A Space, and to discuss the Centre's ethos and identity in relation to that of its site school (see also Chapter 8).

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<sup>126</sup> For example, a school nurse was attached and health drop-ins had been run at the school.

<sup>127</sup> Particularly to some of the health service staff.

<sup>128</sup> The A Space Director has a specific remit to develop multi-agency work; arguably, he also has more time to devote to this role than the Head teacher.



### **7.3.3 Education**

The relationship between the A Space project and Hackney Education services extends back to the beginning of the feasibility research when I carried out initial negotiations regarding the study with a senior officer in the Council's Education Learning and Leisure Department. Additionally, the recruitment panel appointed the core staff as employees of this section, the Centre was based on a school site, and it was open to children from specific Hackney schools (see Chapters 1: 1.6). Education also had a prominent place within the Steering Group with representation from senior staff in the participating schools.

Clearly, the Education services were centrally placed within this original project framework, but what contribution did they make to the process and progress of the Centre? And what kinds of relationships developed between A Space and the schools?

Analysis of the Centre's history suggests that there was very little collaboration between the Centre staff and the Education, Learning and Leisure Department. This is probably attributable, in part, to the departure from the Council of the senior officer with whom I negotiated access for the research (see above). This individual was notably supportive of the Centre concept and he played an active role as the first Chair of the Project Steering Group. He left shortly after the Centre was established, and his leaving served to sever some of the links between the Centre and the Department. Also critical was the enormous upheaval within the Education Department at this time (see Chapter 6: 6.2.1).

Relationships between Kingsland and A Space can be most clearly illustrated by outlining the position at the end of the study. By December 1998 there were numerous examples of collaborative practice between the two: a senior member of Kingsland School staff had remained in regular attendance at project Steering Group meetings; the A Space Director was represented on the school governing body and he met regularly with the school's senior management team. Together, Kingsland and A Space staff had raised the funds for the appointment of a joint home-school link

worker (see also Chapter 6: 6.3.4 and Chapter 8) and they had made an application for new school sports facilities. A Space had also played a key role in the establishment of a Kingsland based and chaired multi-agency group (see 7.3.2 above: health). The Centre was making frequent use of school resources (classrooms, facilities and equipment) in liaison with school staff, and the school had arranged for a student teacher to work at the lunchtime drop-in. Finally, many elements of the A Space programme were increasingly centred around improving the orientation of children and young people to Kingsland School and to school life (e.g. the homework club and the transition programme) (see also Chapters 6 and 8).

The development of collaborative working between A Space and the participant primaries took a rather different course. As I noted in Chapter 1 (1.6) one of the selected primaries withdrew from the project at the end of 1997. The remaining two primaries were only occasionally represented at Steering Group meetings, and the A Space link development workers sometimes found it difficult to access and talk to primary school staff. Nevertheless, the after-school sessions were particularly popular with primary children and both of the participant schools played a key role in ensuring that escorts were available to take the children from school to the Centre (see also Chapter 6: 6.2.6). Importantly also, by the Summer of 1998, a closer working relationship was in evidence between A Space and one of the two primaries in particular. This change related directly to the Centre's new emphasis on easing the transition (see also Kingsland above and Chapters 6 and 8) and to the appointment of the home-school link worker.

The differences in the pattern of collaboration between the Centre and the secondary compared to that of the primary deserves some further consideration here. It is likely that in the early months at least the primary school staff viewed A Space as a useful *care* service for some of their children - essentially as a service to parents and carers, rather than as a service with which they were engaged in an active partnership.<sup>129130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> This observation is based on participant interview data, as well as on evidence from the lack of involvement in the Steering Group.

<sup>130</sup> Secondary schools also tend to have more staff than primaries with time allocated for tasks other than classroom teaching (personal communication; Berry Mayall's discussions with secondary staff).

With Kingsland however, the shared siting raised immediate issues which were of concern to both agencies (e.g. resourcing, equipment, security, procedures), and which demanded extensive liaison between the two (see also Chapter 6: 6.2.2). Also, as I discussed in Chapter 6 (6.3.4), whilst increasing numbers of primary children registered for A Space, and the lunchtime sessions were popular with Kingsland students, only a few older children attended as 'drop-in' attenders at the Centre. Indeed, Centre staff believed that they should actively seek to change this and initiatives such as the pilot peer mentoring project - designed in part to address these discrepancies, *required Kingsland staff to become involved*, for example, in identifying possible mentors (see Chapter 8: 8.2.2).

These developments suggest that (at least until the Summer 1998 - when the transition programme got underway) parents and carers, rather than school, were key participants along with primary children in relation to A Space. Parents were actively involved in decision-making about their children's use of the project. Unsurprisingly, with the older children, who were not generally viewed as in need of after school *care*, the role of parents was less significant. However, by suggesting to young people that they might like to try A Space, the Kingsland staff played a key role in promoting the involvement of their pupils with specific Centre projects, some of which (like the pilot peer mentoring project) were ultimately geared towards orienting children to school. Arguably the process by which these older children accessed A Space was not as 'participative' as that of those who came as drop-in members. The idea of pilot peer mentoring was not theirs in the first place - but that of the A Space staff - and they were prompted to come by their teachers. I am not suggesting here that these young people *did not want* to get involved with A Space - the key point here is that it was adults who suggested that they might do so.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the collaboration between A Space and *all* the participant schools is the development of the shared 'transition' agenda from the Summer of 1998 onwards. The Centre's expressed aim to ease the transition from primary to secondary school effectively acts to confirm existing links between the primaries and the secondary; to provide A Space with a role in relation to the primary schools (as well as to parents); and to establish a new triangular set of relations

between the three parties. And the role of the home-school link worker - whose post is based in both Kingsland and A Space, and who is employed to work across the primary/secondary interface - can be understood as an *embodiment* of this three-way relationship. As the title of the post suggests it is also significant that the link worker works across *the home-school interface*: the role involves work both *with parents* and *young people* to facilitate orientation to secondary school. Again, this raises similar questions in relation to children's participation as those alluded to above.

#### 7.4 Discussion and Conclusions

My account of the relationship between the welfare, health and education services and A Space has highlighted some important issues concerning both the process of collaborative working and children's participation.

In summary, I have suggested that:

- the contribution of Social Services is influenced by the Department's 'family support' remit, in which services are 'targeted' and not provided on a universal basis (an essentially 'welfarist' and 'compensatory' approach: see also Chapters 2 and 3);
- the involvement of Health services is informed by a prior relationship with the secondary school, a relationship which positions A Space as ill-equipped to work with children until proven otherwise;
- the relationship with the schools is characterised by the development of an increasingly shared agenda which prioritises the orientation of children to secondary school and which raises, in turn, some questions regarding children's participation (see also Chapter 2 and Chapter 3:3.4.4).

By making these points I do not intend to convey any value judgement about the quality of the contributions of external agencies to A Space; and the commitment of staff in these agencies to multi-agency working; or about the dedication, hard-work

and commitment to children's participation and multi-agency collaboration which has been shown by the Centre staff (see Chapter 6). Indeed, as I have described above (7.2), the development of A Space shows a quite remarkable progression into a thriving project which successfully involves a large number of agencies. Nor do I wish to suggest that there is anything problematic *per se* about a project which focuses increasingly on assisting children with settling into secondary school (see Chapter 3: 3.4.4). My concern is, however, to pinpoint some of the ideological and practical issues which are encountered when adults attempt to develop participative work practices with children, and to understand more about the influence of multi-agency collaboration on these dilemmas.

My analysis may also be over-simplistic. Although I have suggested that the interests of children as participants may be threatened by some of the processes of multi-agency working at A Space - and particularly by the development of an increasingly shared agenda between the Centre and the schools - it should not be assumed that the shared agenda or *rationale* of A Space and school - is entirely at odds with that of the children themselves (see also Chapter 3: 3.4.4). It is also important to note that a shared agenda does not in itself equate with a shared identity and ethos. For example, there is evidence to suggest that the social environment of the Centre was markedly different from that of the schools, and that children experienced their relationships with A Space staff as more democratic and 'equal'<sup>131</sup> than their relationships with teachers. And whilst the agenda of the Centre service may have been shaped by the adult staff at A Space in collaboration with the schools, children contributed as active participants to the Centre's identity and ethos (see also Chapter 6).

The chapter as a whole has also focused on the *characteristics* and *processes* of collaboration at the expense of any detailed analysis of the *programme content*. And by prioritising the contributions of key Steering Group agencies I have largely ignored the significant arts and sports elements of the programme. As the chart in Appendix 2 shows, the team represented their programme in three broad areas, education, health-well-being and recreation. 'Recreational' provision took up a considerable part of the

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<sup>131</sup> Several children commented that the A Space staff were more 'like friends.'

Centre's resources and included a range of arts and sports activities. The youth, play work and arts skills of core and sessional team members were essential here; and these were supplemented as needed by external collaborations with a large number of (mainly) voluntary agencies.

And finally, the Centre team's categorisation of the programme into the three broad services is of considerable interest itself for this discussion of collaboration. Team members found themselves to be reliant on the categories 'educational', 'recreational' and 'health/well-being' in representing the programme: a grouping which suggests that there were three clear areas of activity, each influenced by one service. However, they used these terms reluctantly, noting that many activities combined these service elements and recognising that they lacked more appropriate terms within which to describe their services. Whilst the terms *holistic* and *integrated* may be readily used for general descriptive purposes, this experience of the team suggests the inevitability of categorisation in providing more detailed information about service provision.<sup>132</sup> It also points to the pervasive influence of 'fragmented' thinking, both amongst the staff and in society at large.

I move on now to Chapter 8 where I explore three elements of the Centre's programme: the 'Listening Ear' service, the peer mentoring service and the transition programme. These elements are linked by an underpinning philosophy of *social education*; a philosophy which I suggest provides an 'umbrella' for practices which are influenced by both the 'therapeutic' and youth work approaches of the core team.

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<sup>132</sup> Of course the thesis and the research upon which it is based also relies on such categorisation (eg the 12 key features referred to educational, recreational and health-welfare services).

## 8. CASE STUDIES: THREE ELEMENTS OF THE A SPACE PROGRAMME

### 8.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides an in-depth description and discussion of three elements of the A Space programme: the 'Listening Ear' service, the peer mentoring service and the transition service. The ordering reflects the chronological development of the three services over the data collection period: the 'Listening Ear' concept was developed during the feasibility study and taken up by the core team early in the Centre's history; the peer mentoring service had its origins in a pilot peer mentoring project which began in the Spring Term of 1998, and the transition service was developed in the 1998 Summer term (see also Chapter 6:6.4).

Chapter 6 has focussed on children's participation in the development of A Space and Chapter 7 on collaboration. I aim to use these case studies as exemplars for a more detailed exploration of ideological and practice issues in the development of participative, collaborative work with children.

The structure of the Chapter is straightforward. I look at the chronological development of each of the services in turn, focussing first on description and then on analysis (8.2). I then summarise and discuss the themes which emerge from the case studies *as a whole* (8.3). My concluding comments (8.3.1) are intended to serve as a starting point for a full and final discussion in Chapter 9.

The 'Listening Ear', the peer mentoring and the transition service are all elements which broadly reflect the health/well-being and educational aspects of the A Space programme. However, my discussion in 8.3 will also refer briefly to the 'Learning through Sports' service. Although this service originated in the Autumn of 1998, its full development took place during 1999 when I had stopped formally collecting data for this study. I include it, however, to redress the imbalance of Chapter 7 (see 7.4) and because the service provides a clear illustration of some key issues concerning children's participation.

## 8.2 The Case Studies

### 8.2.1 The 'Listening Ear' service

#### 8.2.1.1 Introduction

A 'Listening Ear' service is essentially a service which provides an opportunity for children to talk in private to an empathic adult. This concept emphasises a non-stigmatising, non-pathologising approach to children and their concerns. There are precedents in several voluntary sector projects at London schools, such as the 'Place to Be' which provides comfortable child-friendly rooms with counsellors to help children talk about their difficulties, and a Children's Society project (The Genesis Project) which offers counselling to children at a large co-educational secondary school. Crucially children and young people can refer themselves to such projects, and the service itself is confidential within agreed limits.<sup>133</sup>

This model of service provision emphasises children as active participants as it is generally *they* who decide whether and when to use a service.<sup>134</sup> It contrasts, therefore, with more traditional models<sup>135</sup> in which children are 'referred' for help by concerned adults - and where parents commonly participate with the agency to which the child has been referred in determining the nature and extent of the service to be offered. The 'Listening Ear' model also gives emphasis to children's time-present - providing easy accessible opportunities to address day-to-day 'here-and-now' concerns, for example worries about school, drugs, friendships, sexuality or family problems.

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<sup>133</sup> Staff give children assurances of confidentiality except where there are child protection concerns.

<sup>134</sup> Clearly children make these decisions within the context of existing adult-power relations. The point here is that the model emphasises their role as active participants within this decision-making.

<sup>135</sup> For example, the models operated by many Child and Family Consultation services.



In Chapter 3 (3.6) I noted that some of the children who were consulted in the feasibility study said that they might welcome the opportunity to talk privately with an adult about issues and difficulties that were concerning them (for example, bullying and hormones were mentioned).<sup>136</sup> In response to this Berry and I suggested that a future Children's Centre might wish to develop a 'Listening Ear' service. We envisaged also that children's ease of access to a 'Listening Ear' might be further facilitated within the setting of a Children's Centre where the service would be offered *as just one of a range of* other activities and opportunities; and where the adults who offered the 'Listening Ear' might develop more democratic relationships with the children and young people than, for example, teachers or doctors (see also Chapters 6 and 7).

#### *8.2.1.2 Early development of a 'Listening Ear' service at A Space*

During the A Space pilot programme a development worker ran a group called 'Express Yourself' (see also Chapter 6.6.2.6). This was an open art group where children were encouraged to explore their feelings using creative work. The worker - a trained art therapist - saw this group as contributing to the creation of a climate in which it was valid and acceptable to talk through problems or difficulties. Additionally, the Centre team aimed to promote this ethos within every group and activity. Thus *all* staff were encouraged by the Centre Director to provide an informal 'Listening Ear' to children in shared group areas; and children were also welcome to ask to meet with a member of staff in private.

When the full programme began in January 1998 the Centre team agreed that the two development workers should together take lead responsibility for the development of a 'Listening Ear' service. A timetabled 'Listening Ear' slot was introduced in the after school sessions and the development workers posted notices around the Centre to let the children and young people know that they could request a meeting, either as an individual or in groups. This offer was taken up by small numbers of children who

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<sup>136</sup> A few children mentioned this during small group discussions. Questionnaire data indicated that 50% of all children could think of a time in the last year when they had wanted some help or advice, and 18% of all children said that they did not have enough people to talk to when they needed help or advice.

came to discuss a range of issues including emotional, family and school difficulties (usually as individuals); and friendship and communication concerns (usually in groups). The development of this rather more formal service raised a number of procedural questions for A Space staff, and health colleagues recommended that clear *policies* should be developed to accompany the new 'Listening Ear' (see also Chapter 7 (7.3.2): health).

#### *8.2.1.3 The introduction and implementation of a policy framework*

During the early months of 1998 A Space core team members discussed a range of policy issues concerning:

- i) the required competence or professionalism of the staff who provided the service;
  - ii) the confidentiality of the service;
  - iii) referral to and from the service.
- i) Staff debated what kinds of qualifications and/or experience were necessary in the adults who provided the 'Listening Ear.' For example, was extensive experience of working with and relating to children in an out-of-school setting sufficient (e.g. as a youth or play worker), or were more specialist therapeutic or counselling skills and experience required?
- ii) Team members were clear that the 'Listening Ear' would need to comply with the Borough's Child Protection Procedures, and they also debated whether and when the child's parents or school should be informed about the child's use of the service.
- iii) Members discussed whether and in what circumstances they should take referrals for the 'Listening Ear' from the schools (or other agencies), and whether and in what circumstances they should liaise with or refer children and young people who were attending the 'Listening Ear' onto other Borough services.

In response to each of these areas respectively, the core team agreed the following key policies:

1. Responsibility for the provision and future development of the 'Listening Ear' service would be delegated to the worker *with the art therapy background*.

2. The following clause was to be added to the Centre's registration form (to be signed by parents) (see also Chapter 5: 5.3.3 and Chapter 6: 6.2.6):

Our 'Listening Ear' service provides an opportunity for children and young people to talk to us confidentially in individual or group settings. Your signature below confirms that you accept that your child may benefit from this service.

3. A Space would *not* accept referrals from the schools or any outside agency for the 'Listening Ear'. However, any one wishing to make such a referral could suggest that the child came to A Space, and/or could be given advice about alternative sources of support. Referrals of children already attending the 'Listening Ear' might be made *to other agencies* (including child protection services - see ii above) by the 'Listening Ear' worker if she thought this to be necessary. However, this would always be discussed with the child in the first instance.

In my view, the development of these policies, the involvement of health colleagues and the designation decision are all closely and inextricably linked. Policies and procedures in children's services may be understood to protect the interests of a range of service 'stakeholders'.<sup>137</sup> These include, for example, the child who uses the service (here adults are commonly concerned to ensure that the child's 'welfare' is best met); the adults who provide the service (ensuring 'cover' in the event of complaint about the service); and other adults who have an interest in what happens to the child - most notably parents - but also other agency staff. But implicit in such measures are balances between the interests of children and those of adults; and where these

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<sup>137</sup> And the same applies, of course, in other types of service provision.

policies are introduced by adults *without* the involvement of children - as was the case here<sup>138</sup> - adult concerns are emphasised.

It is likely that health staff were influenced by medical models of treatment when proposing *the need in the first place* for policies and procedures; and it is also likely that they were concerned here with ensuring the *protection* of the child. Similarly, medical models of treatment will have influenced their understandings of the skills that were required to provide a 'Listening Ear' service. They will have had far more confidence, for example, in the capacity of the therapeutically oriented staff member to provide a confidential, professional service for children (than, for example, in a play or youth worker). And although there may have been good practical reasons to delegate the 'Listening Ear' to one staff member the Director's particular choice of staff member (see 1 above) served to confirm this idea that such skills were required. Interestingly, it may have served also to facilitate the development of more trustful future collaborations with health colleagues.

The decision to refuse direct referrals from external agencies (3 above) confirmed children's role as active participants within the 'Listening Ear' (see introduction), and it effectively ensured that A Space did not simply adopt the same agenda as the participating schools, particularly Kingsland. However, when the home-school link worker was appointed in the Summer 1998, she began to encourage children whom she identified as experiencing emotional difficulties to attend both A Space *and the* 'Listening Ear' service, with a view to assisting them with orientation to school and with transition. Thus, the work of the 'Listening Ear' became increasingly linked with a school agenda (see also Chapters 6 and 7).

The policy of *discussing* referrals elsewhere with the child (also 3 above) emphasises his or her involvement in decisions about what happens with information given in confidence. But this third policy raises some dilemmas for implementation. What would be the appropriate course of action, for example, if the 'Listening Ear' worker

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<sup>138</sup> And this is, of course, commonly the case.

thought it important to consult with a teacher or the child's parent but the child refused to give his or her permission for this to happen?<sup>139</sup>

This hypothetical example illustrates some of the ethical and practical dilemmas which may arise when adults attempt to respect children's right to a confidential relationship. In this instance the debate concerns the child's right to veto the disclosure of information to others. However, the 'Listening Ear' service also highlights the question of whether parents have the prior *right to know* that their child is using the service. The legal framework in relation to children's rights to confidentiality is complex although it appears that the current position *does* provide young people with entitlements in both of these areas (see Alderson and Montgomery 1996, for discussion). And, unsurprisingly perhaps, much of the debate on this issue is in the context of children and their *medical treatment*, a context which differs from the 'Listening Ear' approach.

The decision of A Space staff to add a clause to the registration form (see 2 above) reflects an understandable concern to work in partnership with parents as well as with children; and to avoid the possible negative consequences for 'Listening Ear' staff (and maybe for the child also) of a parent 'finding out' that their child was using the service. It may also be viewed as an unsurprising resolution in the context of existing parent-child power relationships, where children and young people may still be viewed as the 'property' of their parents.

#### 8.2.1.4 *The development of a dual-pronged 'Listening Ear' service*

The policy framework for the 'Listening Ear' service was introduced at the same time that staff were debating and implementing a range of other Centre policies and, as I noted in Chapter 6 (6.3.2), a key staff concern during this phase was the development of measures to address children's behaviour. Interestingly, for this discussion of children's participation, the A Space team increasingly linked the 'management' of children's behaviour with the 'Listening Ear' service. Indeed, the Spring of 1998

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<sup>139</sup> Where the concerns of the 'Listening Ear' worker were not serious enough to warrant a child protection referral.

witnessed the development of 'Actions Have Consequences' an off-shoot of the 'Listening Ear' expressly established for children and young people who were thought to be displaying difficult or anti-social behaviour; and viewed by staff as 'an alternative to 'disciplinary action'. Children were *referred* to this new service by both core and sessional staff and by the home-school link worker.

Children attended the Actions Have Consequences service either individually or in groups (as in the original element of the 'Listening Ear'). However, Actions Have Consequences (hereafter AHC) tended to be used by individuals more frequently than by groups<sup>140</sup> - thus emphasising the inequalities of prevailing adult-child power relations. This was essentially an adult-led referral system which positioned children and young people as objects of an intervention, rather than as active participants. Although the staff offered 'choices' *within* the system (e.g. children could opt to attend AHC or to stop going to the group where they had been deemed to be disruptive) these choices were set within an adult-initiated and prescribed framework. And whilst decisions to refer transgressors to AHC were arguably made by adults *in consultation* with a wider group of children (e.g. those taking part in a particular activity) the *service itself* was not of children and young people's making.

The issue of how to respond to behaviour which is viewed as anti-social by both adults and children in a centre such as A Space is challenging and complex. AHC was developed by staff in a context where changing group membership often made a more 'democratic' approach - such as more participative discussion of what action to take - difficult. Further, team members saw themselves as using an approach within which all behaviour was understood to represent *an effective* or a *less effective* way of communicating rather than one in which behaviour was judged as '*good*' or '*bad*'. However, the referral of individual children to private AHC sessions with an adult has an undoubtedly 'authoritarian' feel, an approach which has something more in common, perhaps, with being 'sent to the Head teacher'.

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<sup>140</sup> It was also used more frequently by boys than by girls.

What is particularly problematic, however, is that AHC was developed within the overall framework of the 'Listening Ear,' a service whose origins, purpose and underpinning ethos were quite different. Moreover, it is the designated 'Listening Ear' worker who provides *both prongs* of the service.<sup>141</sup> Interestingly also, as the Centre's social education agenda increased in prominence, *both elements* of the 'Listening Ear' became informed by this ethos. Thus, whether children chose to attend the 'Listening Ear' or whether they were referred for misbehaviour to AHC, the worker aimed to: encourage them to talk about whatever might be concerning them, *and* to assist them in developing more effective forms of communication, or new interpersonal skills. Thus what began as *an informal service* in which *all A Space staff* offered children the opportunity to self-refer to talk about their concerns, became a dual-pronged formal service in which one adult - who was deemed to have the necessary expertise - met privately with children and young people with an agenda to promote their social development.

## 8.2.2 *The peer mentoring service*

### 8.2.2.1 *Introduction*

'Peer mentoring', 'peer education', 'peer counselling' and 'peer support' are all terms which variously recognise the role that *peers* (whether children or adults) may have in supporting and facilitating one another. Such approaches are based on the premise that peers have 'equal status' and that they may be better equipped to relate to each other than non-peers as a consequence of their social positioning and their closer age and/or experiences. As with the 'Listening Ear' approach, the model emphasises easily accessible, non-stigmatising and non-pathologising relationships.

### 8.2.2.2 *Peer mentoring at A Space*

A pilot peer mentoring programme at A Space was developed in the Autumn and Spring terms of 1997/1998 by an A Space worker in collaboration with staff from Hackney Youth Services (see also Chapter 7: 7.3.1). These workers aimed to develop

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<sup>141</sup> The worker concerned also viewed this as problematic. She attributed her dual role primarily to

a structure whereby the older students at Kingsland School could 'support, mentor and pass on skills to the younger children within A Space'.<sup>142</sup> They planned a training course in which Year 10 students would be offered sessions on a range of subjects including bullying, sexual health, abuse, discrimination and inequality and personal development; and they envisaged that the programme - which was to be finalised in consultation with interested students - might also include sessions on confidentiality issues, counselling skills and working as part of a team.

The development workers viewed the pilot as a possible starting point for a 'cascade' system in which trained Year 10 students would act as peer mentors when in Year 11 to Year 10s; Year 9 students would be trained in their year to mentor while in Year 10 to Year 9 students and so on. The cascade would end with Year 7s who would go into primary schools to talk about their experiences of secondary school with Year 6 students.

The training course ran in the Spring Term of 1998 and included fifteen Year 10 pupils who were recruited via the Kingsland School career tutor. Eight of the fifteen were regular attenders. Sessions were provided by A Space staff, and staff from Hackney Youth Service and other agencies, e.g. health. The pilot was evaluated by these staff and by the young people who had been involved. And it was agreed that an ongoing programme should develop the skills of peer mentors so that they could work either within the 'Listening Ear' service, as peer educators passing on a skill, as a volunteer on the Centre programme, or as links for Year 6s moving to secondary school or for Year 7s who needed support with starting school (see 8.2.3: transition below).

During the Summer and Autumn Terms a more formal recruitment system was introduced for the next intake of mentors - as the staff concerned thought that this was needed in order to ensure higher levels of commitment - and the trained mentors took up their new roles within the full programme. The A Space worker saw potential

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resourcing issues and said that she hoped the services might be separated in the future.

<sup>142</sup> Quotation from centre documentation.



for a considerably expanded and increasingly child-led future peer mentoring programme; and for this programme to act as a springboard for children and young people's eventual representation on the project Steering Group.

Peer mentoring can be analysed on a number of different levels in relation to children's participation. As I have suggested in Chapter 7 (7.3.3) the initial idea for the pilot programme came not from the children and young people themselves but from A Space staff who were concerned to find ways of involving more secondary pupils in the Centre. The recruitment of the young people via the careers tutor reflects an emphasis within the peer mentoring concept on the preparation of young people for their future adult roles, and this emphasis is further evidenced in the discourse of *skills development* which informs the entire programme. And the concepts adopted within the training - such as 'raising awareness' 'passing on knowledge', 'taking on responsibility' are essentially ideas which derive from adult understandings of social education and learning.

Nevertheless, young people *were* consulted and involved in the *internal pilot programme processes*, for example in devising and evaluating the training programme; and there is evidence that they were increasingly involved in the delivery of the full programme. It is likely that some - if not all<sup>143</sup>- of those who took part valued and enjoyed the 'here and now' experience. However, what is particularly interesting, in my view, is the nature of the peer mentoring roles that the young people eventually adopted. They did not become involved in the 'Listening Ear' programme which remained the province of the delegated staff member, and peer mentoring did not lead, as envisaged, to the representation of mentors on the project Steering Group. Instead the efforts of young people were increasingly geared towards the Centre's transition work. Indeed, as I shall show below, the peer mentoring programme was effectively *subsumed within* the A Space transition service from the Summer term of 1998 onwards.

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<sup>143</sup> The reasons for the 'drop-out' of young people from peer mentoring are not entirely clear. However, as I suggested earlier, peer mentoring staff were sufficiently concerned about the rates of drop-out to suggest that the programme required a more formal recruitment process.

### 8.2.3 *The transition service*

#### 8.2.3.1 *Introduction*

Services for children have traditionally been divided by age and, as I discuss in Chapter 3, this division has generally applied too in out-of-school services. In developing the children's centre idea Berry and I were interested to see *whether* and *how* a service which aimed to cross this traditional divide would be used by children and young people from primary and secondary schools. In our original proposal for a children's centre we noted also that the transition between primary and secondary school may be eased when children of these ages mix together educationally and socially, and particularly where the Centre is on a secondary school site. But whilst we recognised that this might be a positive 'outcome' of a future centre, our proposals placed greater emphasis on the *underlying principles* for service development: and such an 'outcome' was not an explicit objective.

Work to ease the transition has, however, been of central significance in the development of A Space. Indeed, by the Summer term of 1998, 'easing the transition' was arguably the most highly prioritised objective of the A Space staff. In this section I describe and discuss the chronological development of the Centre's transition programme.

#### 8.2.3.2 *The early development of a transition agenda*

Centre staff saw the 'Express Yourself' group - begun during the pilot programme - as a forum where children could use art as a means to express their experiences and concerns (see also Chapter 6:6.1 and the 'Listening Ear' above). During one of the early 'Express Yourself' meetings one child talked about his/her anxiety about moving from primary to secondary school and this was taken up by staff as an opportunity to explore this issue further with the whole group. The development worker concerned (the trained art therapist who also developed the 'Listening Ear') decided that it would be useful to facilitate more discussion about transition, and in order to do so she established a 'talking' 'Express Yourself' in addition to the arts based group.

The new group started in the Spring term of 1998 and was named 'Express Yourself on the subject of Beginnings and Endings'. The Year 6 children who attended were encouraged by the development worker to raise their concerns about the future move, and they spoke of a number of issues including, for example, the size of the secondary school premises, worries about getting lost, concerns about peer relations, changing work and homework demands and expectations, and changes in the lunchtime routine. Children expressed a preference for an activity based group (as opposed to just discussion) and the development worker introduced the idea of creating books for each child to record their thoughts and feelings about changing school.

#### 8.2.3.3 *The development of a full transition programme*

During the Spring term (of 1998) the A Space staff also laid the foundations for a thorough, and multi-faceted transition programme which was time-tabled to run during the Summer term, the Summer holidays and on into the Autumn term, thereby allowing for work with children both before and after their move. This expanded programme was to be open not just to children from the participant primaries but (on two evenings only) to all Year 6 children in Hackney primary schools who were planning to come to Kingsland in September. There would, therefore, be a large number of potential users on each of these evenings (N=210). The programme included a continuation of the 'Beginnings and Endings' group run jointly now by the development worker and the new home-school link worker, an open art workshop looking at the concept of change ('Touching the Ground'), and a 'girls only' group for Year 6 and Kingsland Year 7s.<sup>144</sup>

In addition further elements of the programme were open to just one of the original participant primaries where A Space staff had a close relationship with the Head teacher and the secondary transfer co-ordinator (see also Chapter 7 (7.3.3): education). These elements included a weekly group called 'Making Moves' which

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<sup>144</sup> The 1998 intake at Kingsland had a very low percentage of girls (approx 26%). The 'girls only' group gave Year 6 girls who planned to come to Kingsland an opportunity to meet with Year 6s from other schools and with current Kingsland Year 7s.

was run on the primary school site<sup>145</sup> and special A Space 'taster sessions' for Year 6 children from this school. Parents and carers of transition children were also invited to take part in the programme and as many as 65 parents attended an initial Centre meeting which was set up to introduce the transition work (approximately 30% of the total parent group). The A Space staff envisaged the establishment of a regular forum where they would work with parents to identify and discuss their concerns around their children's transition.

Preparations for this intensive programme also included the training of peer mentors - now termed 'peer educators' and 'supporters' - for contributory roles (see 8.2.2 above). In particular, Year 7 and 8 support workers were trained up to work together with A Space staff in the 'Making Moves' sessions. And, during the Summer term, Year 7 and 8 pupils were also trained to adopt the role of 'Buddies' with some of the new Year 7s in the Autumn term. In liaison with the primaries, the home-school link worker had identified pupils whom she thought might need extra support in starting at Kingsland, for example those who had already experienced problems around attendance, bullying and achievement. The link worker and the A Space development worker envisaged that 'Buddies' would be matched with these new pupils in a 'support' role, involving activities such as taking their student on a tour of the school, explaining the timetable and homework arrangements.

In the final event, most elements of the transition programme operated as the staff had envisaged - and with good attendance particularly from the Buddy scheme which developed into a Buddy lunchtime drop-in from the Autumn term. However, the 'Beginnings and Endings' group did not continue into the Autumn term as planned as the original attenders did not return to the group once they had started at Kingsland. Arguably, this may have been because they became involved instead in the Buddy scheme; however, evidence does not support this as the majority of Year 7 Buddy scheme users were neither 'Beginning or Endings' users or regular Year 6 after school users.

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<sup>145</sup> This group was also run jointly by the A Space development worker and the home-school link worker.

#### 8.2.3.4 Discussion

The development of the A Space transition programme raises a number of complex and inter-related points for this broader discussion of children's participation. Central to these is the question of how far the programme is constructed around adult or around children's agendas.

Clearly, the move from primary to secondary school represents a major change in the lives of many children, and the kinds of issues that children raised in the 'Beginnings and Endings' group (see 8.2.3.2 above) were raised by Year 7 children in my questionnaire (October 1998) and have also been documented in studies of transition elsewhere (e.g. see Youngman 1986). The A Space transition programme offers children opportunities to air and work with these concerns *as and when they arise* in the course of changing school; and the programme is probably more thorough and *more child-centred* than that which could be carried out by Kingsland and its feeder primaries alone. The transition programme content is developed in *direct* response to children's expressed concerns and children also contribute as participants to the programme delivery (see above). It is likely also that the presence of non-teaching staff - at a tangent to the school - facilitates children's discussion of issues that are concerning them.

However, whilst children are active participants *within the programme processes* (see also peer mentoring above), *the pattern of marked expansion* in the A Space transition work may be 'at odds with', or out of balance with the majority of children's wishes. Studies of transition have suggested, for example, that whilst many children experience some initial worries *before and during* the move, for the majority these are considerably eased soon after and most children settle well (e.g. see Brown and Armstrong 1986; Schagen and Kerr 1999) and, again, the Year 7 questionnaire findings support this.<sup>146</sup> Year 6 children attending A Space are able to familiarise

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<sup>146</sup> Children were asked to rate how hard or easy they found various elements of moving to Kingsland when they first started; and whether they found these things easier or harder now (eg at the time of questionnaire completion: October 1998). Almost all the children reported that the various elements had become easier.

themselves with the secondary school buildings and with some of the secondary pupils *without* the addition of special transition group activities, and these experiences may in themselves bring considerable benefits. And a related point is that children's lack of interest in continuing with 'Beginnings and Endings' after starting at Kingsland (see above) might be a reflection of the success of the group in Year 6; and/or it might quite simply be a feature of the processes noted in these transition studies. The question arises therefore as to whether the A Space programme effectively serves to 'problematise' an issue which perhaps warrants a little less concern.<sup>147</sup>

The A Space transition programme also raises more fundamental questions about the rationale for having such a service in the first place. Arguably children are happier when they are well-oriented to the environment of school in which they spend many of their waking hours, and to promote their happiness there is in itself of considerable value. Further, if happier children show improved attitudes to learning then this too is positive. However, much transition work - particularly that carried out in schools - may ultimately be premised on helping children and young people to learn in increasingly narrow school-based terms; and the question of how far *out-of-school services should* contribute to this agenda raises some critical issues for children's participation (see Chapter 3: 3.4.4).

I suggest here that the A Space transition work *initially* developed *not so much in response to any* of the considerations above but in response to staff concerns about the small numbers of secondary children using the project. Essentially, this work provided the staff with *a viable means for developing services which effectively crossed the age divide* - in line with the original 12 key features (see also Chapter 7: 7.3.3).<sup>148</sup>

However, with the appointment of the home-school link worker, whose remit embodied the interests of the school, A Space and families, A Space allied itself

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<sup>147</sup> Although, from another perspective, it might be argued that a transition programme for large numbers of children provides a non-stigmatising and valuable means of supporting the minority who may experience problems.

increasingly with the schools in a highly developed and extensive programme devoted to 'easing the transition' (see also Chapter 6 and 7). A considerable proportion of the resources of a centre which was set up to develop *a range of* opportunities and activities *in participation with children* was focused, therefore, on a programme of orientation to school.

### 8.3 Summary, Discussion/Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter (8.2) I have traced the development of three elements of the A Space service. My aim has been to illustrate some key ideological and practice issues in the implementation of collaborative, participative work with children.

The development of the '*Listening Ear*' service is marked by the introduction of policies and procedures which are themselves underpinned by powerful adult interests both in the protection of children *and* in the protection of their status as professionals; and the process of implementing a confidential service for children and young people raises complex dilemmas in this context. By the end of the study what started as an informal service run in response to children's day-to-day concerns has developed into a more formal service which provides a vehicle for an agenda of social education and behaviour change.

The *peer mentoring service* promotes children's participation within its internal development processes, and children and young people contribute to some elements of service delivery. They are enabled through the service to provide support, guidance and advice to one another, but the programme is largely informed by an adult discourse concerning preparation for the future.

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<sup>148</sup> And interestingly, also, transition work proved to be critical in involving parents in the work of A Space.

By the Summer of 1998 peer mentoring is effectively subsumed into *the transition service*, a thorough and resource-intensive programme which is similarly centred on preparation for and adjustment to secondary school life.

These services were each developed in turn over the chronology of the project (see introduction) and some interesting patterns are suggested in an analysis of this chronological process. Essentially, the 'Listening Ear' starts from a concept of listening to and working with children's own agendas, whereas the peer mentoring service and the transition service which follow have their origins and rationale in more adult-based concerns. Children refer themselves to the early 'Listening Ear', but the pattern of adult referral (albeit indirect) which quickly follows on from this is evidenced too in recruitment procedures for the peer mentoring and transition services. And *all three services* show a progression from relatively informal 'organic'<sup>149</sup> beginnings to a formal and highly organised 'programme' which is increasingly informed by a social education agenda. Analysis of service development at A Space also highlights a gradual shift from adult concerns to promote children's well-being *as a goal in itself* (e.g. through the provision of a range of discrete activities) to a concern *to educate children socially in order to promote their well-being at home and at school* (introduction of the social education agenda and 'programmes' of work) to an increasing focus *on increasing children's orientation to school* (the full transition programme).

In summary, therefore, these developments reflect a changing balance between the interests of adults and the interests of children - whereby adults concerns to prepare children for their time-future take gradual precedence over their concerns to enhance children's lives as lived in the time-present. But the services which I have considered broadly reflect the health/well-being and educational aspects of the A Space programme; and my analysis itself may be imbalanced. What about the *recreational aspects* (sports, arts, crafts)? Arguably, these represent enjoyable ways for children

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<sup>149</sup> This was a term which was favoured and commonly used by the A Space staff to describe the process of early service development at the Centre.



and young people to spend their time *in the here and now* - regardless of any benefits that might thereby accrue for *their future lives*.

In response to children's interests, sporting activities and opportunities have always formed a key constituent of the Centre's programme. Staff have used both the facilities of Kingsland School and outside facilities to provide a wide range of activities. Many of the core and sessional team have experience in teaching sports and one also has qualifications in this area. Sports specialists have also been bought in to the Centre to run courses. However, since early 1999 this provision has also been organised into a programme which uses sports as a vehicle both for the development of children's social skills and for health promotion. The *Learning through Sports* service is responsive to children's expressed wishes for particular sporting activities. However, sessions are used to help children and young people to learn to take responsibility, manage conflict, and learn about the value of sports in healthy lifestyles. Thus, this area of activity, potentially so important in its own right, has also been encompassed within the remit of social education. And whilst children and young people continue to participate in a variety of other discrete activities (which do not fall within the boundaries of any larger 'programmes') the processes I have discussed suggest a clear chronological pattern of service 'formalisation' into programme areas.

### **8.3.1 Concluding comments**

This is the last of the three Chapters which focus on the findings from the Children's Centres studies (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Together the Chapters have illustrated the challenges and dilemmas that are faced by adults who set out to develop participative, collaborative services with children and young people. I have suggested that whilst children contributed as participants to many of the Centre's *internal operational processes* the Centre staff adopted a social education agenda which was increasingly directed at orientation to school - and which was *largely derived from adult understandings*.

However, as I have also suggested, the picture is much more complicated than this. By focusing on the tensions *between* the interests of adults and of children, I have neglected the varying and sometimes conflicting agendas that may exist *within* each social group. Thus children will have differed in the ways that they chose to use the Centre; for example, for fun, or for learning or for help with personal problems. And some may have welcomed the opportunities offered by the Centre for acquiring social skills and for developing skills to prepare themselves for adult life. Similarly, the staff at A Space will have differed in the extent to which they prioritised children's time-present and children's time-future; and the priority of individual adults and children will varied at different times.

Additionally, the development of a close collaboration between the adults in schools and the adults at A Space did not *of itself equate with a shared identity and ethos* - so although A Space had a function in preparing children for school, children's experiences of the social environments of school and Centre may have been markedly different. And Centre attendance may have provided valuable opportunities for children and young people to 'control' their learning and to engage in more democratic relationships with adults.

That an agenda of social education developed such strength amongst the A Space staff is perhaps unsurprising - as adults commonly gain a sense of professional purpose by setting clear objectives in their work with children; and as welfarist and developmentalist understandings of children and childhood are still so pervasive (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4). And, ironically, the research may also have contributed to these processes.<sup>150</sup>

But what contribution do these findings from the A Space exemplar make towards our knowledge of children's participation; and how do they relate to the materila covered in the earlier chapters of the thesis? This will be the main focus of Chapter 9 - the final chapter of the thesis.

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<sup>150</sup> The presence of the research - may have served to increase the staff's sense that they should be providing something 'special' or 'additional' for the children who attended A Space.

## 9. A SERVICE FOR CHILDREN? THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A SPACE

### 9.1 Introduction

In this thesis I have used the exemplar of the A Space out-of-school centre for analysis of conceptual, policy and practice issues in the implementation of children's participation rights. The way in which children's participation is understood and operationalised *within* and *across* services affecting children has been a related area for study.

In Chapters 2-4 of the thesis I set out a conceptual framework for the exemplar of A Space. Chapter 2 focused on:

- the influences of developmentalism and welfarism on public policy in relation to children;
- and children's participation rights *within* and *across* key services.

And Chapters 3 and 4 focused respectively on:

- recent public policy-making in out-of-school services for children;
- and issues informing the implementation of children's participation in children's services.

In Chapter 5 I presented a methodological debate which was embedded in the substantive concerns of the thesis itself. And in Chapters 6-8 I described the progress and process of A Space with a focus on children's participation and on collaborative working.

This final chapter of the thesis has three inter-related aims and will be set out in three sections. I intend:

- to summarise the key themes concerning the phenomenon of children's participation (and multi-agency collaboration) which arise from the A Space exemplar (Chapters 6-8) (9.2);
- to contextualise these in relation to both the conceptual framework and the research itself (Chapters 2-5) (9.3);
- to discuss the relevance of the A Space exemplar and the thesis as a whole for conceptual, methodological and policy issues in the field of children's participation and children's rights (9.4).

In line with the substantive interest of the thesis, my primary focus will be on children's participation. However, this will be discussed in relation to collaboration.

Consideration of the broader relevance of the A Space experience raises the complex question of generalisability. However, whilst the generalisability of the A Space exemplar to other *out-of-school services* has been a key concern for dissemination reports arising from the Children's Centre Studies (see Hood and Mayall, 1999), the focus for the thesis and for this last Chapter is broader. I aim to suggest how A Space has added to our knowledge of children's participation (and collaborative working) by considering the exemplar in relation to the wider public policy context which I set out in Chapters 1-5. And I aim to reflect on the policy- significance of this knowledge for *children's services more generally*. In so doing, I adopt the premise that both the A Space exemplar and the public policy context within which it is based are forms of 'data' - and it is these two forms of data which I consider together.

## **9.2 Children's participation (and multi-agency collaboration): Key themes arising from the A Space exemplar**

My analysis of *children's participation* at A Space suggests that:

1) The extent and nature of children's participation in (children's) services is likely to be determined in a compromise between the interests of children and the interests of adults who are working with them.

2) Adults who work with children commonly adopt developmentalist agendas which emphasise the preparation of children for their time-future. These developmentalist agendas are likely to take gradual precedence over their concerns to enhance children's lives as lived in the time-present.

3) There are, however, likely to be varying and conflicting agendas *within* as well as *between* the two social groups of children and adults. So individual adults and children may, for example, prioritise the time-future and the time-present in different ways at different times.

4) Though children may provide some of the initial impetus for elements of service development, adults increasingly provide both the initial impetus and the underpinning rationale for the services which are offered.

5) Children are likely to be consulted and involved as active participants in some aspects of planning, evaluation and delivery of services; but they are unlikely to be involved in determining either the goals of particular programmes or the overall function and direction of the service itself.

In specific relation to *multi-agency collaboration* and children's participation the exemplar suggests that:

6) The statutory agencies (principally health, social services, education) emphasise the provision of targeted, welfarist services which aim to ensure particular (adult-defined) outcomes for children. On balance the agendas and interests of these agencies serve to constrain the progress of children's participation.

It is possible, nevertheless, for agencies (such as A Space) to develop services (in collaboration with other statutory and voluntary agencies) where children and young people are offered opportunities to 'control' their learning and to engage in democratic relationships with adults.

I return now to the issues I raise in the introduction and consider the A Space exemplar within the wider context of the public policy 'data' from Chapters 2-5.

### 9.3 Contextualising the Findings in Relation to Chapters 2-5 of the Thesis

#### 9.3.1 Introduction

In the discussion to follow I will suggest that the process and progress of children's participation (and collaborative working) at A Space can be understood as a function of the *inter-relationship* between factors which served to *promote* and factors which served to *constrain* participative working with children. It can also be viewed as a function of the *inter-relationship* between specific local 'micro' factors and broader societal 'macro' factors, including (from least to most):

- the particular circumstances within which the project was developed (the specific staff appointed, the research, the multi-agency Steering Group and the available funds);
- the local context of the project (sited at a secondary school in a socio-economically deprived area);
- government - and particularly DfEE - policy in relation to children (which is in turn informed by wider understandings of children and childhood - and principally by developmentalism and welfarism);

- the inevitable tensions which exist both within and between the two social groups of adults and of children.

For ease of description, my analysis distinguishes between *promoting* and *constraining* factors. However, it is helpful to see these as forming a continuum from factors which were highly promoting to those which were highly constraining - and different factors may have had both promoting and constraining effects at different times.

### 9.3.2 *Promoting factors*

A Space had what was in many respects an auspicious start. The London Borough of Hackney, where the project was situated, claimed to have an interest in and a commitment to children's participation and multi-agency working, and this interest was clearly apparent during my consultations with senior authority staff in the feasibility phase. Even before the Centre was opened, a number of skilled and experienced staff had chosen to commit their time to the Steering Group which had been formed to take the Children's centre idea forward; and this multi-agency group appeared well placed to offer a cross-service perspective to the Centre's work (see also Chapter 1:1.6).

Generous funding from the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts covered the costs of Centre establishment, staff and research; and A Space was particularly well-resourced in comparison with other out-of-school centres. Most, if not all, out-of-school centres rely on part-time staff - but the posts of the A Space Director and the two development workers were full-time. The majority of out-of-school centres have no funds for research or evaluation - but the research element at A Space was intensive at three and sometimes four days a week throughout the course of the project.

The core staff team was made up of highly skilled, trained and experienced people with professional backgrounds which emphasised the use of democratic approaches and practices (particularly youth, play and community work) (see Chapter 1: 1.6).

Team members were appointed on the basis of their experience and skills but also on the basis that they actively supported the underpinning principles of the Centre: that they were committed, in particular, to the value of multi-agency collaboration and to the view that children's rights of participation should be respected. And the possibility that the A Space staff might seek actively to promote children's participation (and collaborative working) was probably further increased by the ongoing presence of the research element. As I discussed in Chapter 5 (5.3.2), team members suggested that the researchers might measure their success by their capacity to comply with the key principles - and so in order to be deemed successful they observed that they were keen to comply.

Unusually, also, this core team had the opportunity to develop an out-of-school centre 'from scratch'. The newly opened A Space had no established policies; and no accepted 'ways of doing things' (though see also *constraining factors* below). And with the relative 'luxury' of full-time posts (see above) A Space staff had the opportunity to plan their work thoroughly, to have regular meetings and to review and develop their working practices.

Many of these 'promotive' aspects of A Space are similar to those I identified in the conclusion to Chapter 4 (4.4) as being helpful to the implementation of children's participation across children's services more broadly: most notably, the cross-service perspective, the availability of time, money and information; and a willingness to listen to children. The measure of their positive influence is seen, particularly in the early stages of project development, in the extensive use of collaborative working at A Space (see Chapter 7: 7.2.3); in the speedy development of a wide-ranging programme of activities and opportunities; and in the involvement of children as active participants at a number of levels (see Chapter 6: 6.5 and 9.2 above).

It is significant, also, that the Centre began with some of the advantages which have been commonly associated with *a school site*, particularly the shared use of resources and ease of physical access (see also Chapter 3: 3.4.2). Close collaboration between Centre staff and Kingsland managers during the early weeks of the Centre's operation facilitated the creative, cost-effective and shared use of a range of school facilities and



resources. And this, in turn, facilitated the rapid development of a full and largely responsive centre programme (Spring 1998) which was easily accessed by children and young people in the participating schools (see Chapter 6: 6.3.1).

### 9.3.3 *Constraining factors*

My discussion of the promotive factors has focused primarily on factors associated with the original establishment of A Space, and on the early months of Centre operation. However, some of these were less favourable to children's participation than might have been envisaged.

Though senior council officials had broadly welcomed the Children's Centre idea, A Space began its life during a period of widespread organisational change and upheaval in Hackney Education Learning and Leisure Department. As a result of this the Centre Director and the Administrator spent an inordinate amount of time establishing working relationships with the relevant Hackney staff, and setting up the basic systems of finance which were required for centre operation (see Chapter 6: 6.2.1). *Time spent* on 'wrangling' with the Authority represented *time away* from important development work. And a significant and related consequence of this was that some of the early Steering Group meetings were taken up with discussions of these difficulties - so leaving less time for other elements of project planning.

Though the Centre gained immediate and specific benefits from its school site (see *promotive* factors above), the socio-economic context of this siting - at a secondary school in a deprived Borough - proved considerably less positive for children's participation and multi-agency collaboration. As I discuss in Chapter 3 (3.4.2), the current government's agenda of 'raising standards' - though universally applied - is particularly aimed at improving academic and test results in deprived areas such as Hackney. Within this wider context Kingsland school managers gave higher priority to improving *academic* achievement as measured in test results than, for example, to developing children's wider opportunities for learning. And those elements of the A Space service which were perceived as assisting - however indirectly - with this

concern to raise achievement (e.g. homework clubs, transition work) received more support than those which prioritised children's participation rights alone (see also discussion in Chapter 3). This particular constellation of factors undoubtedly played a key role in the increasing alliance of school and A Space agendas which I discussed in Chapters 6-8. And this pattern directly reflects current trends in government out-of-school policy where there is increased emphasis on the links between out-of-school services and the goals of formal education (see Chapter 3).

Similarly, as I have suggested in Chapter 7, the other statutory agencies which were involved with A Space (health, social services) were ultimately concerned with acting to 'compensate' for social deprivation (e.g. through the development of targeted services for those who are deemed to be most 'in need') rather than with promoting the values of universalism or participation; and these concerns informed the nature of and limits to their collaboration with A Space staff.

This is not to suggest that there is anything inherently undesirable about these adult-defined outcomes. The statutory agencies are generally concerned to ensure children's rights to protection (and provision); and as I discuss in Chapter 4, it may be difficult or even undesirable to promote children's participation rights where their rights (to protection and provision) are not adequately met.

Nor do I wish to suggest that the statutory agencies' focus on outcomes and the promotion of children's participation are mutually exclusive. Indeed, the potential link between children's participation and positive outcomes (as specified by the service providers) has been recognised in health, education and welfare services (see also Chapter 4). But rather I wish to reaffirm that in a climate where services are ultimately judged by *adult-defined* service outcomes, *participation is justified primarily for its contribution to these particular goals* rather than in broader terms of principle or rights or in terms of its contribution to a range of other possible outcomes which might be associated with children's services (for example, children's *breadth* of learning, their happiness, or sense of self-esteem (see also Chapter 3: 3.5). And in local authorities (such as Hackney) where socio-economic deprivation is acute, and where consequent concern to compensate for this in social and educational terms is

*particularly high*, the pressure to deliver on the adult-defined outcomes inevitably takes precedence.

Ultimately, as I discuss in Chapter 5 (5.4) even the research itself was influenced by and subject to some of these more macro priorities and constraints. Thus, negotiations for funding for further research were carried out in the context of the DfEE's interest in the contributions which out-of-school services can make to improving academic achievement (see also my discussion of study support in Chapter 3:3.4); and my current study is focusing on *the impact of A Space* on the children who use it, on their parents and on the participating schools.

As I suggest also in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 developmentalist and welfarist thinking continues to dominate much thinking about children and their status and these approaches hold powerful sway over the attitudes and actions of practitioners and of policy-makers. A Space staff were not practising in isolation from this wider social context: and though the project began without entrenched institutional practices, staff were strongly influenced both by established patterns of inter-generational relations, and - perhaps more importantly - by the professional thinking which informed their previous professional roles.

It is of significance here that the staff's experience in youth, play and community work (see *promotive factors* above) was combined with a strong allegiance within the team to *therapeutic* approaches. Such approaches emphasise the importance of empathy and listening skills and it is likely that the therapeutic skills of A Space team members contributed positively to the creation of a social environment where children and young people were encouraged to express themselves and were actively 'listened to'. However, therapeutic approaches also commonly emphasise the *targeting of selected individuals* for emotional help to be offered by *specially trained adults*; and these elements sit uncomfortably with the idea of children as active participants.

I have shown, for example, how the collaboration between A Space and the health service promoted an understanding that the 'Listening Ear' service should be the sole premise of *specialist* staff with *therapeutic training*; and I have suggested that this

understanding, - with its roots in traditional models of medical treatment, - ran contrary to the ethos of a more informal, less specialist service which informed the concept of the original 'Listening Ear'. I have suggested also that both the *therapeutic* and *youth work* approaches of the team were encompassed together within the Centre's social education agenda. Significantly, this social education agenda was increasingly geared towards orienting children to school; and the A Space staff increasingly targeted selected children - such as those who were deemed to be having emotional difficulties - for the more therapeutic elements of the transition service and for the 'Listening Ear'.

#### 9.4 Concluding discussion

What key points emerge from this final chapter and how can these be developed in a discussion of the significance of the thesis for conceptual, methodological and policy issues in the field of children's rights, particularly their rights of participation?

In many respects the picture that I have presented is not encouraging. Though there is considerable and fast increasing support for the principle of children's participation within public policy and government rhetoric, this thesis suggests that attempts to implement participative practices will, nevertheless, be subject to inter-linked constraints of public policy agendas, socio-economic considerations, and the kinds of welfarist and developmentalist understandings of children and childhood which underpin the approaches of children's service agencies and the perspectives of the staff therein. The A Space exemplar offers a good illustration, therefore, of how things are likely to be in the 'real world' where history, agendas and public opinion shape agencies' goals and practices; and where developmentalist and welfarist ideas remain firmly entrenched.

Certainly, the material which I have covered in Chapters 2-4 of the thesis - and which I refer to in the analysis itself - lends some support to this rather pessimistic understanding. These three chapters set out the 'macro' framework for the 'micro' exemplar of A Space by showing the varied emphasis which is given to children's

participation within and across education, health and welfare services and the lack of a cross-service perspective (Chapters 2 and 4); the failure of the UK government to respect children's rights (including the failure to publicise them) (Chapters 2 and 4); the significant constraints to implementation (Chapter 4) and the powerful influences of welfarist thinking and state education agendas on out-of-school policy (Chapter 3). Together they present what is in many ways an un auspicious context for an experiment in the development of a new kind of children's service.

However, even within this unpromising context, the thesis has presented evidence to suggest that some progress can be made, nevertheless, towards the implementation of children's participation. As I have noted in Chapters 2 and 4 there are several indications in this country of recent progress with the 'structural' ingredients for implementation. And, at the level of practice, there are examples of innovative projects which have illustrated that children's participation rights can be actively promoted, in spite of the multiple barriers and constraints, and even within settings such as education, where children's rights are more commonly disregarded (see Chapter 4).

The A Space exemplar shows that children and young people can be (and have the competence to be) involved in contributing to both the content and the operation of their own services; and it suggests that they (children) can play a key role in determining the physical and social environment within which services are offered. It shows how a service which is sited on a school setting can, nevertheless develop a separate identity from the school, and that this separate identity is strongly linked with the democratic approaches of the staff and with children's own involvement in the creation of the prevailing ethos. Children and young people clearly attach value to the use of democratic approaches by the adults that work with them, and, where adults adopt such approaches, children *can* have some degree of control over what and how they learn.

The exemplar also highlights the considerable progress that can be made towards the development of services which are both integrated and responsive. However, where the agendas and remits of the diverse agencies themselves diverge, and where

professional agendas may conflict, it takes considerable time and effort to develop inter-agency collaborations which are built on trust and respect. Further, in a socio-economic and political climate which emphasises the role of the statutory services in contributing to a range of adult-defined outcomes, the attainment of these outcomes takes precedence (for these agencies) over the principle of children's participation.

The thesis as a whole suggests that there are complex tensions within current government policy, with its increasing emphasis, on the one hand on the attainment of adult-defined 'time-future' outcomes for children; and its promotion, on the other hand, of children's participation.

It also suggests that there are no 'quick fixes' on either children's participation or multi-agency collaboration - that the development of both takes time, money and dedicated, skilled staff. And whilst *it is possible* to implement *some elements* of children's participation within children's services it is, nevertheless, challenging and difficult to achieve this kind of change.

These are important messages for those who are concerned with developing both policy and practice in and across education, health and welfare services. They are important *not* because they suggest that the challenges are too great; but rather, because they suggest that if participation is to be anything more than a 'token gesture' then careful attention will need to be paid to finding ways of breaking down the substantial barriers which stand in the way of implementation.

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**11. Appendix 1: Information on the research noticeboard**

## A CHANCE TO TALK ABOUT 'A' SPACE

(Photo of researcher attached)

Hello! I'm Suzanne.....

Some of you may already have seen me around in 'A' Space....

My job is to find out from the people who are involved with 'A' Space - children, young people, staff, parents - what they think about it and what it provides.....

I'll be coming in to 'A' Space after school on Tuesdays and Wednesdays until half term and would like to meet with you in groups.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT 'A' SPACE?

I would like to hear your ideas....

Please sign up here if you would like to talk with me...

## FINDING OUT YOUR IDEAS ABOUT 'A' SPACE

(Maximum of six in group. **Please sign up for only one group**)

### Tues 3<sup>rd</sup> February (Primary only)

4.15-4.55

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

5.00-5.45

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

### Weds 4<sup>th</sup> February (Kingsland only)

4.15-4.55

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

5.00-5.45

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

### Tues 10<sup>th</sup> February (open to all)

4.15-4.55

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

5.00-5.45

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

### Weds 11<sup>th</sup> February (open to all)

4.15-4.55

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

5.00-5.45

- 1.
- 2.
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**12. Appendix 2: The contribution of voluntary and statutory agencies to the A  
Space programme (July 1998)**



## Current A-Space Programme (July '98)

Appendix 2

