

# Exploring participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre

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## **DECLARATION OF RESEARCHER**

I, Jessica Clarissa Johannisen, hereby declare that the manuscript with the title, *Exploring participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre* is my own work and that I have not previously in its entity or in part submitted at any other university in order to obtain a degree.

JC Johannisen

November 2013

## **DECLARATION OF TEXT EDITOR**

Hereby I declare that I have language edited and proof read the thesis *Exploring participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre* by Jessica Johannisen for the degree MSW. I am a freelance language practitioner after a career as editor-in-chief at a leading publishing house.

Lambert Daniel Jacobs (MA, MDiv)

November 2013

## **PREFACE**

The candidate, Jessica Clarissa Johannisen, opted to write an article, with the support of her supervisor and co-supervisor. We, the supervisor and co-supervisor, hereby declare that the input and the effort of Jessica Clarissa Johannisen in writing this article, reflects research done by her on this topic. We hereby grant permission that she may submit this article for examination in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree Magister in Social Work (Child Protection).

- The dissertation is presented in article format as indicated in Rule A.5.4.2.7 of the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus Yearbook.
- The dissertation consists of Section 1: Background to the study, Section 2: The article and Section 3: Critical reflections on the study.
- The article is intended to be submitted to the journal *Maatskaplike Werk / Social Work*.
- In Section 2, which comprises of the article, the researcher has followed the Harvard Method of referencing as well as the guidelines of the article format stipulated by CARSA (provided in Appendix 11). This includes no numbering of sections.
- Sections 1 and 3 have been referenced according to the North-West University's referencing manual.

Dr Hannelie Yates

Dr Carlien van Wyk

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DECLARATION OF RESEARCHER	iii
DECLARATION OF TEXT EDITOR	iv
PREFACE	v
SUMMARY	x
OPSOMMING	xi
KEY TERMS	xii
<b>SECTION A: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</b>	<b>1</b>
PART 1: ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH	1
1. ORIENTATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT	1
2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	6
2.1 General aim	6
2.2 Objectives	6
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
4. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION	8
4.1 Literature review	8
4.2 Empirical investigation	9
4.2.1 <i>Research design</i>	9
4.2.2 <i>Units of analysis and method of data collection</i>	9
4.2.3 <i>Data analysis</i>	13
4.2.3.1 <i>Familiarisation and immersion</i>	13
4.2.3.2 <i>Inducing themes</i>	12
4.2.3.3 <i>Coding</i>	13
4.2.3.4 <i>Elaboration</i>	13
4.2.3.5 <i>Interpretation and checking</i>	14
4.2.4 <i>Trustworthiness</i>	14
4.2.4.1 <i>Credibility</i>	14
4.2.4.2 <i>Transferability</i>	15

4.2.4.3 <i>Dependability/Reliability</i>	15
4.2.4.4 <i>Confirmability</i>	16
4.2.5 <i>Ethics</i>	16
4.2.5.1 <i>Avoidance of harm</i>	16
4.2.5.2 <i>Informed consent/assent</i>	17
4.2.5.3 <i>Right to privacy/confidentiality and anonymity</i>	17
4.2.5.4 <i>Involvement of researcher</i>	18
4.2.5.5 <i>Voluntary participation</i>	18
4.2.5.6 <i>Debriefing of participants</i>	19
4.2.5.7 <i>Honesty, trust and avoidance of deception</i>	19
4.2.5.8 <i>Compensation</i>	19
5. REPORT LAYOUT	20

PART 2: CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CONTEXT: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION	21
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1. INTRODUCTION	21
2. PARTICIPATION AS A CHILDREN'S RIGHT	22
3. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: A FIELD THEORY PERSPECTIVE	24
4. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE	26
5. AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION	29
6. CONCLUSION	31
7. REFERENCES	33

<b>SECTION B: ARTICLE: CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR REALISING PARTICIPATION AS A CHILDREN'S RIGHT IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE</b>	<b>41</b>
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ABSTRACT	42
INTRODUCTION	42
CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: A RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE	45

CHILDREN AS RIGHTS HOLDERS WITHIN A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	46
CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CONTEXT	48
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	49
CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR REALISING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION	51
Institutional mechanisms and consequences	54
<i>Family conferences</i>	54
<i>House meetings</i>	56
<i>Opportunity to speak and listen</i>	59
<i>Children's emotional well-being</i>	61
<i>Awareness of limitations to participation</i>	63
Conceptual clarity of participation	66
<i>Relational process</i>	66
<i>Age and maturity of children</i>	69
<i>Child's best interest</i>	72
CONCLUSION	76
REFERENCES	78

## **SECTION C: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 84**

1. INTRODUCTION	84
2. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	84
3. A SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY	86
4. CONCLUSIONS	87
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	90
5.1 Recommendations for social work practice	90
5.2 Recommendations with regards to social work training	91
5.3 Recommendations for research	92
6. LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH	93
7. REFLECTION	94
8. GENERAL CONCLUSION	95
9. REFERENCES	96

<b>SECTION D: COMBINED REFERENCES</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>SECTION E: ADDENDA</b>	<b>106</b>
APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE	106
APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS	108
APPENDIX 3: ASSENT FORM FOR CHILD PARTICIPANTS	109
APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS	110
APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILD PARTICIPANTS	111
APPENDIX 6: CODED TRANSCRIPT: FOCUS GROUP WITH SOCIAL WORKERS AND PROFESSIONALS	113
APPENDIX 7: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT	134
APPENDIX 8: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT	135
APPENDIX 9: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT	136
APPENDIX 10: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT	137
APPENDIX 11: PUBLICATION GUIDELINES OF THE JOURNAL <i>MAATSKAPLIKE WERK/SOCIAL WORK</i>	138

## SUMMARY

**Key terms:** child protection, alternative care, child and youth care, child participation, children's rights

In the last two decades, increasingly more research has been conducted on the process of participation as a children's right both nationally and internationally. This includes research on children's participation within the family environment as well as with children who are placed into alternative care. Children's participation within the field of child protection continues to demonstrate challenges for both children and those adults working with children in this environment. A child and youth care centre forms part of the broader field of child protection and represents a bounded system of dynamics especially with regard to the process of children's participation. There continues to be various barriers with regard to children's participation in general but especially for children who have been found in need of care and protection. This is largely linked to the emphasis being put on the vulnerabilities and needs of children who have been placed into alternative care.

The general aim of the study was to qualitatively, through a case study design, explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right in the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape. The case study was utilised in order to gain more insight into the nature of participation as a children's right, based on the perceptions of the children, child care workers, social workers and professionals within the system. Thirteen semi structured individual interviews were held with the child participations. Prior to the interviews, a session was held with the children to discuss the purpose of the research and to allow them to become more aware of the concept of children's participation. The children were asked to create a collage of their perception of children's participation as a right. Two separate focus groups were held for the adult participants; one for the child care workers and the other for the social workers and professionals. Based on the findings of this qualitative study about the nature of children's participation as perceived by both children and adults in a child and youth care centre, the article in Section B aims at highlighting those critical elements needed for the realisation of children's participation within a context of child protection.

## OPSOMMING

**Slutelbegrippe:** kinderbeskerming; alternatiewe sorg; kinder- en jeugsorgsentrum; kinderdeelname; kinderregte

Tydens die laaste twee dekades is toenemend meer navorsing gewy aan die proses van deelname as 'n kinderreg, sowel op nasionale as internasionale vlak. Dit sluit navorsing in oor deelname deur kinders binne die gesinsverband sowel as kinderswat in alternatiewe sorg geplaas is. Kinderdeelname binne die veld van kinderbeskerming bly uitdagings bied vir sowel die kinders as die volwassenes wat met kinders in hierdie omgewing werk. 'n Kinder- en jeugsorgsentrum vorm deel van die breër veld van kinderbeskerming en verteenwoordig 'n gebonde sisteem van kragte, spesifiek in verband met die proses van kinderdeelname. Daar bly steeds verskillende hindernisse met betrekking tot kinderdeelname in die algemeen, maar spesifiek ook waar bevind is dat kinders sorg en beskerming nodig het. Dit word hoofsaaklik gekoppel aan die klem wat geplaas word op die kwesbaarhede en behoeftes van spesifiek kinders wat in alternatiewe sorg geplaas is.

Die oorkoepelende doel van die studie was om in 'n kwalitatiewe studie, deur 'n gevallestudie-ontwerp, die aard van kinderdeelname binne die konteks van 'n kinder- en jeugsorgsentrum in die Wes-Kaap te verken en te beskryf. Die gevallestudie is gebruik ten einde meer insig in die aard van deelname as 'n kinderreg te verkry, gebaseer op die persepsies van kinders, kinderversorgers, maatskaplike werkers en ander professionele persone binne die sisteem. Dertien semi-gestruktureerde individuele onderhoude is gehou met die kinderdeelnemers. Voor die onderhoude is 'n sessie met die kinders gehou om die doel van die navorsing te bespreek en die kinders meer bewus te maak van die konsep van kinderdeelname. Die kinders is gevra om 'n collage te maak wat hulle begrip van kinderdeelname as 'n reg uitbeeld. Twee aparte fokusgroepe is gehou vir die volwasse deelnemers: een vir die kinderversorgers en een vir die maatskaplike werkers en ander professionele persone. Gebaseer op die bevindings van hierdie kwalitatiewe studie oor die aard van kinderdeelname soos waargeneem deur sowel kinders as volwassenes in 'n kinder- en jeugsorgsentrum, poog die navorsingsartikel in Afdeling B om die kritieke elemente wat nodig is om kinderdeelname binne die konteks van kinderbeskerming te laat realiseer, uit te lig.

## KEY TERMS

The following concepts are clarified as for the purpose of this study:

**Child protection:** The child protection environment refers to a broad spectrum of child and family services that are aimed at both prevention and/or intervention of children who may be or have already been found in need of care and protection (Healy & Darlington, 2009:420). A child and youth care centre therefore forms part of the broader child protection field under intervention.

**Alternative care:** When children have been found in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005), then it is necessary for the state to provide children with alternative care – preferably in a family-like environment. The South African Children’s Act identifies three forms of alternative care: foster care, cluster foster care, child and youth care centres. Child and youth care centres are therefore a form of alternative care within the South African context.

**Child and youth care centre:** Chapter 13, Section 191 (1) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) describes a child and youth care centre as “a facility for the provision of residential care to more than six children outside the child’s family environment in accordance with a residential care programme suited for the children in the facility”. Children who have been placed into a child and youth care centre have been found in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA). The field of child and youth care work focuses on the promotion of optimum development and well-being of children and families (Van der Ven, 1991; White, 2007:225-227). The emphasis is on relational work and consequently on engaging with children; encouraging children to experience a sense of value, supporting them and allowing them to experience and benefit from the therapeutic relationship (White, 2007:225).

**Child participation:** Pölkki, Vornanen, Pursiainen and Riikonen (2012:108) maintain that participation can be described as “interaction; belonging; and integration”, whilst child participation refers to children being actively involved in the decisions that affect their own lives as well as the lives of their families and their communities (Ward, 2008:3). Kirby and Woodhead (2003:236) support this view and maintain that participation is a multifaceted

practice which involves children being provided with the opportunity to express their views and wishes in a safe environment. Participation is also considered a basic children's right (Ansell, 2005:225; Jamieson, 2011:22; RSA, 2005; UNCRC 1989).

**Children's rights:** The UNCRC (1989) outlines the fundamental rights of children and Article 4 (Protection of rights): highlights that governments have a responsibility to ensure that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. When countries ratify the Convention, they agree to review their laws relating to children. Legislation, such as the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) seem to confer on children's right to be heard and to have their views taken into consideration. Within the context of this study, the focus is on children's participation as a right.

## **SECTION A: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **PART 1: ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

#### **1. ORIENTATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Since the 1990's there has been an increase in the recognition given to the importance of children being part of the decisions made in their lives, and how this process advances their survival, protection and development (Cook, Blanchet-Cohen & Hart, 2004:1; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006:10; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:7). The construct of children's participation which has been explored and described in especially the interdisciplinary field of Childhood Studies put emphasis on how children are actively involved in making a valuable contribution to society as a whole (Cook *et al.*, 2004:1). However, the attitudes towards and interactions with children in society do not always reflect this ideal of acknowledging children's worth and contribution in society.

Challenges in society exist with regard to how the status of children in society can be perceived. A need for change in perceptions is highlighted by Dr Benyam Dawit Mezmur (African Child Policy Forum, 2011:14), Second Vice Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as follows:

(The) attitude that says ... that children are to be seen and not to be heard ... needs to change, and needs to change fast. This change needs to take place fast within the family, community, in schools, in policy and law making, in international development partners etc. Since children's rights are predominantly children's issues too, we need to include children as much as possible in the work that we do.

In the light of the above quote, it can be argued that adults' perceptions of the social position of children in society and specifically in adult-child spaces, may influence the way in which children are included or excluded in matters pertinent to their lives. Leeson (2007:274) highlights that often children are viewed as vulnerable by the adults working with them, and this in turn affects the level of participation that the adult allows. Roche (1999:477) maintains that children are often silenced and viewed as being invisible especially in a society where adults are perceived as being the "expert". Historically, children have not been provided with

the right to be part of decision making about their lives as they were not seen to have the necessary logic, awareness or ability to act in their own best interest (Ansell, 2005:226). Ansell (2005:228) affirms that children are often viewed as merely being vulnerable and therefore giving children certain rights such as being part of decision making is seen as an “intrusion into the jurisdiction of the family that weakens parental authority”.

For years children have been viewed as naive by society and many adults have felt that children should not be burdened with adult decisions (Hart, 1992:5). It is evident that adults often view children as primarily vulnerable or innocent and thus needing the protection and continual guidance from adults (Manion & Nixon, 2012:30). Consequently adults can fail to recognise children as fully human who also have rights and have the ability to be part of the decision making process that takes place in their lives (Manion & Nixon, 2012:30). This may be even more the case when working with children who are classified as “vulnerable” and who have been found in need of care and protection (Leeson, 2007:270-274).

Within the existing body of knowledge related to the child participation discourse, the meaning of participation and how it ought to be implemented in society are well explained (Cashmore, 2002:841-843; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:14-17; Ward, 2008:9). Whilst Cashmore (2002:838) maintains that children’s participation is the process whereby children’s voices are heard and their views are taken seriously, she adds that it does not necessarily indicate that children determine the outcome of all decisions made in their lives. Similarly, Hart (1992:5) describes children’s participation as the process where children are part of the decisions made in their own lives as well as within the community in which they reside. It is therefore evident that children’s participation is explained as a process where children need to be viewed and treated as partners in the decisions that are made in their lives. The implication of children’s participation is clear – children’s views need to be taken into consideration.

Literature, furthermore, describes the potential benefits that children’s participation can have for children and other role players in society. These benefits include; boosting children’s self-esteem and confidence (Melton, 1987:363) and giving children some sense of being active agents with regard to their lives rather than being dependent on adults (Mannion, 2007:408). Lindsay (cited by Cashmore, 2002:839) adds that some research has even shown that when children have been part of the decision making process regarding their placement in

alternative care, these placements were inclined to be more stable. Lansdown (1995:30) emphasises that the benefits of taking this process seriously can have a remarkable impact on the nature of adult-child relationships but also provides children with a sense of being accepted as worthy citizens in society. Hart (1992:6) similarly is of the opinion that children are active agents who have the potential to make a valuable contribution to society. If children's participation is appropriately facilitated, children's participation can add value to both children and society, although it is important to be aware of the various challenges that may be experienced during this process (Cook *et al.*, 2004:60).

Hart (1992:9) highlights the levels of involving children in the process of participation by using the metaphor of a ladder. The three lower rungs; manipulation, decoration and tokenism are regarded as unfavourable. The top five rungs include; assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult initiated, shared decisions with children, child initiated and children initiated, shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992:9). Hart (1992:10) maintains that the level of participation implemented depends on the context that the child finds themselves in. From his work it is evident that there are opportunities for child participation that can be constructive or destructive for children.

Cashmore (2002:838-840), Cook *et al.* (2004:1) and Lansdown (2010:12) put emphasis on the difficulties related to participation children encounter within the family environment but also in the context of alternative care. Within the child protection field, children may be found in need of care and protection and are consequently placed into alternative care. Alternative care includes: foster care, child and youth care centres, cluster foster care and permanent care which includes adoption. Child and youth care centres therefore form merely a part of the child protection field. Sinclair (1998:137) is of the opinion that within the child protection context it is common for social workers to apply the principle of child participation within the decision making process as it is a prerequisite to "ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child regarding decisions and to give due consideration to them, having regard to his age and understanding" especially in terms of developing the child's care plan (Sinclair, 1998:137). However, this view is contradicted with what happens sometimes in reality by a quote from a child in alternative care who felt isolated within his/her care plan meeting;

*"It is really oppressive when they (adults) suddenly say... yes, you have to go outside; we will talk a bit with the adults... They talk behind my back, and I know*

*they talk about me and it frightens me, what it could be about” (Pölkki et al., 2012:118).*

It seems from this quote as well as the research of Cashmore (2002:838) and Thomas and O’Kane (1999:221) that children who have been found in need of care and protection can be in a different position with regards to being part of the decisions that are made in their lives. The most significant differences between the family environment and alternative care environment with regards to the nature of decision-making processes, are the number of adults involved in the process as well as the complexity of the decisions being made (Leeson, 2007:269; Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:108; Thomas & O’Kane, 1999:221). Decisions made within the lives of children who are placed into alternative care are often made by several adults and professionals, and time constraints due to high caseloads may limit the level of participation (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:108-121). Research on an international level has already emphasised that children’s participation within the context of child protection is a complex aspect of social work practice (Healy & Darlington, 2009:420).

All children placed within a child and youth care centre have been found in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005). Consequently, children have the right to care and protection, but at the same time have the right to be part of decisions made in their lives. The right to participation is stipulated in Section 10 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) where it clearly states, “every child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participation in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration”.

Whilst the UNCRC and other national legislation such as the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 provide children with the right to participate, various barriers continue to exist with regards to putting the ideals of children’s participation rights into practice. The challenges in the child protection environment relate to social workers involved with the child having high caseloads and limited time and therefore not always being able to build meaningful relationships with their clients (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:121). Other obstacles to enabling mechanisms for child participation within the field of child protection include; professionals not always having the skills to communicate effectively on the same level as the child, limited number of professionals and high turnover of staff (Bell, 2002:2-5).

In recent years research has been conducted in the area of child participation both nationally (Jamieson *et al.*, 2011:18; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:7) and internationally (Cook *et al.*, 2004:1; Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:108) utilising various research contexts. International research has focused on the importance of child participation within a family context (Cook *et al.*, 2004:11; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006:11) and also within a context of children who are in alternative care (Cashmore, 2002:837; Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:107). Furthermore, most international research has focused on either the views of children (Leeson, 2007:268; Sinclair, 1998:137; Thomas & O’Kane, 1999:221) or those of adults (Shemmings, 2000:235; Vis, Holtan & Thomas, 2010:7) in understanding the nature of children’s participation. Recent national research on the topic of children’s participation put emphasis on primarily the ethics of children’s participation (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:7), children’s participation in law reform (Nomdo & Roberts, 2011:49-53) and the importance of children’s participation in social dialogue (Jamieson *et al.*, 2011:23). It seems as if there is limited national research available on how participation as a children’s right gets realised in the daily decision making processes of South African children, who have been found in need of care and protection and are consequently placed into alternative care.

Against the background of the focuses and gaps in current research, it can be argued that a need exists for in depth descriptions of the nature of participation as a children’s right within a child protection environment, as perceived by both the child and those adults (social workers, professionals and child care workers) interacting or working with the child. Differently put, how participation as a children’s right is understood and realised by children and adults in the practice field of child protection and specifically in a child and youth care centre in South Africa needs further exploration and description.

The research context that was utilised to address this gap in the current state of national research was the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape, South Africa. The rationale for choosing a child and youth care centre as a research context to gain more understanding of the nature of children’s participation as perceived by both children and adults was threefold: 1) the kind of decisions/matters pertinent to the lives of children (future defining); 2) adults who are mainly in the role of ensuring care and protection for children and 3) the child and youth care centre represents a bounded system of dynamics – specifically related to adult/child interactions and relations.

Towards realising children's participation in a child protection environment, the following research question was formulated: What is the nature of participation as a children's right as perceived by both adults and children in a child and youth care centre?

The results of the study may lead to the formulation of guidelines on how participation as a children's right can be realised within the child protection environment in South Africa, by focusing on the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape.

## **2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **2.1 General aim**

The aim of this study was to qualitatively, through the use of a case study design, explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right in the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape as perceived by both children and the adults working and interacting with them.

### **2.2 Objectives**

- To explore and describe the perceptions of children on the nature of their participation in the decisions that are made in their lives in the context of a child and youth care centre.
- To explore and describe how social workers, child care workers and other professionals, as adults interacting and working with children in a child and youth care centre, perceive the nature of children's participation in the decisions that are made in their lives.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Babbie (2011:33) a paradigm is an essential theoretical framework for observation and comprehending, which influences how a specific situation or problem is understood from a specific perspective. A rights perspective to the notion of children's

participation was utilised to explore the meaning of participation as it is stipulated in international and national child rights instruments. Field theory was used as an additional theoretical lens in order to comprehend the dynamics within a child and youth care context which may impact the nature of children's participation.

Participation, meaning that children voice their opinion and are listened to in matters pertinent to their lives, is considered as a basic children's right (Jamieson, 2011:22; RSA, 2005; UNCRC, 1989). However, this perspective primarily puts emphasis on individual children and their human rights. Field theory aims at complementing the right focus by providing the study with a second theoretical lens. It shifts the focus from an individualistic approach where the child is the primary focus, to a more collective approach where the various parts of the child's field is taken into consideration. Field theory highlights that within this context, the child cannot be understood in isolation and his or her whole field with both its personal and environmental influences and resources need to be taken into consideration (Schulz, 2012:32). This includes the relationships with the social workers, professionals and child care workers as well as the child and youth care centre. Field theory therefore provides a scope for exploration on the interaction between the child (as a rights bearer) and the environment (which is the context of the child and youth care centre and the interactions of the various role players within this context), and focuses on the effects that these interactions have on the nature of children's participation.

One aspect that needs to be taken into consideration, is that the various role-players within the process of children's participation in the context of a child and youth care centre, view the field from different perspectives (usually due to the varying roles) and are in different positions (Foster-Fishman & Yang, cited by Wulczyn, Daro, Fluke, Feldman, Glodek & Lifanda, 2010:17). Consequently these different views may affect how the various role players respond to the various processes within the field. For example, the social workers, professionals and child care workers may have very different views of children's participation even though they are all united in terms of ensuring the well-being of children and ensuring that their human rights are realised (Wulczyn *et al.*, 2010:17). It was therefore vital to include all the role players involved in the context of a child and youth care centre to ensure that the various perspectives on the nature of children's participation could be identified.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the role of contextual influences such as children, social workers, professionals, child care workers, the family, the community where the child and youth care centre is located as well as larger socio-economic and political influences (Wulczyn *et al.*, 2010:14). The field is consequently required to adapt to the realities these influences present (Wulczyn *et al.*, 2010:14). An example of this is the establishment of legislation in the last two decades which puts emphasis on children's participation as a right. It was therefore necessary for the field (children, social workers, professionals, child care workers and child and youth care centre) to adapt accordingly to ensure that these prerequisites are met.

## **4. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

### **4.1 Literature review**

The literature review was developed and written on an on-going basis as research is described as a developing process where new information may emerge continually (Fouché & Delpont, 2011:133). The aim of the literature review was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the problem thus putting the researcher's research into perspective and aimed at both ensuring that similar research has not yet been conducted and serving as a foundation for the empirical study (Fouché & Delpont, 2011:133).

Resources that were utilised within the literature review consisted of text books, journal articles and electronic search engines. The search engines utilised were those available through the NWU library services: Ebsco Host, A to Z Journal List, Google Scholar, and Sage Publications.

The subsequent aspects were included in the literature review:

- Children's participation
- Children's rights
- Child protection
- Child and youth care
- Alternative care.

## **4.2 Empirical investigation**

### ***4.2.1 Research design***

A qualitative case study design was utilised in order to explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right within a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape. Fouché and Schurink, (2011:307) maintain that qualitative research, rather than quantitative research, aims to discuss social phenomena by comprehending how individuals understand their social worlds. Therefore the aim of using a qualitative approach was to focus on the perceptions of the children and professionals regarding the nature of participation as a children's right within the context of child and youth care.

A descriptive case study was utilised to explore and describe the specific phenomenon (Lindegger, 2006:460) of children's participation within a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape. This case study aimed at providing rich descriptive data regarding the phenomena of children's participation (Lindegger, 2006:461). The study was conducted using the child and youth care centre as a single case with three units of analysis, namely: the children; the child care workers; as well as social workers and professionals. A single case design is often descriptive and offers rich data about individuals or specific phenomena (Lindegger, 2006: 461). However, a limitation of a case study design is that it focuses the contextual issues of the case study and the findings can therefore not be generalized. Therefore the dynamics within the process of children's participation at the specific child and youth care centre cannot be generalized with other child and youth care centres. Nevertheless, the research allowed for new ideas to emerge and was also to make certain hypotheses regarding the process of participation as a children's right within a child and youth care centre context (Lindegger, 2006:461).

A non-probability approach of purposive sampling was used in order to identify participants for the research (Durrheim & Painter, 2006:139). This method was utilised in order to identify participants that would be appropriate for the study and have a certain level of expertise in the area of children's participation (Durrheim & Painter, 2006:139). In the specific study, the researcher aimed at exploring the nature of participation as a children's right within the context of a child and youth care centre. Therefore, participants considered to

be experts in this area would be children living in a child and youth care centre and professionals working and interacting with these children.

#### ***4.2.2 Units of analysis and method of data collection***

The population refers to the larger group where the sampling elements are drawn from and in theory it should include all the units that form part of the unit of analysis (Durrheim & Painter, 2006:133). The population included children who form part of the senior leaders at the specific child and youth care centre. Section 84 (1)(d)(v) of the Regulations in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, states that "one member who is a representative of residents of the child and youth care centre needs to be on the management board" (RSA, 2005). The senior leaders at the child and youth care centre therefore represent the residents at the centre and are elected by the children with the guidance from staff. The role of the senior leaders is to provide the children at the child and youth care centre with a voice regarding matters pertaining to them. The children who form part of the senior leaders were between the ages of 14 and 18. An additional two children who were in the same age group but who did not form part of the senior leaders were also part of the study to ensure trustworthiness. Children in this age group were able to verbalise their thoughts and perceptions easier and the data collection method of individual interviews would also be age appropriate (Louw, 1997:487-489). The researcher also chose this group of children to ensure that children who are on her caseload were not participants (the researcher is the case manager of children under the age of 11 at the specific child and youth care centre). The reason for not conducting the research with children on the researcher's caseload was due to ethical reasons as the participants may have felt obliged to take part in the research as the researcher had a relationship with them and they may have given answers that they thought the researcher would want to hear.

The population also included social workers, child care workers and other professionals (such as managers and coordinators) working within the context of the specific child and youth care centre. These professionals needed to have worked in this context for a minimum period of six months as the researcher believed that it would be important for them to have some experience in the specific field in order to give their input.

The process for data collection followed with each group of participants is discussed below.

## **Unit 1: Children**

A coordinator at the specific child and youth care centre approached the senior leaders and invited them to be part of the study. Of the fifteen children part of the senior leader's forum, thirteen children volunteered to be part of the study. Permission to conduct the research with the children was obtained from both the manager of the child and youth care centre as well as the Department of Social Development. The researcher also ensured that when reporting results of the children that special care was taken so that no-one would be able to recognise any of the children.

A session was held with the children as a group to discuss the details of the study. The children were also asked to fill in the assent forms during this informal session. The children were then asked to make a collage as an icebreaker to become more aware of participation in general, but also of their participation as a right within the child and youth care context. Yontef (1993:72) states that the here and now focus can be described as allowing the feelings, thoughts and memories of the past and future to be brought into the present so that meaning can occur. Reality exists in the here and now as a unique experience and if it is dealt with then growth can take place (Yontef, 1993:72). The aim of using the collage was therefore to make the children more aware of the process of children's participation as a right and to bring their various experiences and views to the foreground (see appendix 7-10).

The children were contacted and suitable times for the interviews were arranged with them. The interviews took place in a child friendly office after working hours to ensure that other children or staff members at the child and youth care centre did not overhear anything discussed in the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were utilised with the child participants where the researcher made use of an interview guide (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:166). The interview guide, which was reviewed by the Ethics Committee at the Department of Social Development (see appendix 5), consisted of various themes that needed to be approached during the interviews (Welman *et al.*, 2005:166). The children's interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 30 minutes and produced 140 pages of data when transcribed.

## **Unit 2: Child and youth care workers**

A coordinator at the specific child and youth care centre approached the child and youth care workers and invited them to be part of the study. Of the twenty child and youth care workers, seven volunteered to be part of the study.

A focus group was held with the seven child and youth care workers by an external researcher, although the researcher sat in on the session. The reason for using an external researcher to conduct the focus group was to decrease the possibility of the data being flawed due to the management role that the researcher fulfils within the organisation. An interview guide was utilised by the external researcher to obtain the data (see appendix 4). Confidentiality was also discussed with the participants. The focus group was held within the activity hall at the child and youth care centre.

Two focus groups were used, one for the child and youth care workers and the other for the social workers and other professionals. Separate focus groups were conducted due to the different interactions that the adult participants have with the children. The separate focus groups were also utilised to ensure that the participants felt comfortable to share information in front of each other. The focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes and produced 22 pages of data when transcribed.

### **Unit 3: Social workers and other professionals**

The manager of the child and youth care centre invited the social workers and other professionals to be part of the study. Of the three social workers and four professionals invited, three social workers and one professional volunteered to be part of the study.

A focus group was held with the group by an external researcher; however the researcher sat in on the session. The reason for using an external researcher to conduct the focus group was to decrease the possibility of the data being flawed due to the role of the researcher within the organisation. The focus group was held within the activity hall at the child and youth care centre. The focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes and produced 25 pages of data when transcribed.

### ***Reflections***

The researcher made use of regular personal reflections to ensure that there was a constant awareness of her own attitude and possible biases. In line with the observation of Whittaker (2009:9), reflexivity can also ensure good quality research as it involves a process of continually reflecting and being aware of the process that is taking place. The researcher also made process notes during the interviews to note any observations (for example body language) that would not be identified in the audio recording (Kelly, 2006:298).

### **4.2.3 Data analysis**

The researcher made use of the following steps in order to analyse the collected data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006:322-326).

#### *4.2.3.1 Familiarisation and immersion*

Whilst collecting the data, the researcher already started identifying themes and analysing the data. Once all the data was collected and transcribed, the researcher read through the transcripts and field notes several times and reflected on the various themes. Throughout the process, the researcher made notes and formulated mind maps.

#### *4.2.3.2 Inducing themes*

The researcher used a bottom-up approach to look for reoccurring themes within the material. The researcher explored the terms used by the participants when labelling the categories, themes and subthemes and identified the ideal number of themes to ensure that the findings of the study were not too vague.

#### *4.2.3.3 Coding*

Whilst identifying the various themes, the researcher also started coding the data with the aim of extricating the data in a systematic manner. The researcher made use of track changes in a word document to underline the various parts of the text (see appendix 4). The researcher also made use of an external coder to assist with identifying the themes within the data.

#### *4.2.3.4 Elaboration*

The researcher aimed for elaboration by looking at the themes in a more comprehensive manner. This was so that the finer distinctions could be identified and to ensure that a thorough analysis was conducted.

#### *4.2.3.5 Interpretation and checking*

After the induction of themes, coding and elaboration, the researcher put together her interpretation of the study. This stage provided the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on the process and how the data was interpreted, to ensure as much objectivity as possible.

### **4.2.4 Trustworthiness**

According to Krefting (1991:215), qualitative data should be measured in terms of its precision and trustworthiness to ensure that the findings are of a high quality. Lincoln and Guba (cited by Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:419-420) utilised the following model in order to assess and ensure trustworthiness of qualitative data. This model focuses on the following four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:419-420). The researcher aimed at ensuring trustworthiness of the qualitative study by ensuring that Lincoln and Guba's model of trustworthiness (cited by Schurink *et al.*, 2011:419-421) was applied.

#### *4.2.4.1 Credibility*

According to Schurink *et al.*, (2011:419-420) credibility refers to the researcher's ability to ensure that what the participants discussed has been accurately described. Lincoln and Guba (cited by Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420) outline various parameters which will ensure the credibility of a study:

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field– This validity procedure allows for the researcher to remain at the research site for a prolonged period of time (Creswell & Miller, 2000:127). The researcher works as a social worker at the specific child and youth care centre and consequently was at the research site for a prolonged period of time. By continually observing the phenomena of children’s participation on site, the researcher was able to build a trusting relationship with participants, which allowed participants to feel more comfortable to share information (Creswell & Miller, 2000:128). Being on site for a longer period of time allowed the researcher to correlate the interview data with observational data and thus ensure that the findings were the same (Creswell & Miller, 2000:128). It therefore allowed the researcher to have better insight on the participant’s context (Creswell & Miller, 2000:128).

Triangulation– It was the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that the research conducted was valid and the process of triangulation contributed to this (Kelly, 2006:287). Triangulation refers to the process of collecting information in different ways and from various sources (Kelly, 2006:287). In this study the researcher used semi-structured interviews, focus groups, field notes, observations and personal reflections in order to obtain the information in various ways. This ensured that the information obtained was credible. The interviews and focus groups were held with multiple human sources, including children, child care workers, social workers and other professionals to ensure credibility.

Member checks – Member checking is an important aspect of the validity procedure as the focus moves from the researcher to the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000:127). The researcher presented the data and interpretations obtained during the study to the participants, thus verifying its credibility. Fox and Bayat (2007:107) include member checking as means of data verification and as such it is directly related to the trustworthiness of the data analysis and subsequent conclusions.

#### *4.2.4.2 Transferability*

Transferability refers to the process whereby the researcher would be able to conduct the research in another setting and obtain similar results (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). The researcher made use of purposive sampling and data was collected until data saturation

occurred. The researcher ensured transferability by providing a thorough description of the process, context and participants involved in the research.

#### *4.2.4.3 Dependability/Reliability*

According to Schurink *et al.*, (2011:420) dependability refers to the description of the research methods used in order for the study to be repeated. According to Durrheim and Painter (2006:152) and Babbie (2011:415) reliability refers to the dependability of the instrument being used in the research, thus ensuring that the study can be conducted again within a similar context (Babbie, 2011:415). In order to ensure dependability and reliability the researcher provided information on the data gathering methods and data analysis methods in detail to ensure that the study could be replicated.

#### *4.2.4.4 Confirmability*

Confirmability refers to whether the findings of the research can be confirmed by another study to ensure that the researcher has been objective (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:421). In order to ensure confirmability, the researcher kept detailed records of all the evidence that validates the findings and the analysis (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:421).

#### **4.2.5 Ethics**

Ethics form an important aspect of research in social sciences as people are objects within the study (Strydom, 2011:113). This research has been registered under the project: Developing sustainable support to enhance quality of life and well-being for children, youth and families in South Africa: a trans-disciplinary approach with the ethics number: NWU-00060-12-A1. The Ethics Committee of North-West University approved the research which ethically deals with the concerns of no harm, informed consent and confidentiality.

The Department of Social Development is responsible for children who are found in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 (1) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005). The researcher therefore obtained permission to conduct the research from the Department of Social Development as well as the management at the specific child and youth care centre.

The following ethical aspects were taken into consideration within the study:

#### *4.2.5.1 Avoidance of harm*

An important aspect of ethics within research is to ensure that the participants experience no emotional harm (Padgett, 2008:69). During the qualitative research study, the researcher focused on the perceptions rather than experiences and in doing so attempted to minimise the potential of harm (Strydom, 2011:115; Willig, 2008:19). The researcher also informed the participants of the impact that the research might have on them and their emotional well-being (Strydom, 2011:115; Willig, 2008:19). Punch (2006:57) maintains that non-maleficence, which means no harm, should be the stance that is followed at all times when conducting research. ‘Beneficence’ is the term used to describe the obligation that the researcher has to ensure possible benefits for the participant and to minimise harm (Wassenaar, 2006:67). It was therefore important for the researcher to determine carefully what personal information was essential to the research and what information (which could possibly cause harm) could be omitted (Strydom, 2011:116).

The participant could be referred to a professional counsellor after the research was conducted if this was necessary (Padgett, 2008:69). In order to avoid the emotional harm of the participants, the researcher ensured that she made contact with social workers at the child and youth care centre to accept referrals. No referrals were made.

#### *4.2.5.2 Informed consent/assent*

The researcher aimed at truthfully explaining the details of the research to the participants in terms of what the purpose of the research was and what was expected of the participant (Welman *et al.*, 2005:201). Once this was done, the researcher acquired the required consent from the adult participants and the assent from the child participants (Wassenaar, 2006:73; Welman *et al.*, 2005:201). An informed consent form was also filled in by the guardian (the manager of the child and youth care centre) of the children under the age of 18 (Creswell, 2009:8; Padgett, 2008:65). It was also necessary for the researcher to obtain consent from the participants to make audio recordings of the interviews (Padgett, 2008:65).

It was imperative for the researcher to obtain the participants' permission to be part of the research to ensure that their rights were not being violated and to ensure that they felt comfortable disclosing their personal experiences. The researcher ensured that the purpose of the research and the manner in which the research would be conducted was discussed thoroughly with the potential participants.

#### *4.2.5.3 Right to privacy/confidentiality and anonymity*

According to Babbie (cited by Strydom, 2011:120) confidentiality implies that only the researcher will have access to the information and know who the participant is whilst anonymity indicates that not even the researcher will be able to ascertain any participant afterwards. The participants in the study all had the right to privacy and it was therefore necessary for the researcher to assure the participants that their identity would remain anonymous in the research (Welman *et al.*, 2005:201). The researcher ensured that the information obtained was handled in a confidential manner and the limits to confidentiality, anonymity and privacy were discussed with the participant (Strydom, 2011:119). The researcher did this by ensuring the names of participants were not linked to the contents of the data-capturing forms except through the confidential code that would only be familiar to the researcher and co-coder. This ensured that there was limited access to the data. The identity of the participants was not linked to the collected data made available for analysis, which ensured anonymous reporting of data. Participants' right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that documents which linked names to data was securely stored at all times. Confidentiality was also maintained by means of password-protected documents on the computer.

The researcher also ensured that her field notes, reflections and transcripts were kept safe and confidential. All the data for the project would be stored in the archive of the offices of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies at the Wellington campus. After five years these confidential documents would be disposed of.

#### *4.2.5.4 Involvement of researcher*

According to Fontana and Frey (cited by Welman *et al.*, 2005:201) it is the researcher's responsibility to treat the participants with respect and not to manipulate them in any way. It

is also important that the researcher does not ask the participants any questions using unethical methods. In order to ensure that the research was not manipulated, the researcher ensured that the questioning techniques were conducted in an ethical manner. The researcher also ensured that the participants were treated with respect.

#### *4.2.5.5 Voluntary participation*

It is important that participants participate in the research willingly and they should not feel obliged to be part of the study (Strydom, 2011:117). The researcher therefore made use of mediators in the organisation to invite the participants to be part of the study and this minimised the risk of the participants feeling obliged to participate. The participants were also given time to think about whether they want to participate or not. The researcher ensured that the participants understood what the research entailed and informed them that they could withdraw from the research at any point.

#### *4.2.5.6 Debriefing of participants*

During qualitative research, where the participant is often part of a reflective process, participants may become aware of various feelings, emotions and may become more conscious of who they are (Patton, 2002:405). When the research process becomes reflective for the participant it is likely that they may need some form of debriefing where they can have their queries answered and where they can receive clarity (McBurney, 2001:60). Debriefing was offered to all participants after the interviews and focus groups. The child and youth care workers of the children involved in the study were informed that should they observe any changes in the child's emotions or behaviour after the interview, that the children should be referred to their social workers for support. No referrals were made.

#### *4.2.5.7 Honesty, trust and avoidance of deception*

According to Punch (2006:56) it is important that the researcher displays honesty towards the participant so that they may trust her. The researcher should not deceive her colleagues, the public or any other persons (Resnick, 2011:3). It remains unethical to deceive participants in any way unless there is no alternative and it would be essential that the benefit to research outweighs the risk to the participant (Struwig & Stead, 2001:69). The researcher was honest

at all times and with all concerned during the process. She was honest with the participants in terms of the purpose of the research and how the information would be obtained. The researcher also allowed the participants to have access to the results of the research.

#### *4.2.5.8 Compensation*

According to Strydom (2011:121), it is viewed as being logical to compensate participants for costs that they incur due to being part of the research e.g. transport costs, time spent away from work etc. However, if the researcher reimburses the participant with large amounts of money, there may be ethical implications as it is likely that the participant is only participating for the compensation (Strydom, 2011:116). The researcher conducted the study on the premises of the child and youth care centre and therefore the participants did not need compensation for their travelling expenses. The researcher however provided light snacks for the participants.

## **5. REPORT LAYOUT**

### **Section A: Background to the study**

The first section of two parts. Part 1 provides an orientation to the study while Part 2 reports on the reviewing of the literature. The following elements are focused on within Part 1: the orientation and problem statement, aims and objectives, theoretical framework, scientific paradigms, description of concepts, research methodology, ethics and report layout. The following aspects were focused on in Part 2: the literature review: introduction, participation as a children's right, children's participation: a field theory perspective, children's participation in a child and youth care centre, an enabling environment for children's participation and conclusion.

### **Section B: Journal article**

This section consists of the journal article with the title: "Critical elements for realising participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre". This article will be submitted for publication in the *Maatskaplike Werk / Social Work* journal.

## **Section C**

Section C consists of the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

## **Section D**

Combined references.

## **Section E**

All the addenda are included in this section.

## **PART II**

### **CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CONTEXT: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

When exploring children's participation within the scientific field of social work, it is evident that child protection represents a complex context and various forms of research have been conducted in this area to ensure that the participation of children is promoted (Healy & Darlington, 2009:420). The research previously conducted aimed at obtaining the perspectives of children in care on various issues including their involvement in decision-making (Leeson, 2007:268; Sinclair, 1998:137; Thomas & O'Kane, 1999:221). The value of children's participation in the decision making process in society is outcomes based for both the children and adults involved. It is therefore vital that the dynamics of adult-child relations are taken into account when exploring the process of children's participation. Furthermore, there is a need for additional research on the nature of children's participation within their living environment, as perceived by both the child and those adults interacting with the child. The researcher consequently utilised the context of a child and youth care centre to fill the current gap in research in order to gain improved comprehension of the nature of children's participation as perceived by both children and adults.

The literature review provides a discussion of constructs and theoretical perspectives obtained from various studies conducted with respect to the research question. These studies primarily include, but are not limited to, Leeson (2007), Pölkki *et al.* (2012), Thomas and O’Kane (1999) and Viviers and Lombard (2012). The aim of the literature review is to provide a conceptual framework on children’s participation, viewed from a rights perspective while having the dynamics of the social environment in mind. The conceptual framework informed the empirical study and provided a basis from which the research findings could be understood, presented and discussed.

In the first section of the literature review participation as a children’s right is discussed, where after children’s participation in a child and youth care centre is explored. Based on the insights derived from a rights and field theory perspective on the notion of children’s participation, a description of an enabling environment for children’s participation is provided in the last section of the literature review.

## **2. PARTICIPATION AS A CHILDREN’S RIGHT**

Legislation, such as The Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), seems to confer on children’s right to be heard and to have their views taken into consideration. The Children’s Act (RSA, 2005) clearly states in Section 10 that, “Every child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participation in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration”. This legislation is effective in terms of treating children as individuals with specific needs and may assist in avoiding treating children as a homogenous group (Leeson, 2007:269). However, the Children’s Act does not provide specific guidelines to measure the maturity and stage of development of the child and this may cause discrepancies. Article 12 of the UNCRC stipulates the importance of listening to children and states that children have “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” and is often used as a foundation to stress the importance of children participating in the decision making processes in their lives (Ansell, 2005:225; Tisdal, 2008:419; UN, 1989, Article 12). It is therefore evident that in terms of the constitution of South Africa, children have the right to participate in the decisions that have an impact on their lives. Children are therefore entitled

to both participation and protection rights which imply that they are not merely recipients of adult protection (Lansdown, 2001:1).

The UNCRC provides the following principles; non-discrimination (Article 2), the child's best interests (Article 3), survival and development (Article 6) and the child's views and wishes to be taken into consideration (Article 12). These principles are essential for understanding and applying each article and the underlying normative framework of the UNCRC meaningfully (UNCRC, 1989). The value base of these principles applied within a context of parental (or those legally responsible for children) guidance (Article 5) and children's evolving capacities (Article 5) provided a theoretical perspective for this study in comprehending the realisation of children's participation in the child protection field (UNCRC, 1989).

Within theory in general, and especially within the field of child protection, there seems to be continuous conflict between the concept of encouraging children's participation in the decisions made in their lives and ensuring that decisions made, are in the child's best interest (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998:137-142). Whilst it is evident that in terms of the constitution of South Africa that children have the right to participate in the decisions that have an impact on their lives, it is also stated in Section 9 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended that "in all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of a child the standard that the child's best interest is of paramount importance, must be applied" (RSA, 2005). Therefore, the dilemma is evident in maintaining the balance between hearing and having respect for children's views and input and ensuring that the child's best interest is maintained (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998:141-142; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:14-17). Another aspect to this debate is that some research has indicated that adults have occasionally failed to do what is in the child's best interest because they have not listened to the child's opinion (Lansdown, 2001:3). In addition to this, both the UNCRC and the Children's Act include a requirement about "age and maturity", which in turn brings us to the recognition of children's evolving capacities although the weight that children's views should carry at a specific age is not stipulated in the UNCRC or the Children's Act (Cook *et al.*, 2004:11; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998:138). Article 5 in the UNCRC stipulates that guidance should be provided to children with regards to them exercising their rights "in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child", which emphasises that age and maturity of a child play a significant role in terms of children's participation (Cook *et al.*, 2012:12). However, the complexity of the issues rises

when professionals working within the child protection context need to apply these principles with very few guidelines.

In 2002 a study was conducted by Save the Children Sweden, where children within the family context in South Africa, Zambia and Swaziland, were asked to indicate which rights are most often violated in their lives and the findings indicated the following (Ward, 2008:8-9):

- Make one's own informed choices
- Express one's own opinions and ideas
- Participation – to be heard and taken seriously
- Have access to information for making informed choices
- Be listened to as children – the wish to be respected and heard by adults

The above mentioned study indicates what constitutes children's right to participation. Furthermore, it emphasises that children are sometimes portrayed as being helpless and defenceless, rather than being able to make a significant contribution to not only decision making processes in their own lives but also to communities and society in the broadest sense (Ward, 2008:8-9). Children are however able to easily learn about various ideas and values if they are given the opportunity to participate as citizens. Active participation allows children to develop a confidence in themselves as social actors who can act as change agents in terms of having some control over their own lives (Taylor, Smith & Gollop, 2008:196). Smith (2009:103) argues that children have positive attributes and skills and although they deserve acknowledgement, respect, and participation, they are still in need of support, care, and/or protection. Children's right to participation can therefore be supported within a context of parental (or those adults legally responsible for the care and protection of children) guidance and with the evolving capacities of children principle or can be perhaps limited by adults' duty to protect them – depending where the primary focus lies. The realisation of children's rights is determined by several contextual factors based on the dynamics within the social environment of which children are part. A field theory perspective is needed to understand what may influence the understanding and realisation of participation as a children's right within society. The field theory perspective on children's participation is for the purposes of this study applied within a child and youth care centre within the broader child protection environment.

### **3. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: A FIELD THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

The field of social work has a long history of focusing on and dealing with phenomena by using a systems-related approach (Wulczyn *et al.*, 2010:32). The systems approach to social work has developed over time, to include ecological theory, the ecosystems perspective, complexity theory as well as field theory (Wulczyn *et al.*, 2010:32). The theoretical lens utilised in this study to look at the various systems evident within the process of children's participation in the context of a child and youth care centre, is field theory.

The earliest field theory principles were based on terms utilised in physics although various additions and developments were needed in order for this approach to be relevant and useful within the context of human sciences (Schulz, 2012:32). Within the Gestalt approach the figure can be explained as being what is the most important to the individual in the moment whilst the ground refers to the background of the individual's experience in the here and now (Blom, 2006:24-25). As soon as the need has been met, the Gestalt is complete (Blom, 2006:25). The figure then moves into the background and a new need emerges (Blom, 2006:25). Field theory views everything that takes place within a specific context and therefore the significance of any situation is established by the connection between the figure and the ground (Yontef, 1993:46).

The field can be described as the three areas of the phenomenological method which are as follows, "the internal world of the client, the external world or environment and the ever changing relationships between them" (Joyce & Sills, 2001:24). With this said, it can be confirmed that a person never functions in isolation but is always connected to everything else (Joyce & Sills, 2001:24). The field therefore refers to the total sum of the individual (organism) and their context (environment) (Yontef, 1993:47). Within this approach, everything in reality is therefore viewed as being holistic and interconnected (Yontef, 1993:47).

Yontef (1988:299) describes the field as a "...systematic web of relationships where everything is connected and each aspect is affected by the other". Oaklander (2006:18) lists the following examples of fields that children may be part of: school systems, court systems, alternative care systems, medical systems etc. The field theory therefore explores the

interaction between the child and the environment and focuses on the effects that these interactions have. It highlights the fact that the child and the process of children's participation cannot be understood or worked with when separated from the environment; instead the environment and child are seen as a whole.

When looking at the process of children's participation in the context of a child and youth care centre, it is not possible to view the child in isolation. Instead the various professionals working and interacting with the child in this context also need to be a part of this process. Skivenes and Strandbu (2006:14) view participation as the "... interaction with others that is concerned with identifying the meaning of that which comes to expression. Individuals are taken seriously and have influence, whereby others take up their expressions for consideration and discussion". This highlights the importance of interactions within children's participation and emphasises that no part may be viewed in isolation. Bell (2002:1-2) continues in stating that relationships and processes that foster supportive interactions are more likely to involve children in a positive manner within the child protection process (Bell, 2002:1-2). Literature highlights the importance of the relationship in assisting children to "assimilate information, make informed choices as to what their views are...(and) exercise their rights to participation and service provision" (Bell, 2002:3). In an attempt to understand the nature of children's participation within the context of a child and youth care centre, it is necessary to attend to the dynamics within the broader environment that may influence the functioning of a child and youth care centre while also focusing on the relationships and interactions between children, the child care workers, social workers and professionals as they form part of the field.

#### **4. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE**

"Child protection" is the term used to refer to a broad spectrum of child and family services that are aimed at both prevention and/or intervention of children who may be or have already been found in need of care and protection (Healy & Darlington, 2009:420). A child and youth care centre therefore forms part of the broader child protection field under intervention. All child and youth care centres in South Africa are influenced by law reform on both international and national level and need to be informed of and guided by new developments in legislation. Children who are placed within the child and youth care centres in South Africa have been found in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 of the

Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005). The placement of children is usually a result of a serious breakdown in parenting responsibility. These children are removed from their parent's care by social workers or the police and it is during the court proceedings that a decision is made as to whether the child will be placed into alternative care, permanent care or back into the care of their parents.

Chapter 13, Section 191 (1) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) describes a child and youth care centre as "a facility for the provision of residential care to more than six children outside the child's family environment in accordance with a residential care programme suited for the children in the facility". In early years, placing a child in a child and youth care centre was viewed as being the last option, however evidence in recent years shows that the number of children placed into child and youth care centres is not decreasing as some children find it very challenging to adjust in foster care (Del Valle, Bravo, Alvarez & Fernanz, 2008:13). Child and youth care work is a multifaceted, dynamic and diverse field which focuses on the promotion of optimum development and well-being of children and families in particular contexts (Van der Ven, 1991; White, 2007:225-227). The focus is on relational work and thus on engaging with children and families; encouraging children to experience a sense of value and worth, supporting them to have hopeful dreams for their futures and allowing them to experience and benefit from the therapeutic relationship (White, 2007:225).

Child and youth care work is deeply embedded in various principles including "holistic, strengths-based, context sensitive, developmentally-informed, collaborative and committed to social justice and diversity" (Mattingly and Stuart; Corney & School of Child and Youth Care cited by White, 2007:227). Research conducted by Anglin (2004:180) indicates that an effective child and youth care centre should focus on ensuring that whatever is done is in the child's best interest and should address the following psychosocial processes: establishing a therapeutic environment outside the family, responding to the pain and the behaviour related to this pain displayed by children, and providing children with a sense of normality.

A child and youth care centre aims at providing children who have been found in need of care and protection and consequently removed from their parent's care with a home-like environment (Anglin, 2004:178). Often children placed into a child and youth care centre have experienced a great deal of trauma, and as a result of the intense pain display

challenging behaviour (Anglin, 2004:178). It is therefore essential that the staff at the child and youth care centre focus on providing these children with therapeutic care and a constancy of structure and routine that is often not possible within a family or foster care context (Anglin, 2004:186). Anglin (2004:180) highlights the following interactional dynamics as being essential types of relations between professionals and the children in the child and youth care centre: listening and responding with respect; communicating a framework for understanding; building rapport and relationship; establishing structure, routine and expectations; inspiring commitment; offering emotional and developmental support; challenging thinking and action; sharing power and decision-making; respecting personal space and time; discovering and uncovering potential; and providing resources.

Traditional child and youth care centres, previously known as children's homes, form part of a model of statutory residential care, which are legal institutions that often operate with the support and supervision from government (Desmond, Gow, Loening-Voysey, Wilson & Stirling, 2002:451). These facilities are often large institutions with a sizeable workforce including child care workers, social workers, managers, coordinators, cleaners etc. (Desmond *et al.*, 2002:451). In the context of this research, the child care workers and the social workers would be the personnel who spend the most time with the children and they would consequently be responsible for ensuring the children's rights and in particular children's participation as a right, are fulfilled. Whilst social workers usually spend time with the children in an office environment and with an appointment, child care workers are working with the children on an on-going basis (Van der Ven, 1991). It is therefore evident that whilst both role players play a significant role in the child's life, the roles are very different.

Due to the nature of child and youth care work, child care workers are in a position to develop positive therapeutic relationships with children which can facilitate goals that have been identified in the child's individual development plan (Moses, 2000:113). In fact, Moses (2000:113) identifies that the interactions within the therapeutic milieu have the potential to encourage growth and bring healing to children. Child and youth care workers interact with children on a daily basis for several hours at a time, taking on various roles that are needed for the child's development (Van der Ven, 1991). Child and youth care workers are therefore working with the children on a regular basis and thus play a significant role in terms of allowing children to be part of the decisions made in their lives.

Transformation in the underlying approach to social service delivery provides an additional understanding of participation. As a result of Apartheid, the South African government moved away from the previous residual approach (the residual approach only provides help to the people when needs are unmet by other institutions, family, religious institutions, market, etc.) and has adopted a developmental approach to social services (Integrated Service Delivery Model, 2005:7). Social development promotes the participation of citizens, the strengthening of the voices of the poor and vulnerable in decision-making and the building of democratic and accountable institutions (Patel, 2005:30). The developmental approach to social welfare is strength-based which implies that the abilities of individuals and communities to grow and develop need to be identified and mobilised (Maistry & Vasi, 2010:6). A strengths-based approach requires professionals to focus on the client's strengths and highlights the importance of allowing the client to share their views and opinions of the process in improving their circumstances (Early & GlenMaye, 2000:120). The client is therefore actively involved in the process and needs to take responsibility of their own lives instead of the social worker taking full ownership (Early & GlenMaye, 2000:120). All South Africans, including children, are therefore provided with an opportunity to play an active role in promoting their own well-being and contributing to the development of their evolving independence (Integrated Service Delivery Model, 2005:13). This means that within a child and youth care context, children have the right to be provided with the opportunity to participate actively in decisions affecting their lives. Social workers and other professionals play an essential role in terms of addressing both the developmental needs and the rights of the children within the child and youth care context (Integrated Service Delivery Model 2005:14).

Part 3, Section 7(b)(g)(h)(r) of the National Norms and Standards for Child Protection in the Children's Act makes provision for various forums where children who have been placed into alternative care may participate in the decisions that are made in their lives. Children who are placed into alternative care should be informed of their right to these forums by their social workers during the initial phases of removal. These forums include family conferences and multidisciplinary meetings and provide an environment where children's opinions are heard and considered. Professionals, however, may continue to make the final decisions regarding the children's future as they often have a natural desire to protect children and also have the responsibility to ensure a child's best interest. With an extreme focus on child protection, based on one-sided adult perceptions of what is in the best interest of children, one can fail to

provide children with the opportunity to develop and practice skills of participation, interdependence and evolving independence (Skivenes & Standbu, 2006:19).

## **5. AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION**

The field can be described as the three areas of the phenomenological method which are as follows, "the internal world of the client, the external world or environment and the ever changing relationships between them" (Joyce & Sills, 2001:24). With this said, it can be confirmed that a person never functions in isolation but is always connected to everything else (Joyce & Sills, 2001:24). Therefore, children within the child and youth care centre cannot be understood or worked with when separated from the environment; instead the environment and the child will be seen as a whole. Participation is therefore vital in terms of the child interacting with their environment and being part of the decisions that are made in their lives.

Participation refers to the process whereby children's involvement is acknowledged, where they are dealt with in a respectful manner, where they are allowed to communicate their feelings, beliefs and ideas and are listened to (Cashmore, 2002:838; Kirby & Woodhead, 2003:236). Kirby and Woodhead (2003:236) highlight that with child participation it is important that children are provided with adequate information and consulted with on matters that involve them, as this in turn offers them the opportunity to form their own opinion (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003:236). This is supported by Part 3, Section 7(h) in the Norms and Standards for Child Protection in the Children's Act (RSA, 2005) where it states, "ensure that recipients understand their rights and responsibilities and are provided with sufficient information to make informed choices". Participation can be applied to various areas of a child's life and implies respect for the way in which children communicate and learn (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003:236). Therefore, participation can include children's input in what they eat, what clothing they wear, what programme they watch on TV, what school they go to, where they would like to live if the family breaks down, whether a child wants to receive medical treatment etc. (Kirby & Woodhead, 2003:236).

Child participation within the context of child protection however remains a controversial issue. Social workers and other professionals involved with the child often have high caseloads, have limited time and therefore are not always able to build meaningful

relationships with their clients (Pölkki, *et al.*, 2012:121). Professionals within this context usually work with high risk cases and therefore ensuring a child's safety is prioritised over child participation (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:121). Other obstacles to enabling mechanisms for child participation within a child protection context include: professionals not always having the skills to communicate effectively on the same level as the child; limited number of professionals and high turnover of staff; lack of enough genuine dialogue, empathy, courage and skills of professionals (Bell, 2002:2-5). Children are also not always able to be part of the various forums due to school attendance and because of tension within these meetings (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:121). Sinclair (1998:137), however, is of the opinion that within the child protection context it is more common for social workers to apply the principle of child participation within the decision making process. He maintains that it is a prerequisite to "ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child regarding decisions and to give due consideration to them, having regard to his age and understanding" especially in terms of developing the child's care plan (Sinclair, 1998:137).

Research highlights the importance of positive, long term relationships between children and their social workers to ensure that children are actively involved in the decisions that are made in their lives (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:123). The relationship between the child and professional is vital in order for the child to feel comfortable and not intimidated during the decision making process (Bell, 2002:3). Child participation, especially within child protection, can be promoted through the establishment and enhancement of relationships based on trust, by professionals working with children (Bell, 2002:1). Many children who have been found in need of care and protection may lack secure attachments and this in turn may affect their ability to make informed decisions and feel confident to express their views to the relevant adults working with them (Bell, 2002:1). Bell (2002:1) maintains that attachment theory provides a framework for looking at what children find beneficial and not beneficial in their relationships with social workers. Relationships which are encouraging, friendly and understanding have a bigger likelihood of engaging children in child protection processes (Bell, 2002:2). It is only within a trusting and secure relationship, where the professionals are emotionally available for the children, that the children are able to assimilate information, make their views and opinions known and participate freely in the various processes (Bell, 2002:3). Bell (2002:3) argues that it is essential for social workers to be emotionally and physically available to children in order to ensure that they are able to contribute to the realisation of children's rights. In addition children need to be able to make

informed decisions about their lives in a safe environment. Although statutory social workers hold much power in terms of children's futures, Winnicot (cited by Bell, 2002:8) argues that through ensuring professional practice, keeping appointments, maintaining regular contact with children, listening attentively, treating children with respect and taking children and what they say seriously, the social worker ensures that children feel "held" and consequently feel secure.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Children's participation in decisions that affect them as individuals has become in rhetoric a priority for government on both a national and international level in recent years (Sinclair, 1998:137; Skiveness & Strandbu, 2006:11). However, the realisation of children's participation in their daily life within the various contexts in which they function remains a challenge. The challenge has to do with the gap that exists between the ideals of children's rights instruments and the implementation thereof in practice. From the reviewing of literature, it has become clear that children's participation is an extremely sophisticated and complex concept in general but especially within the context of child protection.

Working from a rights perspective highlights a child's right to be part of the decision making process in their lives but also stresses the importance of taking a child's age, maturity and stage of development into consideration and providing them guidance when allowing them to be part of this process. Furthermore, it is vital that the child's best interest be taken into consideration when decisions are made. Field theory also provided insights on how children in a child and youth care centre never function in isolation but rather are connected to their environment. This means that when the nature of children's participation as it is understood and realised by both children and adults is explored, the ever changing field should be taken into consideration.

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## SECTION B: ARTICLE

<b>ARTICLE</b>	
Title:	Critical elements for realising participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre
Aim:	The aim of this article is to identify and discuss critical elements for realising participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre. The identification of the critical elements is based on an understanding of the database of the broad research project that was focused on exploring the nature of participation as a children's right as perceived by children and those adults working with children within a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape.
Journal:	<i>Maatskaplike Werk / Social Work</i> (see the publication guidelines in Appendix 11)

# **CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR REALISING PARTICIPATION AS A CHILDREN'S RIGHT IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE**

**Jessica Johannisen, Hannelie Yates and Carlien van Wyk**

## **ABSTRACT**

**In recent years there has been an increase in research on the meaning of participation as a children's right both nationally and internationally. Children's participation within the context of child protection continues to demonstrate various challenges for both children and adults working with children in this environment. Based on the findings of a qualitative study about the nature of children's participation as perceived by both children and adults in a child and youth care centre, the article aims at highlighting the critical elements needed for the realisation of children's participation within the context of child protection.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the 1990's there has been an increase in the acceptance and recognition that children should be more involved in the decisions that are made within their lives (Sinclair, 2004:106; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:7). This principle has been evident in the increase of participation activities that involves children within a family and alternative care context (Bell, 2002:2; Cook, Blanchet-Cohen & Hart, 2004:11; Healy & Darlington, 2009:420-421; Leeson, 2007:268; Sinclair, 2004:106; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006:11). Reflection on children's social position in decision-making processes and more broadly in society is largely due to the emergence of children's rights on both a national and international level, which puts

emphasis on the participation and contribution of children (Jamieson, 2010:22; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006:10). Whilst the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and other national legislation such as the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) provide children with the right to participate, there continues to be too many children whose voices are not being heard (Cook *et al.*, 2004:1).

Children that need to be protected by the state are often in a different position to children living in a family environment with regard to being part of the decision making process (Cashmore, 2002:838; Pölkki, Vornanen, Pursiainen & Riikonen, 2012:108). The main differences include the number of adults involved in the decision making process as well as the complex decisions that need to be made (Cashmore, 2002:838; Leeson, 2007:269; Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:108). The existing body of knowledge on children's participation on national level emphasises the ethics of children's participation (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:7), children's participation in law reform (Jamieson & Mūkoma, 2010:73; Nomdo & Roberts, 2011:49-53) and the importance of children's participation in social dialogue (Jamieson, 2011:23). Current national research has not focused sufficiently on how children's participation as a right is realised within a child's living environment and in particular within a child protection environment. A need for further research on the nature of children's participation in a child protection environment could therefore be identified.

The research context that was utilised to address this need for research is the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape, South Africa. The rationale for selecting a child and youth care centre as a research context was because it represents a system of continuous adult child interactions which could consequently provide a better understanding of the nature of children's participation in a child protection environment as perceived by

both children and those adults responsible for their care and protection. Furthermore, all parties involved within the context of a child and youth care centre are confronted daily with a real life challenge of balancing the provisioning of care and protection with the participation rights of children.

The purpose of the broader research project was to provide an in depth description of the nature of children's participation as perceived by children as well as child and youth care workers, social workers and other professionals, who form part of the important role players in a child's life at a child and youth care centre. Based on the qualitative data collected, the aim of this article is to emphasise those elements that are critical for realising participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre. The critical elements presented and discussed in this article will serve as a basis to construct in a next article, specific ideas of how a mutual understanding of the notion of participation as a children's right and an enabling environment for children's participation can be facilitated within a child and youth care centre.

As an orientation to the presentation and discussion of the findings with an emphasis on the critical elements of realising children's participation in a child protection environment, the notion of children's participation will firstly be described from a rights perspective. Secondly, field theory will be utilised in explaining that children function within a social environment where the dynamics in this environment will determine to what extent participation as a children's right will be respected and realised. In the third section the focus is on the uniqueness of child and youth care as a context for children's participation. This theoretical orientation will be followed by a discussion of the research methodology before the findings with the focus on the critical elements are presented and discussed.

## **CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: A RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE**

Progress in terms of the development of a children's rights discourse and practice has been made in recent years in various contexts, involving children of all ages and from various social and economic environments (Lansdown, 2001:v; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:9). National legislation, such as the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) and the UNCRC (United Nations (UN), 1989) confer that children have the right to be listened to and to have their views taken into consideration (Leeson, 2007:269). According to these international and national children's rights instruments, children are entitled to the three pillars of children's rights; namely the provision of care, protection and participation rights. Children can thus be viewed as active citizens in society and not merely being recipients of adult care and protection (Lansdown, 2001:1).

The UNCRC principles of non-discrimination (Article 2), the child's best interests (Article 3), survival and development (Article 6) and the child's views and wishes to be taken into consideration (Article 12) are essential for interpreting and implementing each article and the underlying normative framework of the UNCRC meaningfully (UN, 1989). These principles applied within a context of parental (or those legally responsible for children) guidance (Article 5) and children's evolving capacities (Article 5 and 18) provided a conceptual framework for this study in understanding and explaining the realisation of children's participation in the context of child protection (UNCRC, 1989).

When exploring the nature of children's participation through a rights perspective, it is evident that the focus is on the individual child who is entitled to rights on the basis of being human (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:110; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:9). However, child right

instruments also stipulate that the realisation of participation as a children's right cannot only be dependent on the actions or claims of children. Adults play an important role in mobilising children to participate in organising their daily life (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:123; Viviers & Lombard, 2012:12). On the contrary, adults can also hinder children's spontaneous participation in matters pertinent to their lives.

Therefore, it can be argued that how the rights of children to participate get realised will largely depend on the social environment in which children find themselves (Viviers & Lombard, 2013:13; Winnicot cited by Bell, 2002:8). Within the context of a child and youth care centre, the process of children's participation involves children as well as the adults working with them. It seems as if a limitation of the rights perspective on children's participation can be that the focus is mainly on the individual child as a rights holder and that it does not provide clear guidelines for understanding the dynamics which may determine how participation as a children's right is realised within the daily life of children. The field theory was consequently utilised as an additional theoretical lens in order to take the systems within the social environment that may influence the realisation of children's participation in a child and youth care centre into consideration.

## **CHILDREN AS RIGHTS HOLDERS WITHIN A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

Field theory is a perspective which considers that all systems are interrelated and respond to each other which consequently implies that the various parts influence each other and thus have an influence on the entire field (Parlett, 1997:16). For this reason, a child within the context of a child and youth care centre cannot be comprehended in isolation. His or her entire field should be taken into consideration (Schulz, 2012:32). The implication of the field

theory for describing the nature of participation as a children's right within a child protection context, is that the systems within the social environment that may influence the dynamics of and within a child and youth care centre, should be explored in relation to the realisation of children's participation within this context.

Whilst it is evident that there has been progress with regards to the recognition of children's participation, limitations of children's participation in practice continue to exist. One of the possible reasons for children's participation not being realised in a spontaneous way in the social environment of children can possibly be the social construction of childhood in society (Manion & Nixon, 2012:30; West, 2007:127). As a result, adults' assumptions with regard to childhood and of authority and power have an impact on adults' perceptions of the social status of children in adult-child interactions and relations. This in turn affects the understanding and realisation of children's participation within society where adults dominate (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:11).

Whilst research illustrates the benefits of children's participation, it continues to be a challenge in practice as it is time consuming, and also questions the power that adults have, consequently diminishing adult control. (West, 2007:124). Involving children in the decision making process presents a level of uncertainty and may provide the space where children can question the actions of adults (West, 2007:125). Allowing children to take ownership and control over the decisions made in their lives requires constant negotiation and relationship building to allow for meaningful power shifting and participation (West, 2007:125). It is therefore clear that the realisation of children's participation is influenced by both the social construction of childhood in society as well as the dynamics of adult-child interactions and relations (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:11; West, 2007:131).

## **CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CONTEXT**

Children who are placed within a child and youth care centre have been found in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005). Alternative care includes: foster care, child and youth care centres, places of safety and cluster homes. A child and youth care centre is therefore one element of the child protection field. Chapter 13, Section 191(1) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended describes a child and youth care centre as “a facility for the provision of residential care to more than six children outside the child’s family environment in accordance with a residential care programme suited for the children in the facility”.

Child and youth care centres are a form of statutory residential care which operate with the support and supervision from government (Desmond, Gow, Loening-Voysey, Wilson & Stirling, 2002:451). The increase in research on child and youth care in recent years seems to have focused on the negative aspects of this context such as incidences of abuse, poor outcomes and the lack of drive and qualifications of the staff working in this context (Smith, 2009:1). Anglin (2001) describes child and youth care as “...work with children and youth, as whole persons, in order to promote their social competence and healthy development, *by participating in* and using their day-to-day environments and life experiences, and through the development of therapeutic relationships, most importantly the relationship with the particular child or youth who is the focus of attention...”. Whilst there are several professions which strive towards the promotion of well-being within people, child and youth care work is a unique field which encourages the engagement of children from diverse backgrounds using strength based approaches, holism and ecological perspectives (Pence & White, 2011:xv; White, 2007:227).

The researcher conducted the research at a specific child and youth care centre in the Western Cape. Within the context of a child and youth care centre, various adults including the designated social worker, social workers within the child and youth care centre, child care workers, family members and other professionals are involved in the daily decisions that are made within the children's lives. Sinclair (1998:137) is of the opinion that within the child protection context it is more common for social workers to apply the principle of child participation within the decision making process. He maintains that it is a requirement to determine the feelings and desires of children and take this into consideration when developing the child's care plan (Sinclair, 1998:137).

Participation in a child and youth care centre is not only a right; in fact it is also a responsibility (Jamieson, 2011:23). For example, child representatives on the management of a child and youth care centre are not only exercising their rights as indicated in Section 84 (1)(d)(v) of the Regulations in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, but also taking some responsibility for the managing of the institution (Jamieson, 2011:23; RSA, 2005).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study was to qualitatively, through the use of a case study design, explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right within the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:188). The research context was a child and youth care centre as a single case with three units of analysis, namely: the children; the child care workers; as well as social workers and other professionals. A non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling, was utilised to

ensure that participants involved in the research had adequate knowledge and experience of the phenomena being studied (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004:356).

The population included children who form part of the senior leaders at the specific child and youth care centre. These children are between the ages of 14 and 18. Two other children who were in the same age group but who did not form part of the senior leaders were also part of the research to ensure trustworthiness.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the child participants where the researcher made use of interview guides (Welman *et al.*, 2005:166). The interview guide was developed according to the developmental stage of the children and was reviewed by the Department of Social Development's research committee (Welman *et al.*, 2005:166). Prior to the interviews, a session was held with all the child participants to explain the purpose of the research and where the child participants were asked to create a collage on their understanding of children's participation as a right. The purpose of this exercise was to create more awareness of the participation process.

One focus group consisted of the child care workers and the other focus group consisted of the social workers and other professionals. Separate focus groups were conducted because of the different interactions that the different adults have with the children and to ensure that the participants felt comfortable to share information in front of each other. The two focus groups were conducted by an external researcher to decrease the possibility of the data being flawed due to the role of the researcher within the organisation. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. An external coder was also utilised for the data analysis to ensure trustworthiness.

The researcher aimed at ensuring trustworthiness of the qualitative study by applying Lincoln and Guba's model of trustworthiness. This model focuses on the following four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:419-420).

This research was registered under the project: Developing sustainable support to enhance quality of life and well-being for children, youth and families in South Africa: a trans-disciplinary approach with the ethics number: NWU-00060-12-A1. Both the Ethics Committee of North-West University and the Department of Social Development approved the research.

The researcher ensured that consent forms were completed by the adult participants and assent forms by the child participants (Wassenaar, 2006:73; Welman *et al.*, 2005:201). An informed consent form was also filled in by the guardian (the manager of the child and youth care centre) for the child participants (Creswell, 2009:8; Padgett, 2008:65). The information obtained during data collection was handled in a confidential manner and the limits to confidentiality, anonymity and privacy were discussed with the participants (Strydom, 2011:119). **The children and staff were provided with English and Afrikaans consent forms, English forms were only included for the presentation of the dissertation.** Debriefing was offered to all participants after the interviews and focus groups.

## **CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR REALISING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION**

The findings that resulted from the analysis of the thirteen interviews held with the child participants and the two focus groups with the adult participants are presented in the table below. Based on the qualitative data collected and analysed within the broader research study, the article seeks to address the following research question: What are the critical

elements for realising children’s participation in a child and youth care context? In this section the identified critical elements (indicated in bold in the table below) are presented and discussed in relation to the research question and literature in the domain of children’s participation.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>
Nature of participation	<b>Institutional mechanisms for engaging and granting children opportunities for expression</b>	<b>Family conference</b>
		Case work sessions
		Individual development plans
		Multi-disciplinary teams
		Senior leaders forum
		Contraception
		Meal evaluation
		Choice of clothing
		Choice of activities
		<b>House meetings</b>
	Rights framework	
	Informal children’s groups	
	Open door policy	
	<b>Consequence of mechanisms</b>	Presence
		<b>Opportunity to listen</b>

		<b>Opportunity to speak</b>
		Awareness / Aware
		Information sharing
		Appearance
		Confidence to engage
		<b>Overall emotional well-being</b>
		Communication
	<b>Limitations to participation / inclusion</b>	<b>Funding</b>
		<b>Logistics</b>
		<b>Willingness to participate</b>
Dynamics of participation	<b>Conceptual clarity</b>	<b>Maturity</b>
		Ultimate decision maker
		Prioritising
		Weight of child's opinion
		<b>Age of child</b>
		Process of empowerment
		<b>Balancing child's interest</b>
		Flexible process
		<b>Relational process</b>
		Power to persuade

Whilst there were both commonalities and differences with regard to the perceptions of the nature and dynamics of participation (as the main categories), it was evident from the findings that all participants had a desire for children's participation to be a reality within the child and youth care centre. However, the actual realisation of children's participation within this context provides opportunities and challenges for both children and adults specifically related to institutional mechanisms and conceptual clarity.

### **Institutional mechanisms and consequences**

Institutional mechanisms provide various spaces for engaging and granting children with opportunities to express their views and wishes. Children and adults can consequently utilise these mechanisms to engage in social dialogue resulting in decisions being made in children's lives. Whilst various mechanisms were identified during the study by both child and adult participants, family conferences were acknowledged as being the most significant in terms of important decisions being made in children's lives.

#### ***Family conferences***

Children and adult participants highlighted family conferences as an institutional mechanism where children and adults were provided with the opportunity to engage and consequently make important decisions in the lives of children. Significant decisions especially regarding children's futures were discussed in family conferences and provided an opportunity for everyone involved in the child's life to be present. Family, the child and all relevant professionals working with the child were provided with an opportunity to sit together and discuss the various facets of the child's life and make important decisions. In the following

quotes family conferences were highlighted as being essential in terms of providing children with the opportunity to be informed, but also to have their feelings and wishes heard and taken into consideration.

*Like the last time in the family conference, we decided that we can go home weekends and holidays to my mother, I was part of that.* (child participant 3)

*When there is a decision to be made about a child, then it gets made within a family conference and the child is present at the family conference.* (social worker 1)

Whilst family conferences were highlighted as an essential institutional mechanism for children to participate in the important decisions made in their lives; a few children disclosed that they had never or seldom been provided with this opportunity. One child revealed a desire for a family conference for the purpose of both information sharing and to participate in the decisions made in his/her life:

*I want one [family conference] because I want to like know, where am I going to go when I'm finished with school, where am I going to be and what am I going to do and who is going to help support me and where I am going to live and stuff like that. So if I don't have one, then basically I am clueless if – to what I am going to do.* (child participant 1)

Family conferences were explained by participants as significant in terms of providing an opportunity for the child, together with the family and professionals to express their opinions and views and consequently make decisions in the best interest of the child. Some children shared positive (inclusion and participation) and other negative (exclusion and isolation) experiences in relation to family conferences. Within literature it is emphasised that children are usually given a choice as to whether they want to attend the family conference (Holland

& O'Neill, 2006:94). This choice that children can make with regard to their attendance was not mentioned by the adults or children that participated in this study. The perceptions of most of the children and adults were similar with what is found in literature on the matter of family conferences providing opportunities for children to express their views and participate in the decisions made in their lives (Holland & O'Neill, 2006:94). The finding that family conferences offer a space for the sharing of information and for allowing children to be part of the decisions made in their lives is supported by the research of Sinclair on "Involving Children in Planning their Care" (1998). In addition, legislation in South Africa supports the notion of family conferences as an opportunity for children to be part of the planning that occurs in their lives (Sinclair, 1998:139). Part 3, Section 7(b)(g)(h)(r) of the National Norms and Standards for Child Protection in the Children's Act makes provision for family conferences for the purpose of children participating in the decisions that are made in their lives although it was evident in the findings that not all the children were provided with this opportunity.

Family conferences were identified as a significant institutional mechanism where children were involved in the important decisions made in their lives, however, house meetings were acknowledged as a space where children felt most satisfied about their voices being heard and views taken into consideration.

### ***House meetings***

The findings within the study indicated that the "weekly house meetings" at the child and youth care centre provided a constructive environment, where children's participation was encouraged and children felt comfortable to share their views. House meetings, therefore,

provided the children with a “platform” to share their views and concerns in a non-threatening environment. Feedback on the contents of the meetings was then provided to the social workers so that the children’s views could be taken into consideration when decisions were made. The house meetings provided an opportunity for the rules, program and meals to be evaluated but also gave children the chance to discuss their issues and make suggestions about changes they would like to occur within the centre. A child participant highlighted the space house meetings provide for children to express their feelings about their personal issues;

*...house meetings, you have your say about stuff and you can speak about your problems that you have at home. (child participant 4)*

Other elements which were evident regarding house meetings were feelings of inclusion and information sharing. The children expressed appreciation for being included in terms of being present when decisions were made but also in terms of having their views heard and taken into consideration. The children experienced the presence and involvement of their child and youth care workers during house meetings as positive and this was largely due to the child and youth care workers listening to and involving them in the decisions made. This was apparent in the following quotes:

*Yes, she [child care worker] calls us in and then she speaks to us about a thing...and we all sit in. (child participant 8)*

*Like with the social worker, she won’t ask my opinion but my Auntie [child care worker] will always ask my opinion...because my child care worker, she will always ask me if it is okay with me and stuff like that ... the only place where I am part of the decision is with my child care worker. (child participant 4)*

Whilst house meetings are not identified in any South African legislation as a prerequisite for children in child and youth care centres, the findings highlighted that children found that their voices were heard more often in this setting than anywhere else. A number of the children identified the house meetings as “the only place where they [adults] listen”. There could be various reasons why the children indicated that house meetings were a place where they could express themselves and have their voices heard. It could be because the meetings are held within their “space”, thus allowing them to feel more secure. Viviers and Lombard (2012:16) support this in maintaining that wherever possible, children’s natural environments (such as their houses in the context of a child and youth care centre) should be utilised if possible during the process of children’s participation. However, these environments should then be favourable for the process of participation (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:16). It could also be as a result of the meetings being led by their peers and not social workers or child and youth care workers. This may affect the power dynamics which are sometimes evident in adult-child relations. The principle of empowerment and enablement are fundamental with regard to house meetings, because regardless of the means, children remain reliant on the agency of professionals to promote and defend their rights (Bell, 2002:3).

From the findings it was clear that children own their space within the safe space of their home. They are therefore more in control and can take initiative in leading the house meetings. This view of house meetings and the effectiveness thereof in terms of children participating in their environment are in line with Sinclair’s opinion. House meetings are led by children and are consequently a means to enhance their skills and self-confidence to work in partnerships with professionals to plan their future (Sinclair, 1998:141). The outcome of this space or institutional mechanism is that children feel enabled to participate and their

participation can result as Sinclair put it in partnerships with professionals to plan their future.

What became evident from the findings is that specific spaces need to be identified and utilised by both adults and children to encourage engagement, interaction, social dialogue and consequently children's participation in the decisions made in their lives. It is vital that within the child and youth care centre there are sufficient mechanisms available and they should not be limited to the presence, initiative and actions of adults. Children can also create their own spaces to express their views, needs and preferences in life and it can be that they already utilise mediums to express themselves within this environment. It thus seems that participation is not only about providing children opportunities to voice their opinion on matters pertinent to their lives; it is maybe also about children who claim and own spaces where they feel free to be themselves.

The findings of the study indicated that various institutional mechanisms need to be identified, utilised and nurtured to ensure certain consequences conducive for children's participation. The consequences, according to the views of participants, primarily entail opportunities to speak and listen as well as attending to the overall emotional well-being of children.

### ***Opportunity to speak and listen***

Both the child and adult participants highlighted the importance of the opportunity for children to speak as well as to listen within the institutional spaces that exist. For the participants this was directly linked to the idea that children have a need to be provided with

an opportunity to express their views and wishes, but also accept the necessary guidance and support from the adults working with them. This was especially relevant with regard to children's evolving capacities and providing more support to children who are younger and less mature. This was highlighted in the quotes from children, a child and youth care worker and professional respectively;

*... I speak about my things and I also listen to the aunty [child care worker] (child participant 9)*

*So maybe if the social worker or the child care worker thinks, they are asking a child but it's not the right thing, then the social worker can make the final decision because they are still too young ... (child participant 5)*

*It is not to say that a child needs to like all the decisions that are made ... it is not about that at all. It isn't about being satisfied, it's about did the child understand and was he part of and was he informed about why the decisions were made... we should be able to, through a professional discussion, convince a child that it is in his best interest. (professional 1)*

Whilst most of the adult participants felt that they provided children with the opportunity to speak and express their views, numerous children indicated that this was not their experience. Several children identified that their child and youth care workers provided them with more opportunities to speak than their social workers. Whilst the children did not indicate the reason for this, it may be due to the positive relationships that child care workers develop with the children because they work with them on a daily basis. This was evident in the following quote by a child participant;

*Like with the social worker, she won't ask my opinion but my Auntie [child and youth care worker] will always ask my opinion. (child participant 4)*

However, there were several children who felt that their voices were not being heard by any of the adults working with them. They wished that the professionals working with them would spend more time with them and take what they say into consideration. This was evident in the following quote:

*I think that the social workers and child care workers need to speak more with the children...and the social workers need to spend more time with the bigger children. (child participant 4)*

The children in the study appeared to have different experiences with regard to having the opportunity to speak and listen within their relationships with the adults working with them. The impact of being provided with the opportunity to speak seemed according to the views of some participants to have a direct link to the emotional well-being of children.

### ***Children's emotional well-being***

A clear link between children's participation and children's emotional well-being emerged throughout the process of data analysis. The social workers and child care workers in the study emphasised the link between listening to children and allowing them to be part of decisions and children feeling "important", "being taken into consideration", "good", "becoming stronger" and "being part of a team". One social worker highlighted the value that children's participation can have for the child's emotional well-being:

*...it is about their confidence, their self-esteem, the feeling that they aren't just a child that doesn't get heard. I think in some small ways and in some very big ways it plays a definite role in their emotional well-being as well. (social worker 2)*

The children within the study revealed feelings of “happiness” and being content when the professionals involved in their lives allowed them to express their views and where they were provided with opportunities to be part of the decisions made in their lives. However, when children were not part of the decision making process, they revealed that they experienced feelings of loss and unfairness, blamed themselves, felt uncertain, “angry”, “depressed”, “heart sore”, “unhappy”, powerless and irritated. A number of children even identified the possibility of the adults not liking them which had an influence on their exclusion in participating in decisions made in their lives. This was evident in the following quotes:

*I felt frustrated and I just like, I shut myself out. (child participant 4)*

*Maybe they [adults] don't like me, maybe they think bad things about me...(child participant 7)*

It was therefore evident that children experienced very positive feelings which resulted in an increase in their self-esteem, self-confidence and consequently their emotional well-being when being provided with the opportunity to participate in the decisions made in their lives. To the contrary, when children were not provided with opportunities to participate, it resulted in them experiencing negative feelings and sometimes even blaming themselves because of their inadequacies.

The children identified a desire to have opportunities to speak and have their voices heard but understood the significance of listening to the views of adults. It was highlighted several times that whilst the adults felt that they provided children with adequate opportunities to speak and thus express their views, this was not always the children's experience in reality. It also became evident that many of the children felt that their child and youth care workers listened to them more than their social workers and whilst the children did not indicate the reason for this, it may have been as a result of the child care workers spending more time with the children and thus building a strong therapeutic relationship with them. Both the children and adults indicated a strong link between children having their voices heard and the overall emotional well-being of children. This is supported by research conducted in South African child and youth care centres, which confirmed positive outcomes for children when children participate in and through institutional mechanisms. Griesel, Swart-Kruger and Chawla (2004:278) are of the opinion that children's participations provide children with the opportunity to speak and listen to adults which resulted in the development of self-esteem, a greater sense of self-worth, an increased sense of responsibility towards their communities and progress with regards to children developing better communication skills (Martin & Tenant, 2008:20). Furthermore, Melton, (1987:363) proposed that children gain increased self-confidence, when they believed that their views and inputs were valuable and taken into consideration.

### ***Awareness of limitations to participation***

Whilst there were various positive consequences to the institutional mechanisms provided in the child and youth care centre, attention was given to those factors that limited the full

utilisation of these mechanisms for including children as partners – funding, logistics and willingness to participate.

Lack of funds and logistics do not directly lead to children not being part of the decisions made in their lives, however, these elements have an impact on the outcomes of decisions made. For example, when there was a lack of funding, then it was not logistically possible for children to visit their family regularly or wear a specific dress to their matric farewell. This was evident in the following quotes:

*...this is where the logistical issues that come up...in terms of practically taking the child there. (social worker 3)*

*Because sometimes it's problems like if I maybe I want to go home like every second weekend, and then they [adults] tell me, no the transport and all the stuff...(child participant 7)*

*...you know, they get a choice of the dress, the style and the colour and we are obviously a bit limited in terms of whether there's funding that comes in... (professional 1)*

Another limitation that was identified in terms of children's participation was the children's willingness to be part of the decisions made in their lives. A few child care workers identified that the children sometimes avoided being part of the decisions made in their lives and consequently avoided taking responsibility for of their lives. The children therefore depended on the adults to make the decisions in their lives;

*I think that many of our children are actually lazy to make decisions and they want to be spoon fed, then they are happy. They don't want to think for themselves.* (child and youth care worker 2)

Various limitations were identified in terms of the implementation of children's participation within the institutional mechanisms present at the child and youth care centre. Participants were aware of the contextual factors of finances and logistics that may limit the choices children have in relation to decision making processes within this environment. The perceptions of some adult and child participants gave the impression that children are not always aware of those circumstances that can limit children's participation in the making of decisions in the context of a child and youth care centre. What seemed to be important and a perspective that did not come to the fore during the empirical study is to inform children of these limitations and allow them to be part of identifying solutions or strategies to address the challenges that the institution is confronted with. This perspective that was lacking is highlighted by Smith (2009:2013) in a child and youth care context. He explains that allowing children to act as citizens provides them with the environment to be involved in problem solving and to work in partnership with adults in supporting their communities.

For the participants, institutional mechanisms provided the environment for adult-child interactions. For children, these institutional mechanisms were associated with either feelings of belonging and inclusion or experiences of isolation and exclusion. Participants' perceptions of the value of institutional mechanisms for ensuring the inclusion of children are in line with how participation is described by Pölkki *et al*, (2012:108) as "interaction; belonging; and integration".

Participants' views pointed out that the nature of these mechanisms can nurture or restrain participation. Differently put, these institutional mechanisms can ensure positive or negative consequences for both children and adults. Another element which could be considered as critical in the realisation of participation as a children's right, an element that can nurture or restrain children's participation within a child and youth care centre, is clarity in relation to the meaning of the concept of participation.

### **Conceptual clarity of participation**

With a mutual understanding of what is meant by the construct of children's participation an enabling environment can be created and nurtured - not only for children's participation – but for all role-players to participate freely within this context. If children and adults do not have a common understanding of participation as a children's right, a satisfactory level of children's participation cannot be achieved. In order to achieve this level of common understanding, the participants stated that a trustful relationship needs to exist between the children and adults.

### ***Relational process***

The children and adults within this study appeared to have a similar understanding of the significance and importance of relationships within the process of children's participation. The participants agreed that in order to ensure active participation, relationships between the children and adults needed to be nurtured in order for children to feel safe and secure and thus comfortable to express their views. Relationships were identified as being key to engaging with children and providing them with the opportunities to be part of the decisions

made in their lives. The importance of a positive relationship with the adults working with them was highlighted by two child participants when they referred to their child and youth care workers as being parent figures to them. This may be an indication of the positive relationship they share with them;

*She [child care worker] is a real mother figure for us.* (child participant 1)

*...the child care workers are actually our parents as we are mostly here at the Children's Home.* (child participant 4)

*...none of that [children's participation] can actually work properly if we don't have relationships with our children.* (social worker 2)

The importance of the adults working with children being physically and emotionally available and present for engagement was highlighted during the study. However, children sometimes struggled to engage and build relationships with the adults working with them in the context of the child and youth care centre due to past trauma and failed relationships in the past. This in turn could affect children's ability to participate in a negative manner. This was evident in the following quote:

*...because many times it is a case of a child that could maybe not bond with the child care worker and cannot trust the child care worker due to trauma that has not been dealt with.* (professional 1)

The relational process highlighted in the study is confirmed by Bell (2002:3) who stresses the importance of being emotionally and physically available for children in order for them to feel comfortable and not intimidated during the decision making process. Kruger and Coetzee

(2011:39) highlight that meaningful participation can only occur within a trusting relationship. Children who have been placed into alternative care often lack a positive relationship with the professionals working with them, which may be detrimental as the development and maintenance of a relationship based on trust, provides children with the necessary agency to promote their rights within the child protection context (Bell, 2002:1-8; Kruger & Coetzee, 2011:39). This may be as a result of children feeling insecure within relationships which would allow them to feel comfortable to express their views and also make informed choices (Kruger & Coetzee, 2011:40-41). Within the context of a child and youth care centre, several adults, including social workers, child care workers, nurses, coordinators, managers and volunteers are working with the children on a daily basis and are responsible for the promotion of children's rights (Bell, 2002:1). Children, and especially children who are placed into alternative care, are dependent on adults to promote and defend their rights. Social work should essentially provide opportunities for professionals to spend quality time with children on a regular basis (Pölkki *et al.*, 2012:123). Within the child and youth care context, children are dependent on the professionals working with them to provide them with the opportunity to make choices, to guide processes and allow their voices to be heard. The relational process within children's participation can therefore provide the environment for children's rights and interests to be promoted (Bell, 2002:1).

Both the children and adults in this study highlighted the importance of relationships in the process of children's participation. They highlighted that positive relationships allowed for open communication and a sense of security which consequently allowed for children to engage in spontaneous and genuine participation. Children felt most listened to by adults whom they shared a therapeutic relationship with. The adult participants even went so far as to say that no participation can be promoted without some form of a relationship.

Whilst the relational process was highlighted as being an essential element with regard to the realisation of children's participation in a child and youth care centre, the age and maturity of children was identified as an important concept that needs to be taken into account during the process of understanding the nature of children's participation.

### *Age and maturity of children*

The children's views on age and maturity varied from each other and from the adults in this study. Two children said that children should be part of the decisions made in their lives at the age of eight or nine. However, the rest of the child participants felt that children should be older than twelve before they should be part of the decisions made in their lives. The social workers, professionals and child and youth care workers in the study appeared to be in consensus that 10 is an appropriate age for children to be part of the decisions made in their lives. The concept of age as well as evolving capacities is illustrated below:

*Every child has their own opinion and some children are more mature than others... (child participant 4)*

*It's like when you are in grade 3 and 4 then you want to be a princess, and then in grade 6 you want to become a doctor and then from the age of 12 and older then you decide what you really want to be... (child participant 8)*

*I don't know if ten is a magic number, but that maybe from the age of ten, more weight would be given to the child's views. (professional 1)*

However, there also seemed to be an agreement that younger children should still be asked for their views and opinions and that these views should be taken into consideration when making decisions in order to empower them and develop their confidence. This is evident in the following quotes:

*My children are eight and nine and they can't make decisions but I still need to give them choice* (child and youth care worker 4)

*I think when they come here. I think they feel. so many feel that they've never had a choice in coming here and that they feel sort of disempowered. So giving them little choices, even as small as what they are or because of what they are, it does help them to gain that sense of I am important, I do have a voice. And it is about their confidence...* (social worker 2)

An interesting aspect that was evident in the study was that the adults identified the age of 10 as being a suitable age for children to be part of the decisions made in their lives. The adults failed to mention the evolving capacities of children as a factor that needs to be taken into consideration. However, the child participants highlighted children's maturity and thus their evolving capacity as an important aspect that should be taken into account with the child's age when involving children in the decision making process. Two children maintained that from the age of eight or nine then children should be allowed to be part of the decisions made in their lives whilst the rest of the child participants argued that children should be older than twelve. These findings are contradicted by a study conducted by Shemmings (2000:239) where the one group of adult participants felt that children should be part of important decisions between the ages of five and nine whilst the other group was inclined on believing that children should be between the ages of 16 and 18 years (Shemmings, 2000:239). It is

thus evident that there lacks consensus from adults and children in terms of the age that children should be involved in the decisions made in their lives.

Both Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) as well as the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) stipulate that age, maturity and stage of development of a child should be taken into consideration when providing children with the opportunity to participate in the decisions made in their lives. However, no guidelines are provided in terms of a suitable age or maturity for children to be part of the decisions made in their lives. However, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 amended (RSA, 2005) stipulates that children over the age of 12 with sufficient maturity may have access to contraceptives and give consent for an HIV test, an abortion, medical treatment and surgical operations. If government considers 12 a suitable age to make such important decisions, should this be used as a guideline for children's participation in especially a child protection environment? Or is a more open wording like evolving capacities or sufficient level of maturity maybe more effective to make room for an appreciation for the diversity of how childhood is constructed in different times and in different societies? However, critical knowledge is needed of how children develop and of what capabilities children consist of to determine the degree to which they can voice their opinion in matters pertinent to their lives.

Whilst the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) clearly states in Section 10 that, "Every child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participation in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration", it also states in Section 9 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) that "in all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of a child the standard that the child's best

interest is of paramount importance, must be applied". Participation and best interests of the child need to be taken into consideration to facilitate ethical, significant and genuine children's participation (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:14-17; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998:141-142).

Whilst it is important that children and adults should be in consensus that the age and maturity should be taken into consideration when providing children with the opportunity to be part of the decisions made in their lives, it is always vital that decisions made should be in the child's best interest.

### ***Child's best interest***

It was evident in the study, especially with regard to the perceptions of the adult participants, that balancing the concept of children's participation and the child's best interest was a challenging and dynamic process. The professionals highlighted that the children and adults sometimes had different opinions in terms of what constitutes the child's best interest and that this occasionally led to conflict especially when there was lack of communication between the child and adult about each of their views. In addition it was noted that general rules and procedures were sometimes utilised instead of looking at the specific needs and development of a child and that the process was often rigid and didn't allow for much flexibility. This was highlighted in a quote from an adult participant:

*A lot of the times we can, and sometimes do use a blanket rule, no, you can't do this because the rules said ... etc ....., you can't, because this is how it's done ... etc. And I do think ... I mean, obviously those rules are very important and it's there, but it is there to guide us and that if it's in a child's best interest to maybe not do it in that way, then with the agreement of*

*the multi-professional team and with the management and with the child, obviously that's how it should be done, but I don't think we always do. (social worker 2)*

The adults sometimes had a natural tendency to want to protect the children whilst they were very much aware of their responsibility to allow children to be part of the decisions made in their lives. Whilst children sometimes became frustrated with adults not allowing the implementation of their wishes, they also had some form of understanding that the adults were ensuring their best interests. Furthermore, what was highlighted was that when the adults made decisions that they felt were in the child's best interest, they did not always inform the children of their reasoning. This was evident in the quotes below by a professional and a child participant:

*And then there was an opportunity for her to visit people in Paarl, there by Chicago, in those flats. I said over my dead body. But I never explained it to the child. (professional 1)*

*I think it is probably because they want to protect me. (child participant 4)*

*But I do believe that every child's voice should be heard. (child participant 7)*

*So I think, if we allow for that little bit of flexibility in terms of how we work with children, then we will be able to I think improve the child's participation in decisions. (social worker 2)*

It was very clear in the study that the child and adult participants had very different opinions with regard to allowing children to be part of the decisions made in their lives and actually implementing their wishes. Whilst the adult participants identified children's participation as being a process where the adults and child work together to ensure the best decisions are made in the child's life, the child participants identified it as a process whereby their wishes

led to implementation. Due to the lack of consensus in this area, children sometimes experienced frustration and were under the impression that they were not part of the decision making process, because their wishes were not implemented. This was illustrated in the following quotes:

*To be part of the decision making process, does not imply that the child can just choose what they want. I think that there is an important difference... from day one the child should come in, and this is where your professional team plays an important role, where the social worker who plays a leadership role, the initial admission of the child, the assessment of the child and the needs analysis, but also your child care worker and other staff who are part of the process. The child receives feedback on the needs that you have identified and why you have identified these aspects... The child should be involved in the decision making process in a professional manner. (professional 1)*

*They ask sometimes, but it feels as they don't do anything about it. (child participant 8)*

Another aspect that was highlighted in terms of ensuring that a child's best interests are paramount was the role of rights versus responsibility. Whilst the children seemed to be aware of their rights and responsibilities with regard to participating in the decisions made in their lives, the adults felt that the children were of the opinion that they have the right to do anything and do not need to take any responsibility. This understanding is illustrated in the following quotes:

*I think that the children think they have the right to do anything... if they decide this morning that they do not want to go to school and you speak to that child, he will say it's his right, he doesn't have to go. So they actually need to be taught what their rights are. (child and youth care worker 2)*

*...they have the responsibility to know what their rights are and then within that they know that with the rights comes the responsibility as well. So it's a dual process. (social worker 1)*

*But I also need to take responsibility if I do not abide by what I was supposed to do. (child participant 8)*

Although adults felt that children didn't understand that with children's rights children also had certain responsibilities; the children expressed an understanding of their role within this dual process. The children understood their right to participate in the decisions made in their lives, but also understood that they needed to take responsibility for the decisions made. The understanding of responsibility in relation to rights and best interest of the child is important in terms of the realisation of children's participation within a child and youth care centre.

The findings indicated that whilst the adult participants and in particular the social workers and professionals, seemed to struggle with allowing children to be part of the decisions made in their lives due to their reaction of ensuring a child's best interest, the children's approach to the process of children's participation was more from a right's perspective. It was however clear that the children have a level of insight on the adult's perspective in terms of wanting to "protect" them. Shemmings (2000:240) refers to the position which does not support younger children being part of decisions made in their lives as the rescue position and the opposite position is referred to as the rights position. The word "rescue" in this context refers to "protection". To adhere to the rescue position, these professionals may have been condoning a less empowering model of participation in practice (Shemmings, 2000:241). To ensure that children are empowered within the process of children's participation, it is essential that

professionals create the environment where children feel comfortable to express their views on various aspects in their lives (Shemmings, 2000:241-242). This, however, can be challenging if the professional already has an idea of what they think would be in the child's best interest. This aspect of children's participation is emphasised when professionals make certain decisions (which they feel are in the child's best interest) without even consulting with the child. With regards to children's participation, it is not beneficial to practice exclusively from a rights perspective or a rescue perspective, instead professionals need to adopt a flexible approach and integrate the two perspectives (Shemmings, 2000:241-242). The three pillars of children's rights, namely provision, protection and participation, provide a conceptual framework to balance the provision of services and protection of children, especially those who are vulnerable, the acknowledgement of children's evolving capacities to voice their opinion in determining what is in their best interest. In order to ensure that a child's best interest is implemented at all times, it is important that adults build relationships with children through the notion of communication.

## **CONCLUSION**

Both the findings and literature in this study identified that whilst adults and children would like children's participation to be implemented in practice, this is not always what happened in reality. Institutional mechanisms with its consequences and conceptual clarity were identified as the two critical elements necessary for the realisation of participation within the child and youth care context. These two critical elements seem to be interdependent as the one cannot function without the other. Whilst institutional mechanisms provided the space for children's participation to be implemented, conceptual clarity guided the actual process. Therefore, without the space, no process could take place and without conceptual clarity, the

institutional mechanism would be meaningless. It was therefore not possible to view the findings in a linear manner in terms of having institutional mechanisms first and then conceptual clarity or vice versa. Instead, institutional mechanisms can be created in the process of finding conceptual clarity. It became evident from the findings that the realisation of children's participation within a child protection context is a complex process. Furthermore, it is clear that an integrated approach needs to be utilised in the realisation of participation as a children's right within a given social environment and which is influenced by several contextual factors. This article aimed at identifying the various elements that are critical in the realisation of children's participation within the context of a child and youth care centre. It focused on both the nature and the dynamics of children's participation as it is perceived by both the children and the adults working and interacting with them in this context. By focusing on the perceptions of both the children and the adults in the study, the conclusion could be made that children's participation is about utilising existing and creating new spaces for engagement, interactions, dialogue and expression for children to gain a sense of having more control over their lives. When seeking conceptual clarity on the key construct that informs the understanding and realisation of children's participation, it can become clear that participation is not about children having rights at the cost of the power and authority of adults. Instead, children's participation is about open, free and spontaneous communication between all parties involved.

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## **SECTION C: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This section of the report provides a summary of the research problem, followed by a summary of the methodology that was used in this study, conclusions of the study and then recommendations of the study. Limitations of the study will then be discussed followed by a reflection. This section will then end with a general conclusion.

### **2. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The primary source which assisted with the understanding of the problem was the South African Gauge 2010/2011 (Jamieson, Bray, Viviers, Lake, Pendlebury & Smith, 2011). This source was very valuable in understanding children's participation as a right and the findings of the broader study are confirmed by the South African Gauge 2010/2011. Whilst the contexts within the South African gauge differ from the context within the study, the principles of children's participation as a right are universal and can therefore be applied in all contexts.

In recent years there has been an increase in the recognition and application of children's participation for children within a family and alternative care context. This increase in interest was mainly as a result of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) and Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA, 2005) coming into force. Both the UNCRC and Children's Act emphasise the importance of children's rights and in particular their right to participate in the decisions made in their lives. Children's right to participate in the decisions made in their lives includes decisions made on a day to day basis but also on a community level. Regardless of the implementation of the various legislation, many adults are still not listening to children and do not take their views and wishes into consideration in decision making processes.

Jamieson (2011:23) highlights the importance of children learning the required skills to participate in decision making processes and also learn to take responsibility for the decisions that they are part of. In the process of acquiring the skills to take responsibility for their well-being, children rely on adults such as social workers and child care workers within the context of the study, to ensure that their rights are fulfilled. The dependence that children

have on adults, as well as often one-sided beliefs about childhood and the capacity of children, often result in adults identifying children as objects which are vulnerable and thus need protection rather than individuals with rights. This consequently may limit the level of participation that the adult allows. The reluctance from adults to recognise the potential and abilities of children can be traced to religious principles, cultural traditions or the adults' own experience of non-participation. This mind-set is problematic in the recognition and acceptance of children as right bearers in the process of participation (Jamieson, 2011:29).

Children who have been placed in a child and youth care centre are in a very different position to children living within a family environment, especially with regards to their participation in the decisions made in their lives. These differences include the number of adults involved in making decisions as well as the type of decisions that are made. Children in a child and youth care centre often have several professionals as well as family members who are part of the decisions made in their lives and the decisions made are often complex and adult-like. These children may also be viewed as even more vulnerable by adults because of their past trauma and this may affect the level of participation that the adults allow.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right within the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape as perceived by both children and the adults working and interacting with them. Therefore, the research question was as follows: What is the nature of participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre as perceived by both children and those adults working with children within this context? How children's participation is realised within the decision making processes of children within their living environment is not adequately portrayed in the current knowledge base of the children's participation discourse. Children's participation as a right cannot be explored in isolation and therefore when looking at child participation within any context, it is essential that one focuses on the dynamics within the social environment that may impact child-adult relations. Against this background, the need for further research could be formulated as the nature of children's participation within their living environment, as perceived by both the child and those adults interacting or working with the child. The research context that was utilised to address this gap in the current state of research is the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape, South Africa. The reason for choosing a child and youth care centre as the research context was to gain more insight into the process of children's participation as perceived by the children and professionals working

with the children in this context as this context provided a system of relationships which could be explored within the process of children's participation.

### **3. A SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY**

The empirical investigation appeared to be successful in terms of ensuring that the specific aims and objectives of the research were achieved. The general aim of this study was to qualitatively, through the use of a case study design, explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right in the context of a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape as perceived by both children and the adults working and interacting with them. A purposive sampling method was used to select the participants in the study. The participants considered to be experts in this area were children living in a child and youth care centre and the adults working and interacting with these children. Therefore, the study was conducted using the child and youth care centre as a single case with three units of analysis, namely: the children; the child care workers; as well as social workers and professionals.

The child participants were children who formed part of the senior leaders at the specific child and youth care centre. The senior leaders at the child and youth care centre were chosen to be part of the study as they represent the residents at the centre as they were elected by the children with some guidance from staff. An additional two children who were in the same age group but who did not form part of the senior leaders were also part of the study to determine if their views would be similar to those of the senior leaders. The data indicated that the two children who were not part of the senior leaders had very similar perceptions with regards to children's participation as the children who were part of the senior leaders and the data obtained from these interviews were analysed with those of the senior leaders.

A collage was used in an introductory (separate) session with the children to allow them to become more aware of the concept of children's participation as a right in general. Individual semi-structured interviews were used for data-collection with the child participants where the researcher made use of interview guides (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:166).

Separate focus groups using an external researcher were utilised. One focus group included the child and youth care workers and the other focus group included the social workers and

other professionals. Separate focus groups were held due to the different interactions that they have with the children. An interview guide was used in order to guide the questions asked in the focus groups.

The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded with the consent of the participants after which it was transcribed.

The researcher made use of the following steps in order to analyse collected data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006:322-326): familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration and interpretation and checking. An external coder was also utilised to ensure another level of validity and trustworthiness to the findings.

Whilst this section provides an overview of the whole study and aimed at identifying the perceptions of children and adults on the process of children's participation in a child and youth care centre, the article had a specific focus in terms of identifying critical elements in the realisation of children's participation in a child and youth care context. Although specific aspects were focused on in the article, this section aims at making conclusions and recommendations on all the findings of the study as a whole. The next section will be the conclusions of the study based on the findings that have been identified after data-analysis.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

During the beginning stages of the research project, the researcher used the rights perspective as a theoretical lens to explore the process of children's participation. However, it became evident through the study of literature that another theoretical lens would need to be utilised in order to address the dynamics of children's participation within the child's environment. The use of field theory was therefore valuable in taking the child's environment into consideration when exploring the process of children's participation. Field theory provided a theoretical lens to allow the focus to be on, but not limited to, the relational and power dynamics within the process of children's participation. Furthermore, the research context represented a system of continuous adult child interactions which could consequently provide a better understanding of the nature of children's participation in a child protection environment as perceived by both children and those adults responsible for their care and protection. The literature utilised for this study included research from various

interdisciplinary fields in order to obtain a broader understanding of children's participation within the context of child and youth care in the child protection field.

During the literature review it became apparent that when attempting to understand the process of children's participation within the field of social work, it was necessary to conduct an interdisciplinary review of literature which included studies conducted within the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, law, social work as well as childhood studies. Both the literature and the findings in this study identified that whilst adults and children would like children's participation to be implemented in practice, this is not always what happened in reality. There continued to be too many children whose voices were not heard and this was largely due to the way in which society constructs the terms "childhood" and "children". This consequently has an impact on the interactions between adults and children. In other words, the social construction of these terms would also affect the level of participation and power-sharing that adults would allow.

Within a child and youth care centre, the children have been found in need of care and protection and this may cause adults to view these children as even more vulnerable and in need of continuous care and protecting. However, children's participation is acknowledged as a right within national and international legislation and the implementation thereof is therefore vital regardless of the child's living environment. In order for children's participation to be realised within a child and youth care centre, it is consequently necessary for certain critical elements to be in place.

The two critical elements identified for the realisation of children's participation in the child and youth care centre context during the process of data analysis were the institutional mechanisms for engaging and granting children opportunities for expression and conceptual clarity that is pertinent in the realisation of children's participation. These elements were identified as being interdependent on each other for the realisation of children's participation within the context mentioned above. In other words, institutional mechanisms cannot be in place without there being conceptual clarity and vice versa. Various institutional mechanisms were identified by both the child and adult participants as spaces where children's participation is implemented in practice.

Several institutional mechanisms identified in the child and youth care centre provide children with the opportunity to engage and express their views and wishes. Whilst these mechanisms provided the space for specific outcomes to be realised, it was highlighted that some were more beneficial than others. The child participants in particular were able to provide insight on the mechanisms that they felt were most valuable in terms of having their voices heard and taken into consideration. These included house meetings and family conferences although house meetings seemed to be a space where children felt most satisfied with their participation in the decisions made in their lives. Whilst there are various positive outcomes with regard to the institutional mechanisms in place, various limitations were also identified in terms of the implementation of children's participation. Although institutional mechanisms were identified as vital in terms of the spaces where children could participate in the decisions made in their lives, conceptual clarity was highlighted as being pertinent to the application of children's participation.

Conceptual clarity was identified as being significant and needed to be taken into consideration in terms of the implementation of children's participation especially in terms of the adults and children having a common understanding on these elements. The findings showed that when adults and children did not have a similar understanding of conceptual clarity then satisfactory levels of participation could not be achieved. Communication was highlighted as being essential for the effective functioning of institutional mechanisms which in turn could enhance mutual understanding and realisation of spontaneous participation. The process of children's participation as a right can therefore not only focus on the child but needs to include the communication interactions between children and adults.

Children's participation as a right cannot be promoted in isolation and should rather be integrated with rights awareness with adults in order to ensure that neither children nor adults feel threatened. A one-sided focus on participation as a children's right can lead to power struggles and can put children even in a more vulnerable position. It became evident in the study that the focus could not be on child friendly or child centred mechanisms for the promotion of children's participation, but rather on age appropriate mechanisms where children participate in communication with adults. Children would then be exposed to appropriate behaviour necessary for the promotion of children's participation such as listening and treating others with respect. Within this kind of environment of mutual respect, it can be possible for children and adults to learn together how to ground communication and

relationships on the human dignity of all partners involved. Respect is therefore vital in ensuring a harmonious environment where children's participation is promoted by both children and adults.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In light of the above conclusions, the following recommendations with regard to social work practice, social work training and for further research are made:

### **5.1 Recommendations for social work practice**

The following recommendations for social work practice should be considered:

- Social workers working with children in the context of a child and youth care centre should create opportunities to build relationships with the children as well as spend adequate time with them as this will promote the process of children's participation and form the basis for promoting and realising children's participation.
- Allow the older children with the opportunity to organise children's meetings without the presence of adults. These meetings will be managed by the senior leaders. Adult guidance can be available for the senior leaders and older children.
- Social workers should be involved in teaching children the necessary skills to take responsibility for the decisions made.
- Whilst children do not necessarily have to have the final say in decisions made in their lives, social workers should provide the following to promote children's participation in the context of a child and youth care centre:
  - Ensure that children are informed and understand their position in making decisions pertinent to their lives.
  - Share information in age appropriate language.
  - Allow children with the opportunity to express their views and wishes and take this into consideration when making decisions.
  - Ensure that children are provided with regular family conferences, multi-disciplinary meetings and house meetings.

- Children should be provided with the opportunity to be present at their multi-disciplinary meetings and family conferences.
- Provide children with the necessary guidance and support during the decision making process.
- Children's participation is about providing children with choices. Children should therefore be provided with choices in both daily decisions as well as more complex decisions in their lives. This will not only empower children but also teach them the necessary skills to make choices and take responsibility for the decisions they have made.
- Children's participation should not be restricted to adult-initiated opportunities for participation. Children already participate in ways where they express their needs, preferences and unique world in their language. The challenge will be to acknowledge, respect, listen to and value the voices of children in child and youth care centres.

In order for social work practice to be realised, specific training should be provided to social worker students at an undergraduate level.

## **5.2 Recommendations with regards to social work training**

The following recommendations for social work training should be considered:

- The Social Development approach is an abstract theoretical approach with emphasis on democratic institutions, participation, people-centred development, sustainable livelihoods. Social workers should be exposed to the practical implementation of these foci in relation to a child protection environment. In order for developmental social work practice to be realised, specific training should be provided to social work students at an undergraduate level.
- Human rights education with emphasis on universal norms and values of human dignity, freedom, equality, non-discrimination and its implication for social work practice.
- Children's rights education programmes.

- The social construction of childhood and how the perceptions of the social position and status of children in different societies and in different times in history can impact interactions between the social worker and child client and therefore need to be part of social workers' theoretical orientation.
- Social workers should be provided with training on the guiding principle for children's participation which is the evolving capacities of children which makes provision for how individual children in diverse contexts can differ in terms of various capacities. This principle makes a contextual approach more appropriate where the evolving of each individual child is taken in account instead of following a blueprint of a set age category.
- The reflective competencies of social workers can be developed by reflecting on their own constructions of childhood and attitudes towards children.
- Social workers should learn practical skills on how to utilise the institutional mechanisms available within the child protection environment in order to promote children's participation as a right.
- Social workers also need to be provided with training on positive contact making skills within the institutional mechanisms with child clients through the process of self-awareness in order to build partnerships with children in the child protection environment.
- Other professionals work with social workers as a team and therefore similar training should be provided to them. In order for the needs within training to be identified and addressed, further research should be conducted.

### **5.3 Recommendations for research**

The following recommendations for further research should be considered:

- A similar study to be conducted with younger children at the child and youth care centre.
- Case studies to be conducted with other child and youth care centres to make comparative studies in the context of South Africa on the topic of the nature of children's participation possibility.

- Participatory action research approach to be utilised where children are involved from the beginning in terms of identifying the gaps, formulating the interview guides etc.
- Further research on the nature of children's participation within a child and youth care context using art based activities such as collages.
- How critical elements identified in this study can be utilised in creating an enabling environment for children's participation to be implemented in practice.

## **6. LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH**

The following limitations were identified in the study:

- Language

Whilst the researcher's first language is English, many of the interviews were held in Afrikaans. Therefore, some of the transcribed interviews had to be translated from Afrikaans to English. As the interviews were transcribed verbatim, they did contain Afrikaans jargon, which occasionally made it challenging to translate accurately from Afrikaans to English.

- Age

This study only included child participants between the ages of 14 and 18 years and children who were part of the senior leaders. Although two participants, who were in the same age group but not part of the senior leaders, were interviewed, the study did not include children below the age of 14. Therefore, this study does not take into the account the perceptions of the younger children regarding children's participation as a right in a child and youth care centre.

- Demographic area

This study included one child and youth care centre in the Western Cape, South Africa and the researcher acknowledges that it would not necessarily be possible to generalise the findings of this study to the other child and youth care centres or other South African provinces.

- Role of researcher

The researcher works as a social worker at the child and youth care centre and this may have affected the data collected as the children and adults were aware of the researcher's role and this in turn may have affected the participants' willingness to share certain information.

- Alternative data collection methods

The researcher could have made use of the collages made during the introductory session by the participants in the interviews as another method of data collection. Whilst the collages were used as an icebreaker to encourage the child participants to become more aware of the process of children's participation as a right in general, the collages could have been explored in more detail individually with each child to gain more insight into their understanding of children's participation as a right.

## **7. REFLECTION**

The researcher was very aware of her role as a social worker at the specific child and youth care centre and how this may have been to both an advantage and disadvantage to the research study. Whilst being a social worker at the centre could have been to an advantage in terms of allowing both the staff and children to feel more comfortable to share their views as there was some form of a relationship, it could have also been disadvantageous in terms of the participants possibly feeling intimidated to share their true perceptions in fear of confidentiality being breached or being treated differently in the future. The participants were however reassured both verbally and in the consent/assent forms that all information would be treated as confidential. Whilst none of the participants were on the researcher's caseload, the children and staff were very aware of the researcher's role at the centre and this may have inhibited their ability to be truthful.

## **8. GENERAL CONCLUSION**

The general aim of this research study was to explore and describe the nature of participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre. After obtaining the perceptions of the children, child care workers, social workers and professionals on the nature of children's participation, critical elements for the realisation of children's participation in a child and youth care context could be identified. The participants of this study provided significant insights on the understanding of participation as a children's right and the integration of the various perceptions has contributed to the formulation of conclusions and recommendations directed to the realisation of children's participation in the child protection field.

This study has revealed the elements that are critical in the implementation of children's participation in a child and youth care centre especially with regards to the different perceptions of the child and adults involved in the process. Establishing and maintaining these critical elements require the following in order for meaningful children's participation to occur: information sharing in age child appropriate language, listening to children's views and taking what they say into consideration when making decisions and providing them with the necessary guidance and support during the process.

The findings of this study indicated the institutional mechanisms and conceptual clarity as the two interdependent elements which are essential for the realisation of children's participation in a child and youth care centre context. It is fervently hoped that this study can contribute to the realisation of children's participation as a right in this context in order to ensure that children and adults can work in partnership when communicating and making decisions that will be in the best interest of children.

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## SECTION E: ADDENDA

### APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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Cape Town

Dear Ms Johannisen

#### **RE: APPROVAL TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH IN THE WESTERN CAPE, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

1. Your request for ethical approval to undertake research in respect of exploring participation as a children's right in a child and youth care centre in the Western Cape refers.
2. It is a pleasure to inform you that your request has been given ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Department, subject to the following conditions:
  - That the Secretariat of the Research Ethics Committee be informed in writing of any changes made to your proposal after permission has been granted.
  - That ethical standards and practices be maintained throughout the research study, in particular ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity.
  - Participants under the age of 18 years should assent in writing while consent should be given by relevant guardians or caregivers.
  - Only participants who do not form part of your client base should be included in the research in order to avoid any conflict of interest or undue influencing of participants.
  - That the Department be informed of any intended publications and presentations (at conferences and otherwise) of the research findings. This should be done in writing to the Secretariat of the REC.
  - Please note that the Department supports the undertaking of research in order to contribute to the development of the body of knowledge as well as the publication and dissemination of the results of research. However, the manner in which research is undertaken and the findings of research

reported should not result in the stigmatisation, labelling and/or victimisation of beneficiaries of its services.

- The Department should receive a copy of your final dissertation, as well as articles subsequently written for publication.
- The Department should be acknowledged in all scientific/conference papers and contributions that result from the data collected in the Department.
- Please note that the Department cannot guarantee that the intended sample size as described in your proposal will be realised.
- Failure to comply with these conditions can result in this approval being revoked.

Yours sincerely



Ms M. Johnson

Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee

Date: 6/9/13

## APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM FOR THE ADULT PARTICIPANTS

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study.

Title of research: How do children and professionals perceive participation as a right in the decisions made within a child and youth care centre?

Important information regarding the research:

- My name is Jessica Johannisen and I am currently completing my master's degree in Social Work at the North-West University.
- The purpose of the study is to explore children's participation in a child and youth care centre.
- The manager of the child and youth care centre gave written permission for you to take part in this study. We will have focus group discussions where these matters will be explored.
- The focus groups will take place on a date and time that is suitable for the researcher and yourself (participant).
- Whatever will be discussed, will always be kept confidential and your name will never be mentioned. I will use pseudo names in the study, for example if your name is Peter I could use the name \*John. The name will not have any similarity to your own name, therefore making it impossible to trace your real name, protecting your identity.
- It's important to remember that you need not discuss anything if you are not comfortable with it, and that you have the right to withdraw from the study whenever you want to.

**I, ..... have read through the information regarding the study and give consent to voluntarily take part in the study.**

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**Participant signature**

**Date:** .....

### APPENDIX 3: ASSENT FORM FOR THE CHILD PARTICIPANTS

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study.

Title of research: How do children and professionals perceive participation as a right in the decisions made within a child and youth care centre?

Important information regarding the research:

- My name is Jessica Johannisen and I am currently completing my master's degree in Social Work at the North-West University.
- The purpose of the study is to explore children's participation in a child and youth care centre.
- The manager of the child and youth care centre gave written permission for you to take part in this study. We will have individual interviews where these matters will be discussed.
- The interviews will take place on a date and time that is suitable for the researcher, and yourself (participant).
- Whatever will be discussed, will always be kept confidential and your name will never be mentioned. I will use pseudo names in the study, for example if your name is Peter I could use the name \*John. The name will not have any similarity to your own name, therefore making it impossible to trace your real name, protecting your identity.
- It's important to remember that you need not discuss anything if you are not comfortable with it, and that you have the right to withdraw from the study whenever you want to.

**I, ..... have read through the information regarding the study and give consent to voluntarily take part in the study.**

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**Participant signature**

**Date:** .....

## APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS

1. How do children and professionals perceive participation as the right in decisions made within a child and youth care centre?
2. Where are children part of the decision making process?
3. Where are children not part of the decision making process?
4. What are the links between children's rights and the importance of decision-making?

## APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDREN

Discussion regarding the purpose of the research and the various risks. Ask the child to make a collage illustrating their participation in the decisions that are made in their lives.

1) Tell me more about being part of important decisions that are made about your life at the Children's Home.

2a) Tell me more about not being part of the important decisions that are made about your life at the Children's Home.

2b) Why do you think you are not part of the important decisions that are made in your life?

3) How was the decision made for you to be placed at the children's home? Who was involved in making that decision? Who wasn't involved? Were you involved in the decision?

4a) Have you ever been asked to give your opinion about the decisions that are made in/about your life?

4b) **IF YES** Do you think that your opinion helped the people make the important decisions in your life?

4b) **IF NO** What do you think the decision would have been if you gave your opinion?

Do you think they would have changed their decision if you gave your opinion?

5) Do you think that you have a right to be involved in the decisions made about/ for you?  
Motivate.

If yes, why do you feel that you have a right? If no, why do you feel that you do not have a right?

6) In what area and regarding what issues does the children's home allow you to be part of the decisions that are made in your life?

7) Are you satisfied with the part you play in the decisions that are made at the children's home?

7a) **IF YES** How can we help other children's homes do the same?

7b) **IF NO** How would you like to be more involved in the decisions that are made in your life?

In what type of decisions would you like to be involved in, that you are not involved in right now?

8) How would you like to be more involved in the children's home when it comes to making decisions about you and your life?

APPENDIX 6: CODED TRANSCRIPT: FOCUS GROUP WITH SOCIAL WORKERS AND PROFESSIONALS

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok, we can start. Are we going to do the interview in Afrikaans and English, or what's your plan with regards to that?

[INAUDIBLE]

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Everyone answers in which language they want to.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok. Ok, welcome from my side as well. I think, we really want to ... you know the title of Jessica's research, and maybe I should just read for ... the research question actually. Maybe I should just read the question out clearly and loud again, because this is what we want to help her to answer. "How do children and professionals, specifically now in the context then of the Children's Home perceive participation as the right in the future defining decisions made within a child and youth care centre?" Ok so "how do children and professionals perceive participation as a right defining decisions made within a child and youth care centre?" But it's not for the interview, not only on the future, to see really how things, how you are doing things, but also then to focus on the future. Ok. So I think I'm going to start out with a very broad question, and just ask you to tell me more about children at the Children's Home being part of important decisions that are made about their lives. So, net die vraag vra, wat is kinders, spesifiek in die konteks van die Kinderhuis, hulle deelname rondom belangrike besluite wat oor hulle lewens geneem word. So, ek dink ons kan algemeen begin, en dan sal ons van daar af meer spesifiek beweeg. Wat is die eerste gedagtes wat by julle opkom, as ek sê "child participation and decision-making around children?"

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Dat die kinders teenwoordig is by gesinskonferensies.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** So, jy sê die feit dat hulle teenwoordig is, is 'n manier hoe om hierdie kinders te betrek in decision-making?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Ja ... want gewoonlik as daar 'n besluit moet geneem word rakende 'n kind, dan word dit binne ... dan word daar 'n gesinskonferensie geroep, en dan is die kind teenwoordig by die gesinskonferensie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Wat is die kind se ... wat help die kind se deelname by gesinskonferensies? Op watter manier kry hy dan nou kans om deel te neem aan besluite? So wat is sy deelname daar?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Hy of sy sê spesifiek dat hy of sy gelukkig in die kindershuis/ nie gelukkig in die kindershuis is nie. Die kind hoor wat die grootmense sê, watse besluite voorgestel word, en dan kry die kind 'n kans om te sê, ja..nee, ek dink nie so nie, of ja, ek dink so, en dan word die besluit daar geneem, grootliks deur die volwassenes, maar die kind is ten minste by en hy weet watter besluit word geneem.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** So, ek wil sommer ... jy't nou begin, en ek gaan nou verder daarop, maar ek dink dit gaan nou vir ons die [onhoorbaar] gee van die tipe ... want ons gaan nou ook kyk na ander areas ... jy praat van die gesinskonferensies. So, as ek ... ek hoor jou reg, dat dit 'n geleentheid is waar die kind sy voice, sy stem kan laat hoor. Hoeveel tel sy stem in daardie opset? Ek bedoel, dis 'n geleentheid vir die kind om sy stem te laat hoor. Word daar na daai stem geluister? Speel dit op die ou einde 'n rol wanneer daar 'n besluit geneem word?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ja, ek dink so, maar ek dink dit hang ook af van die ouderdom van die kind. As dit nou 'n klein kind is wat vir ons sê hulle wil graag huistoe gaan en hulle wil nie hier bly nie, want dis 'n aaklike plek, en ons volwassenes weet dat die omstandighede is nie geskik nie, dan alhoewel die kind dit gesê het, daai besluit sal dan grootliks deur die grootmense gemaak word, en dis nie noodwendig wat die kind wil hê nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Nog een vragie, dan sal ek laat die ander ook miskien hulle opinie daaroor gee. As jy praat oor ouderdom, uit julle ervaring, is daar so half min of meer 'n ouderdomsfase wat julle voel, maar hier begin kinders die nodige insigte toon en kan hulle deel raak van daai proses?

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Ons het dit nog nooit bespreek of ons 'n spesifieke ouderdom het nie, en ons probeer dit maar van kind tot kind emuliseer. Iets sê vir my mens moet ... mens moet seker altyd na die kinders luister ... en ek weet nie of tien 'n magic syfer is nie, maar dat jy miskien na ouderdom tien, vanaf ouderdom tien meer gewig aan die kind se siening sal gee as wat jy dit voor die tyd sou gee. Ek weet nie hoekom ek dink aan tien nie, maar is vir my wanneer hulle begin meer ... as ek ook vat hoe ons op die oomblik ingerig is in terme van ons eenhede, is tot en met ouderdom tien is ons kinders in kleiner eenhede, die kleiner kindereenhede. En vanaf ongeveer tien, elf skuif hulle nou oor na groter eenhede toe waar hulle insette in terme van die dagprogram selfs in die kindershuis meer toepaslik raak. Waar by die kleiner eenhede gaan dit meer oor wat ons as volwassenes weet wat belangrik is

vir 'n kind van daai ouderdomsontwikkeling, wats goed hy moet doen ... so dis die goed wat hy maar moet doen.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Miskien die ander van julle se opinie ook?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**I very much agree ... I also immediately first thought you know, that the, with the smaller group, you know, the children need the guidance more, they need the structured routine which adults provide, but I do think, and I, even at that age their voice still need to be heard, whether in terms of a person is going to ... I agree with Mr Steyn that in terms of the weight that it's going to carry in terms of the older child still has a little bit more insight in terms of the bigger picture, whereas I think the little ones are still very much focused on the here and now, and what I want and need, you know, that sort of drive. So, as long as they still feel heard and their voice still plays a role, I do think in terms of the weight in terms of decisions around their future, I agree with Mr Steyn in terms of that the older ones play a more, a stronger role in that way. But I do believe that every child's voice should be heard.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:**Also, what comes to mind, especially if you think about the older children, is what is deemed to be important. Is it regarding schooling, what school the child will attend if it comes to that age where the child has to move from primary school to ... what now ... and what input the child will have there, what say the child will have. I think that's important, that you do hear the child, when it comes to that stage. I can't think what other ... maybe, I mean, if a child wants to stay here or not, if you ask any of them at any given age, 99% of them are gonna say, no, I don't want to stay here. They won't stay at home, but that's a home they've got in their mind ...Maar dis belangrik ... skool, toekoms, beplanning. Ek weet nie wat anders sal ons klas as important nie, of wat vir die kind dalk belangrik is. Ons dink dis belangrik vir hom, maar die kind dink iets anders is belangrik.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ek sal graag die ander se opinie wil hoor. So dit klink vir my ... hier kom vir my iets belangriks uit, want wat sien ons ... en ek dink ons gaan nou-nou terugkom na wat is die areas ... jy't nou genoem die gesinskonferensies is een manier om ... en ek dink ons gaan moet terugkom daarna toe ... ek wil hom net so eenkant sit. Ek dink hier's iets belangrik genoeg rondom van watses besluite praat ons dan. Miskien moet ons daaroor gou bietjie gesels. As ons dan sê ons wil kinders betrek ... hierso staan nou "important decisions", maar wat is "important decisions"? Kan ek miskien hoor hoe julle

daaroor dink? Ek dink dit wat nou gesê is wat is belangrik vir my as 'n professionele persoon, maar wat is dalk belangrik vir die kind. Miskien julle gevoel daar rondom?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Kyk, al het ons nou ... en gesinskonferensie nou eers eenkant gesit, die kinders, baie van hulle weet as daar 'n gesinskonferensie ... as 'n kind uitgaan, was daar reeds 'n gesinskonferensie. So hulle konnoteer baie keer die gesinskonferensie met 'n besluit wat gemaak word om te kyk of die kind kan uitgaan. So, van hulle sal kom vra, kan ons 'n gesinskonferensie hê, of hulle word voorberei op 'n gesinskonferensie en hulle weet hulle kan vrae vra. So, baie van hulle vra kan ons meer gereeld huistoe gaan? Of, ons wil elke naweek huistoe gaan ... en die inligting word dan daar vir hulle ook deurgegee van die ouers se kant..van die eksterne maatskaplike werker. Ek stel gewoonlik 'n notule op vir die gesinskonferensie, en my laaste punt is toekomsbeplanning, dat hierdie kind kan weet wat ... waarnatoe gaan ons vorentoe, wat is die verandering wat daar gemaak word. Jy kan nou meer gereeld huis toe gaan of wat ookal ... dat die ouer dit ook vir die kind kan sê.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** So, as ek reg hoor, is die gesinskonferensie nie net die plek waar hierdie groot besluit geneem word nie, maar dis eintlik 'n geleentheid waar die kind op 'n ander manier sy stem kan laat hoor oor meer alledaagse besluite ook. Verstaan ek reg?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ja ... dat hy 'n vraag kan vra. Hulle nooi die kinders ook. Die kind kan daar sit en sê maar ek wil vra kan ons nie dit doen nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok. [onhoorbaar] ... Kan ek gou-gou weer terugkom en vra miskien dan oor die besluite? Watse besluite ... wat is die besluite wat oor kinders geneem word en waarby hulle betrek, of nie betrek word nie, maar dat ons miskien vir mekaar sê, waaroor praat ons hier? Daar is iets belangriks soos ... die besluit om teruggeplaas te word in die gesin, of besluite soos wat nou genoem is oor om meer gereeld huistoe te gaan. Maar watter ander besluite is tersprake?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ek vra gewoonlik vir my kinders oor terapie.Voor ek hulle verwys dan, jy weet, ek sal vir hulle vra of hulle wil ... en dan op so 'n manier ... ja, lewer hulle hulle insette.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** So, jy voel die keuse om terapie te ontvang is iets waaroor hulle 'n sê het in die besluit?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ja.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok. Van julle ander ...

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Ook ten opsigte van nuwe skole. So, die laerskoolkinders wat oorgaan na die hoërskool. Al het ons die vorms van die volgende skool, laat kom ek hulle in en sê, hierso is die vorms, jy kan dit deurlees en kyk of jy daarvan hou, anders moet ons vir jou ... die enigste ander opsie is dalk nou 'n ander skool, maar hierdie is die ... jy moet dit deurlees, gaan dit deur en dan gaan dink jy daaroor en dan kom jy terug en sê vir my ons kan maar aangaan met die voltooiing van die vorm.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Goed. Is dit in julle geval, ek dink ek, as julle nou iets noem, sal ek graag net 'n aanduiding ook wil kry ... ek bedoel, is dit vir julle almal belangrik om byvoorbeeld oor terapie [onhoorbaar]...ek dink, om 'n gevoel te kry oor die algemeen.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Within my role [inaudible] I also let the children ... I mean, once they've been referred to therapy and they do come, then they also have a say in terms of whether they want to continue coming. They're not sort of forced into therapy and once you're in you have to stay there. We sort of really do negotiate around that with the child. Another thing that's sort of ... on a sort of another level ... not as intensive I suppose as reunification and therapy but the child also, when they come to the ART as part of the school leavers programme, we work with them in terms of choices around and their participation in terms of their future, in terms of do they want to go and study, do they want to go and work, where do they want to go and live, with who do they want to go and live with once they leave the children's home. So, in that we also draw up, what we call an exit plan, which I suppose ... which joins in with the individual development plan which we haven't yet spoken about ... which I'm sure will come up, which then also gets discussed at the family conferences, and part of that exit plan, the child very much leads the process in terms of what's going to happen when he/she leaves the children's home.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** But something ... dat ek eerder Afrikaans praat om my reg uit te druk ... waar ek voel ons nog lack, of nog nie ... of ... die ideaal wat ek in my kop het en die model wat ek in my kop het is, en ek dink ons, op die oomblik begin ons goeie vordering daarmee te maak om vandat 'n kind inkom ... en vir my gaan dit daaroor, as ons sê 'n kind is deel van besluitneming, om deel te wees van besluitneming, is nie te sê die kind moet kies nie. Ek dink daar's vir my 'n belangrike verskil, en ek dink ons val baie male in daai gat waar 'n kind vir ons sê, nee, ek stel glad nie belang nie, nee wat, ek gaan dit nie doen nie. Dan laat jy die kind kies, en wat moet gebeur, vanaf dag een wat die kind inkom, en dis waar jou

professionele span baie belangrik is, waar jou maatskaplike werker in daai opsig die leidende rol speel, die aanvanklike opname van die kind en die assessering van die kind en die behoeftebepaling, maar ook laat jou kinderversorger en jou ander personeel deel daarvan wees, en die kind moet terugvoer kry oor, dis die behoeftes wat by jou geïdentifiseer is, en dis hoekom ons dit raaksien. Op so 'n manier, ek meen, as mens dit rêrig professioneel wil doen, dan behoort die kind te sê, ja, ek verstaan hoekom oom of tannie dit sê, en dit dan te koppel en te sê, maar ons kan vir jou help en ons wil graag vir jou help en dit en dit en dit is beskikbaar, en dan die kind begelei om daarby te kom. Met ander woorde, nie vir 'n kind te sê, jy weet, daar is perdry, wil jy gaan, wil jy nie gaan nie? So, ons moet versigtig wees daarvoor. So die kind moet op 'n professionele manier ingebind word in die besluitneming. En ja, soos die kind groter word, ek dink as ons beweeg na kinders wat skool verlaat of wat ookal, dan gaan mens kom by besluit van, ons voel werklik jy't die potensiaal om te gaan studeer, jy's nou amper agtien of jy is agtien, jy sal die besluit moet neem, wil jy studeer of wil jy gaan werk; dan raak dit sy besluit ... uit en uit ... dan moet hy keuses uitoefen. Maar ek dink voor dit gaan dit oor om die kind in te bind in 'n gesamentlike besluit wat namens die kind geneem word in die beste belang van die kind, en ons moet vir die kind verduidelik ... en op so 'n manier ... ek sal nie sê dat hy nie 'n keuse het nie, maar as die kind dan nou nee sou sê vir iets wat ons werklik besef die kind nodig het, dan moet ons weer teruggaan na die kind toe en [onhoorbaar] laat hy verstaan waaroor dit gaan. Jy kry byvoorbeeld kinders wat ... ek meen, ons kry kinders wat baie potensiaal het, byvoorbeeld wat skolasties betref, maar wat so bang is vir failure dat hulle vir jou sal sê ek wil nie na daardie hoërskool toe gaan nie, ek wil na die skool toe gaan, ek wil Morningstar ... nie Morningstar nie ...[onhoorbaar], want hulle is bang vir failure, want hulle weet die druk is hoër hierso. Nou's die vraag wat jy nou vir die kind sê ... om 'n kind se naam te noem ... Veronique byvoorbeeld, dit was haar praat gewees toe sy in die laerskool was, en sy was bang vir daai druk, maar dan moet jy 'n kind begelei. Jy kan nie sê, ok ja, dis reg, jy gaan [onhoorbaar] toe nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** So, as ek reg hoor, is dit iets baie meer as 'n keuse. Dis nie 'n ja of 'n nee spesifiek nie. Jou woord wat jy gebruik is inbind in die hele proses. So dis om 'n pad met 'n kind te stap, en hom involve in hierdie hele proses. Dis nie net om te sê, hoor hier, kies gou-gou- dit of dit, kies gou en maak 'n keuse ... maar dat dit baie meer is eintlik dan net as bloot 'n ... ok. Iemand wat daarby iets wil voeg?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** I do think that something that we also still need to work ... I do think there's a big improvement ... but I think what we still need to work on is to really

look at the individual child's needs. I think a lot of the times there are certain ... and I must be careful how I word it ... there are, for a reason, there are certain rules and regulations and policies and procedures, and they are there to guide and support the whole process, but a lot of the times we do ... I don't think we always, and we should be taking every individual child's needs ... what are the individual child's needs for his or her best interest. A lot of the times we can, and sometimes do use a blanket rule, no, you can't because the rules said ... etc ... , you can't, because this is how its done, etc. And I do think, I mean, obviously those rules are very important and it's there, but it is there to guide us and that if its in a child's best interest to maybe not do it in that way, then with the agreement of the multi-professional team and with the management and with all the necessary agreement that need to take place, obviously that's how it should be done, but I don't think we always do.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Do you think by doing this can lead to more participation then from the children with regards to decision-making?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Because I do think sometimes that children feel, you know, what does it help I say it, because if I do say it, they are just gonna tell me you can't because, you can't because ... So, I think, if we allow for that little bit of flexibility in terms of how we work with children, then we will be able to I think improve the child's participation in decisions.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:**I think what I hear from you, and I think that was said earlier on as well, was something about individual children ... to be able to look at this specific child sitting in front of me and the needs of this child, and not necessarily as part of a bigger group, and there's one set of rules ... how do you feel about that? If we [onhoorbaar] to decision-making or participation in decision-making for the child. Any comments on that? Do you agree?

Hmm ... hmm

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** It was mentioned twice ... Ok. Can I maybe ask now, just to split a bit and to tell each other whatwe've mentioned some of the areas ... where you feel that children are part of decision-making. So, can we focus on that just maybe and see possibly if there's other areas as well, and then move over. Also mention some of the areas where you feel there's a lack and where there can be improvement, and then focus on that. So

I first want to ask you, you've mentioned a few. That the family conferences, referring children for therapy ...

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** The multi-disciplinary teams ...

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok, ja ...

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Individual development plans ...

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Yes. What other areas, specifically here at the children's home? Do you feel that children are allowed really to participate in decision-making?

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** If they are allowed to?

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Yes. Allowed ... or whether they are part of decision-making.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** The forum that we have for ... but that is now not as individuals necessarily, but we have a forum for our senior leaders, where a sort of representative forum from each house, or more or less each house there is individual child on this forum where they get the opportunity to discuss basically anything that goes on there. Anything that don't ... [onhoorbaar] and they get the opportunity to make suggestions, they get the opportunity to complain and moan about stuff. It's basically a forum where, ja, its their forum. And I think that is an important tool that we will ... and that's what we're working towards to develop it further, to have it as a platform for the children, apart from individual, and the individual child can speak to anyone, a social worker, a childcare worker. They even come and speak to me.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Does this forum then [onhoorbaar] with management somewhere else, where they can report ... [onhoorbaar]?

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Ja. So that is one of the things. The idea is also, and we're working on this, on this idea for the past year, where in terms of the new Children's Act, it is stated that the management board should have ... there should be a representative of the residence. So what we've been looking at is to say, to at least for now have a report from this [onhoorbaar] forum, but what we're also looking towards is a quarterly board meeting, maybe just for a short while have one of the representatives of the senior leaders present there. For practical reasons its not ... we can't have them there for a whole meeting ... stuff

that are discussed that are not necessarily that a child should be part of. But just for them to have an input there as well.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** I want to ask a [onhoorbaar] question now, but for them to have the input, give input, do you think that management are ready then to receive the input from the children and then to be influenced by that in making decisions about the children?

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:**Ja, very much so. What happened last year is, as manager, I attended most of their meetings and then I decided, sort of take a step back, and one of the, like Faldien was the childcare coordinator, and he's now attending it. And this gives the children, where they, ja, at that stage they could communicate directly with me, but it also sort of, I think it could hamper free communication, where they can now rather discuss it with him, and then Faldien give feedback to me. So, ja ... we are ... and there are stuff that have been implemented on their request.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Soos die selfone. Die gebruik van die selfone, en die hê van die selfone en wanneer hulle dit by hulle kan hê en wanneer ingee, is teruggegee na die senior leiers toe wat dit met die kinders gaan bespreek het en met voorstelle weer teruggekom het. So ... en die dorp toe gaan tye ...

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:**Ja, they came with a very important sort of request or suggestion. That's what I ... what we had, or still have at the moment is to say Saturday mornings, in terms of the day programme, Saturday mornings first thing is the house gets cleaned and tidied. And after that they are allowed to go to town, the high school children unaccompanied, and the primary school children with a childcare worker. That was ... I can't remember the specific times ... but say for instance that was from 10 to 12. And then they came with the request to say, but we clean the house but then we sit in the houses from 9 until 10. Can't we go at half past nine, and come back half past twelve? I said, ok, let's do it. So, it came from the, it was implemented, and it's still like that. That was ... and it is an important decision ... it involves them.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** What other areas of their lives do you feel that they do get the opportunity to be part of decision-making? You've mentioned a few now ... any others?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Ek dink die ander een is ook op 'n mediese vlak, want as 'n kind twaalf is, dan kan sy haar toestemming gee of sy op die gesinsbeplanning wil gaan of nie, en gewoonlik het ons as maatskaplike werkers en die verpleegkundige 'n gesprek met

hulle, so hulle kan besluit wil hulle op die inspuiting wees of nie. Hulle gee dit gewoonlik skriftelik om te sê hulle wil nie dit neem nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ek wil graag hierdie link maak ... between what she just said and also about children's rights, because I think that we're also referring to ... I mean, according to the Children's Act they've got certain rights, and that also enable them to make certain decisions, and this is an example of that. Other areas where they do have that opportunity to be part of decision-making?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** I'm just thinking now of the evaluations that the children also even do in terms of their meals. You know, whether they are happy with their meals ... and I think that also ... they do the questionnaires [onhoorbaar]... and meals get adjusted according to, in combination with the [onhoorbaar] the medical health view ... again that involvement in terms of that they do have a say in ... if they enjoy the meals, do they feel its good enough ...

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** It's small things and even like choice of clothing ... it's not a case of, ok, you can [onhoorbaar] a blue shirt and a blue shirt, in terms of, and that's also in terms of age. The younger kids, like, think what you would have done with your kids if you decide. Up until a certain stage you get the [onhoorbaar]. Do you like this, you don't like this ... and the same with them. The childcare workers take them to the clothing ... where everything is and they do get the, the bigger children, they choose themselves. They decide what they want. They say, I want this, and I want this. So ja, that's also ... that's their choice.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** En weekliks word daar ook huisvergaderings gehou waar die reëls geëvalueer, die program word geëvalueer, die maaltye word geëvalueer en dan word daar voorstelle gemaak. En dan die notule van die huisvergaderings gaan deur na Magdalena toe en sy kyk of daar belangrike inligting is wat ons van kennis moet dra. So, as sy voel daar is iets wat onder my aandag moet kom, wat genoem was by die huisvergadering deur 'n kind, dan kom dit na my toe en ek volg dit op. So, dit is ook 'n platform vir die kinders om te sê ...

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Is daar nog iets waaroor julle voel hulle deel is van besluite, wat julle spesifiek aan kan dink?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Little things ... for example the matric [onhoorbaar], you know, they get a choice of the dressing, the style and the colour and we are obviously a bit limited in terms of whether there's funding that comes in, but we do, we're very fortunate,

every year we get enough funding that the girls, some of them even go to designer places and the people will design their own dress according to what they want. Those little bits that make them feel ... improve their confidence, and when they do go to the functions, they feel as good as anybody else, that they haven't just been given any dress to wear. So they have a choice in what they want to wear.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** You've touched on something now that I would like to follow-up now. You said it improves their confidence and they've got this decision. What do you think is the benefit there of giving children the opportunity to be part of all these decisions that you've mentioned? According to us, maybe some of them are not that important, and others very important. Like what are the benefits for the children in doing that?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**I think when they come here, I think they feel ... so many feel that they've never had a choice in coming here and that they feel sort of disempowered. So giving them little choices, even as small as what they are or because of what they are, it does help them to gain that sense of I am important, I do have a voice. And it is about their confidence, their self-esteem, the feeling that they aren't just a child that doesn't get heard. I think in some small ways and in some very big ways it plays a definite role in their emotional well-being as well.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Anything else?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ek dink nie dit kom hier in nie, maar dit gaan ook dat 'n mens kinders, kinders wat kan gaan kamp, wat wil graag gaan kamp of netbal speel of sport doen, as 'n mens vir hulle, ons vir hulle die kans of die geleentheid gee om dit te doen, ons kan net sowel gesê het nee. Ek dink dit help ook baie vir hulle om daai selfvertroue van hulle te boost. Dit kom nie eintlik by keuses nie, maar dit help vir hulle om sterker te raak.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok. You've mentioned one or two areas where you feel you lack and then where we can possibly improve by involving children. So maybe we can focus on that now. Which areas do you think, not just the areas, but also how we can really involve children in decision-making?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** I think a personal challenge to me because its something I feel very passionately about, in terms of children participation in reunification in terms of what do we as professionals believe is in a child's best interest to rather stay in a children's home or to be placed out at home. So with that I feel we still can play a much better and

bigger role in terms of hearing the voice of the child, in terms of ... we have our own pre-subjectives opinions as to what we think the child can manage when we place the child out, and the decision is whether we don't place the child out, in terms of a holiday, in terms of a weekend, in terms of permanent [onhoorbaar] and I don't think that the child's voice is always heard loud enough. I do think it's improving, I do think there are situations where it is, but I do think there are still areas where we aren't considering it enough.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** And what would you suggest? How should you improve on it? What can be done?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** On a very practical note, but this is where the logistical issues that come up and it opens up a whole can of worms, in terms of practically taking the child there and getting more of the external ... which in itself is a challenge, getting the external social worker more involved in terms of ... let's say for example a sixteen year old who can be taught the skills as to how to cope in very very difficult situations. I don't think you expect the same of a six year old, but we've got sixteen year olds in the children's home who could cope. Our role then needs to be to really inputting the skills into them as to how do you cope with situations like that rather than keeping them away from the situation, let them gobut then equip them with how to cope with what they're having to deal with. I think in that we need to be playing a more stronger role in.

[INAUDIBLE]

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:**Jy't ook 'n baie goeie ... baie goeie voorbeeld wat ek kan aan dink waar jy 'n kind inbind in besluitnemings wat jy gedoen het met Janice, waar 'n situasie is waar ons baie maal, en ons is maar almal skuldig daaraan, dat ons so beskermend teenoor die kinders is en wil ... ek raak byvoorbeeld ... veral teenoor die meisiekinders, voel ek baie beskermend en as dinge net vir my klink dinge is nie reg daarbuite nie dan wil ek nie hê die kind moet soontoe gaan nie. En dan sê ons vir die kind, nee, jy kan nie gaan nie, dis onveilig of wat ookal. En wat Lisa byvoorbeeld gedoen het is om vir haar ... die kind te vat en te gaan wys, en nie vir haar te gesê het, kies nie, maar deurdad sy vir haar gaan wys het hoe dit daar lyk, kon die kind sê, maar ek wil nie gaan nie. Dan op daai manier bind jy die kind ook in met die besluitneming.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**'n Meer ingeligte besluit ...

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Ingeligte ... byvoorbeeld 'n geval met nog 'n dogter ... een van Jenna se kinders wat ... ek het ook net gevoel maar die kind was omtrent nog nooit uit die kinderhuis nie. En toe kom daar 'n ding van, ja, sy kan daar in die Paarl, daar by Chicago, by daai woonstelle na mense toe gaan. Ek het net gesê, oor my dooie liggaam. Maar ek het dit nooit vir die kind verduidelik nie. En toe eendag het ek vir haar ... sy't by my eintlik kom kla oor Tannie Jenna wat haar nie wil laat uitgaan nie. En toe het ek vir haar gesê, nee, ek wil met jou eerlik wees, dis eintlik ek, en toe het ek vir haar verduidelik hoekom. En toe het die kind gesê, maar sy verstaan nou hoekom ek so sê, maar sy wil ook hê ek moet dit en dit en dit in ag neem ... en ek dink die volgende vakansie is sy toe uit né?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ja ...

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:**So, sy kon my hoor en ek kon haar hoor en so, en ek dink dit, ons het nou daai ... om daai draai gegaan. Maar dit gaan oor deelname en sulke besluite. Nie om die keuse te maak nie, maar om te kan deelneem aan die besluite ... en selfs al besluit jy op die ou einde teen wat die kind wil hê, dat die kind nie kan sê, maar niemand het geluister na my nie. Ek dink dit is wat ons kinders nogal sê ... julle luister nie na ons nie. Hoekom hulle so voel is omdat ons nie vir hulle verduidelik hoekom ons goed doen nie. Maar as jy hulle deel maak daarvan ... enige besluit ... Waar die meeste [onhoorbaar] uitkom gaan maar oor, uitgaan naweke, na wie toe gaan ek, hoekom moet ek nog hier wees, sulke goed ... daai grootmens besluite wat ons van praat, wat jy vir hulle mooi kan verduidelik ...

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ek dink wat my weer eens voorkom, wat ek voorheen ook genoem het, is dat dit nie noodwendig besluitneming, dit gaan nie noodwendig oor 'n keuse wat gemaak word nie, maar oorum kinders deel te maak van 'n proses en te betrek. Ek dink dit kom vir my nogal duidelik na vore. Anything else? Specifically where you feel that children are not being part of the important decisions that are made about them?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:**Ek ... dis ook nou my persoonlike opinie ... dat ek voel dat kinders moet bysit by multi's, want dit is ook 'n platform waar daar volwassenes sit om 'n tafel, wat elkeen 'n spesifieke rol in die kind se ontwikkeling hier by die kinderhuis speel, onder andere, die skoolkoördineerder, die mediese gedeelte, die maatskaplike werker, die kinderversorger. En dan word hierdie kind bespreek, maar die kind is nie by nie. So baie opinies word gevorm, baie insette word gegee en die kind weet nie wat gepraat word om daai tafel nie. En ek dink nie die maatskaplike werker gaan altyd terug na die kind toe om te sê, hoor hier, dit is wat bespreek is oor jou en dit is hoe die nurse oor jou voel, dit is hoe jou

tannie oor jou voel, dit is wat ek raaksien. Daai terugvoering gaan nie na die kind toe nie, so die kind weet nie wat in 'n multi bespreek word nie. En dan weer eens kan die kind nie verstaan hoekom daar daai sekere besluite gemaak word nie, want daai inligting wat die volwassenes na daai besluit toe gebring het, het die kind nie gehoor nie, en weet die kind dan nie hoekom nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** So ek hoor dieselfde ... om die kind te betrek en deel te maak van 'n proses van besluitneming. Ok. Enige ander areas wat julle voel dat kinders meer betrek kan word by besluitneming? Iets wat jy nou genoem het, Katherine, is oor die opinies. Jy't nou spesifiek genoem van daar word opinies oor kinders gevorm, en ek dink dis een van die goed wat mens ook partykeer wonder, is hoe hierdie opinies wat gevorm word, en jy't dit eintlik dink ek nou in 'n voorbeeld nou genoem ook, opinies wat gevorm word en dan bepaal watter besluite geneem word oor kinders. So, 'n opinie word gevorm oor 'n kind, en dit bepaal op die einde watter besluit vir 'n kind geneem word. Dit bevestig eintlik maar net dit is wat jy nou ook gesê het. Ok. As ons miskien 'n bietjie ... en as julle anders dink is julle welkom om dit te noem ook ... if you think about children's rights, we mentioned earlier about the children's right to [onhoorbaar]... What other links do you see between children's rights and the importance of decision-making or participating in that? Or how do you understand children's rights to be part of decision-making? What's the link?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** I think, for us, it really guides the way we work. I mean, the Children's Act is the central core to the way we work and why you're here, and what we are doing, and I think the way we sort of on a very practical note implement it. For example, the children's home units, they all have, they used to, I don't know if they still do ... have copies of the children's rights on the doors and the walls, so each child has the opportunity to read and to know what it is and, I know Jessica in the little one's unit, I mean although the children can't read, they are taught in different ways that they can understand what are their rights, and which is very good though, and we sometimes hear it in a very cheeky way, but the children know their rights and they will say to us, you know, this won't happen because we have a right, and we hear ... that it's good to hear it. That is for me confirmation that they do know what their rights are and that we have a responsibility towards them in terms of teaching it to them, as they have the responsibility to know what their rights are and then within that they know that with the rights come the responsibility as well. So it's a dual process, for us and for them. But I think its central to our way of working, it guides the way we work, its implemented in our umbrella organisation, in their policies how we work in

terms of on a day to day work. Your question is how does the two link. I think it's very sort of core and central to our function, how we do it.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Hulle weet wat hulle regte is. Hulle sal kom en sê, ek het die reg om ...[onhoorbaar]

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Is julle van mening dat hulle ook bewus is daarvan dat om te kan deelneem en om deel te wees van besluite en om my stem te laat hoor, dat dit ook deel is van hulle regte?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Ek dink nie hulle almal weet dit nie. Nie almal nie. Want eintlik wat dit vir jou sê is dat daar mag geen besluit geneem word sonder 'n deelname nie. Dis eintlik wat die wet vir ons sê. En ek dink nie die kinders weet dit, van die kinders weet dit nie.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:**Dit vat my terug na, soos ek sê ons wil, ons nou op daai pad is van dag een af die kind deel te maak van alle besluite ... hetsy in individuele gesprekke, hetsy in die [onhoorbaar], hetsy gesinskonferensies, die kind moet deel wees daarvan. Dis nie te sê die kind moet noodwendig hou van al die besluite wat geneem word nie ... dit gaan glad nie daaroor nie. Dit gaan nie hieroor net om tevredenheid nie, dit gaan oor die verstaan en om deel te wees en ingelig te wees oor hoekom ons besluite neem. Dis belangrik wat ... iets wat ek ook, ek voel baie sterk daaroor, is ons as grootmense en as professionele mense, as 'n kind van sestien byvoorbeeld vir ons sê, ek weier om medikasie te gebruik wat deur 'n psigiater voorgeskryf is, en dat ons dan sê, goed, die kind weier ... dit is vir my hartseer as ons by daai punt kom want dis eintlik moet ons die kind kan oortuig deur middel van professionele gesprekke dat dit in sy beter belang is. Dis hoekom ek, so twee jaar terug het ek ... ek sien die ding is nou weer algemeen, het ek gesê ons gebruik nie die term 'n kind weier' nie, ons gebruik die term 'n kind kon nie oortuig word' ... of, ons sê nie 'n kind weier om skool toe te gaan nie, ons sê die kind kon nie oortuig word om skool toe te gaan nie. Dit bring vir my 'n nuwe dimensie van iemand wat in gesprek moet tree met 'n kind om hom te oortuig en hom deel te maak van daai besluit. En nou los jy hom, hy't geweier, so dis sy besluit. Dit is nie vir my ... besluitneming gaan nie net oor daai keuse, dit gaan oor die ingeligte keuse.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** And with that comes ... to a very central thing around how we build relationships with our children, because a right and a responsibility can sound very clinical and very regulatory and rules and stuff, but none of that can actually work properly if

we don't have relationships with our children, and if we don't have a relationship with a child, then we're not going to be able to ... oortuig die kind om skool toe te gaan nie. They'll just blatantly say no. So, I think, when we hear things like that, it should be an indication to us as to what kind of relationship do we have with our child. So I think that's important that we take that into consideration when we look at [onhoorbaar].

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** You've mentioned now about the relationship. For me it's then almost something that you suggest to do in order to encourage participation.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Yes ... central ...

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ok. The other things that you feel that in your section here at the children's home, you can do in order to involve children more, to encourage them ...?

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Ek dink iets wat ons ... mens aanvaar so maklik dat kinders weet, maar ons behoort baie meer dinamies vir kinders bewus te maak van die verskillende platforms en die kanale en meganismes wat beskikbaar is vir 'n individuele kind om byvoorbeeld iets te sê oor as hy ontevrede is met die kos, of hy's ontevrede oor 'n manier wat hy hanteer word, of hy dink hy wil eerder iets so doen ... dat ons baie meer vir die kinders deurgee wat die regte kanale is. Ek moet dit nie net eenkeer sê as hy inkom nie, ek wil vir hom die healtyd sê, dit is wat jy kan doen, dat kinders weet dit is wat hulle kan doen. Want baie maal is dit 'n geval van 'n kind kon dalk miskien weens onverwerkte trauma uit sy verlede nie kan bind met 'n kinderversorger nie en nie die kinderversorger kan vertrou nie ... dis nie die kinderversorger se skuld nie ... en voel ek gaan maar niks sê vir die tannie nie, dat daai kind weet met wie anders kan ek praat. Sulke goed ... en dat mens dit die healtyd nurture. Jy hoef nie vir die kind te sê maar, jy weet as jy 'n probleem het moet jy praat met jou kinderversorger, want dit skep nie die regte omgewing nie. Jy moet eerder vir hom sê, jy weet wat jou opsies is. Ja, dis die beste dat jy eerder met jou tannie praat, maar as daar nou rêrig 'n probleem is dan kan jy dit en dit doen. En ek dink nie ons doen dit genoeg nie. Miskien is ons bang as ons dit gaan aanmekaar aanmoedig, dan gaan dit nou uitpop, maar ek glo nie so nie. Ons moet net die kanale ... vir groter kinders sê, gesels met jou senior leier. As jy nie met jou senior leier kan praat nie, praat met jou maatskaplike werker, gaan sien die hoof, maak 'n afspraak ... en daar kom kinders by my, maar ek dink nie almal ...

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Wat dit kan doen nie ...

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Ja.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** And something [onhoorbaar] we're busy working on now is that there's a very known step by step complaints procedure for the children. I mean, I think we all, we have it, but it's on an informal way and I don't think all the children know how exactly to go about that. I think that links in very strongly with that, and know that's something we're busy working on at the moment, is to have a very set formal procedure which all the children should hopefully eventually know out of their heads what to do if they're not happy with ...

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Enige ander voorstelle? Om deelname te bevorder nog?

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** I'm just thinking about it now. We've got a senior leaders forum, but we don't have other forums where the children can get together. I suppose the house meetings is a forum. I don't know ... I'm just thinking of other ideas ...

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Die koffiekroeg is daar waar die kinders van dertien af en ouer, maar dit geen meer oor [onhoorbaar] en waar hulle saam bymekaar kom vir speletjiesande. Dan weet ek is daar partykeer het hulle 'n tipe van aksiekomitee vir spesifieke goed wat moet plaasvind waar hulle besluite neem ... ook maar met die nodige leiding en hoe hulle die program wil hê en daai goed, so klein huishoudelike goed.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Ja, maar ek dink die kinders moet maar net ingelig word dat hulle deelname is 'n reg, en ek dink op so 'n manier sal hulle definitief dan 'n vlak vind of 'n forum vind, of dit nou by die maatskaplike werker is, of by Craig, of waar ookal, sal hulle gaan en hulle sal praat en hulle sal sê wat hulle wil, maar hulle moet weet dat hulle deelname is belangrik vir ons, en dat eintlik ons hulle nie gaan wegwys of weier as hulle iets wil sê nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Dan moet julle dit eintlik vir hulle noem ... hulle is baie bewus van hulle regte, maar nie noodwendig dat om deel te neem ook eintlik een van my regte is nie.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Ek dink die kinders doen dit. Ons het voor verlede week [onhoorbaar] waar 'n seun van veertien daar by die kantoor opgedaag het en gesê het hy wil my sien, en dis een van Magdalena se kinders, en toe sê ek, het jy al met die tannie gepraat. Toe sê hy nee, en hy sê, kom ons gaan kantoor toe, en hy het sy saak vir my gestel. Dit was nie so 'n ernstige ding nie, maar hy kon sy saak stel. Dit het gegaan oor wat hy gevoel het ongelyke behandeling tussen seuns en dogters is en hy het sy punt gemaak. So ek dink, ja daar is ... dit moet net aangemoedig word en genurture word.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** [onhoorbaar] was ook daar. Toe het meneer gesê, maar jy moet saam met jou tannie gaan, en toe't hy gesê nee ... hy wil met meneer praat.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** Dit gaan vir my weer eens oor reg van die begin af, en ek dink dit koppel vir my nou op die oomblik ook sterk aan ...[onhoorbaar] alles is op die stadium by die kinderhuis ge-gear towards die [onhoorbaar]... waar jy ook vir 'n kind kan sê, ouderdomtoepaslik kan sê, jy's nou by 'n terapeutiese versorgsentrum en dis hoekom jy hier is, en dit is wat die idee is met jou hierso. Die kind moet reg van die begin af weet. Ons het ... miskien dwaal ek af ... ons het twee jaar terug gehad 'n seun wat nou 'n skoolverlater is, waar ons by 'n gesinskonferensie vir hom gevra het ... ek het op daai stadium die punt gemaak om vir kinders te vra by 'n multi-professionele spanvergadering ... vir hom te sê ... hy was toe al 'n seun van sestien, vyftien ... weet jy hoekom jy hier is? En hy't begin huil en gesê ja, hy weet, dis omdat hy stout was. En dit was glad nie die geval nie. Hy was hierso omdat hulle, daar was, hulle kon hom nie versorg nie. En so, baie van die kinders dink dis hulle skuld dat hulle hier is. So ... Dit gaan deel van besluitneming ... jy moet vir hom sê hoekom hy hier is, hoe sien ons die pad, ons weet nie wat kom op die pad nie, maar dis die pad wat ons nou sien vir jou, dis die pad wat ons wil loop, en assessering behoorlik doen en identifiseer sy behoeftes. Ons het gehad ook ... ek gaan nou twee jaar terug ... situasie waar ons nou [onhoorbaar] mense inskakel by groepe of terapie vir sê nou maar vir aggressie of wat ookal ... ok, hierdie seun, ja hy moet gaan. Dan het ons hom nie eers ingeroep om vir hom te sê, hoor hier, dis nou die rede nie, want dan word daar vir ons gesê, ek het nie terapie nodig nie, want by sy gesinskonferensie of by die multi ... die laaste een, was daar nie gesê hy't terapie nodig nie. Dit is vir my ... as ons daai aggressiewe gedrag van hom geïdentifiseer het, en vir hom gesê het, hoor hier ou maat, ons moet 'n bietjie werk hieraan, dan kan hy mos nou nie stry nie want jy kan vir hom uitwys waar was hy aggressief. En as daar dan so 'n geleentheid opkom, en sê, ok hierso is nou die kans ... as hy dan weier, dan moet jy maar net met hom mooi praat want dan het hy die agtergrond, maar ... Dit gaan vir my oor die proses en van reg van die begin af van deelname in basies alles.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Inligting ... iets wat ek nou gehoor het ... dat kinders ingelig moet wees. Ek dink dit het op verskillende maniere dalk in hierdie gesprek ook na vore gekom waar die kinders ingelig moet wees, anders gaan hulle ook nie kan deelneem aan 'n besluit nie. Ok.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** Ekskuustog ... die inligting moet nie net hier begin gegee word nie, dit moet al 'n proses wees wat begin is voordat die kind in die kindershuis opgeneem word. Ek dink dit is deel van, dat 'n kind hiernatoe kom en as hy hier is en jy begin gesels, begin praat met die kind, begin werk met die kind dan kom dit dalk ... want buitekant is hy nie reg ingelig oor hoekom hy in die kindershuis is nie.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Dis 'n belangrike punt, want daarmee word eintlik dan gesê dat dit nie net gaan oor kinders hier by die kindershuis te betrek in besluitneming nie, maar dat daar kan 'n moontlikheid ook wye as dit, by ander organisasies moet daar saamgewerk word, wie dan graag dieselfde wil sien. Anderste dan kom 'n kind nie hier aan en hy was nog nooit voorheen ingelig of deel van 'n proses gewees nie. Dat dit nie dus net hier binne in die kindershuis is wat ons vir die kind hierdie regte gee en die geleentheid om sy stem te laat hoor nie.

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** [onhoorbaar] ... a lot to do with the implementing now in terms of that we have family conferences before [onhoorbaar] so that those reasons for coming here is discussed in front of the child with the family members. That the children know at that point, as you say, that they're coming [onhoorbaar]...

**VROULIKE RESPONDENT:** By die oriënteringsgesprekke ook ... word daar spesifiek vir die maatskaplike werker gevra om te verduidelik aan die kind hoekom word die kind opgeneem, en dis hoekom ons vir die kind laat kom hiernatoe voor hy opgeneem word. Hy gaan kyk waar hy slaap, hy kyk waar sy huisie ... sodat as hy die dag hier kom dan was hy al hier. So, dit is net nog een manier om die kind van die begin af in te lig en te laat deelneem in die proses.

**ONDERHOUDVOERDER:** Ek weet nie of daar enige ander spesifieke algemene opmerkings was ...[onhoorbaar]... Any final word from anybody? For me, I think you've mentioned quite a few things that you've identified as areas where children are involved. You've also mentioned a few ... where you've actually made suggestions and also mentioned how children can be more involved. I think for me, what came out very clearly, is that it's not only about making decisions, about choices, but it's involving children, information that you're giving throughout a whole process. That came out quite clear. And also the link that there's with children's rights, and that children are quite aware of children's rights, maybe not necessarily the right to be part of important decisions but that they are aware, although, they do ... they want to be part of the decisions ... it showed that in the interactions with you.

Anything else that anybody wants to mention or add? If there's anything after the interview that you think of that may be important, I think also you can give that through to Jessica sometime afterwards, if you sit down and think, oh, what about this or that ... Jessica will ... this interview will now be transcribed and she will analyse it. So, I don't want to say she's definitely not going to ask you for more information, because if she looks through her data and see but there's something specifically that's missing, she may ask you just for more information, even on a one on one basis ... thank you very much.

**MANLIKE RESPONDENT:** You can add there, the one area where we still can improve is specifically with our holiday programme, where I don't think there is any ... also isn't input from our children regarding what they want to do during the holidays. That is something that really ... give them choices. [END OF AUDIO]

APPENDIX 7: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT



APPENDIX 8: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT



APPENDIX 9: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT



APPENDIX 10: COLLAGE FROM A CHILD PARTICIPANT



## APPENDIX 11: PUBLICATION GUIDELINES OF THE JOURNAL *MAATSKAPLIKE WERK/SOCIAL WORK*

### **EDITORIAL POLICY/REDAKSIONELE BELEID**

The Journal publishes articles, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All articles should include an abstract in English of not more than 100 words. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice. Articles of less than 2000 words or more than 10000 words are normally not considered for publication. Submit the manuscript as a Microsoft Word document in 12 pt Times New Roman, double line spacing. Use font Arial in charts and diagrams. The manuscript should be sent electronically to [hsu@sun.ac.za](mailto:hsu@sun.ac.za). Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "..."(Berger, 1967:12). More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors. Note the use of capitals and punctuation marks in the following examples. In terms of SANSO-014 our journal is classified as an approved research journal for the purpose of subsidy by the State. The Editorial Board has therefore decided that an amount of R100,00 (hundred Rand) per page is to be paid for published articles by authors who are lecturing or doing research at Universities in the RSA.

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