



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

## **Measuring Children's Experience of Their Right to Participate in School and Community: A Rights-Based Approach**

Emerson, L., & Lloyd, K. (2017). Measuring Children's Experience of Their Right to Participate in School and Community: A Rights-Based Approach. *Children and Society*, 31(2), 120-133. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12190>

**Published in:**  
Children and Society

**Document Version:**  
Peer reviewed version

**Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:**  
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

### **Publisher rights**

© 2016 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children's Bureau

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Emerson, L. and Lloyd, K. (2016), Measuring Children's Experience of Their Right to Participate in School and Community: A Rights-Based Approach. *Children & Society*, which has been published in final form at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/wol1/doi/10.1111/chso.12190/full>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving.

### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### **Take down policy**

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [openaccess@qub.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@qub.ac.uk).

### **Open Access**

This research has been made openly available by Queen's academics and its Open Research team. We would love to hear how access to this research benefits you. – Share your feedback with us: <http://go.qub.ac.uk/oa-feedback>

# Measuring children's experience of their right to participate in school and community: a rights-based approach

Lesley Emerson and Katrina Lloyd

## Abstract

*This paper discusses the development of a children's rights-based measure of participation and the findings from its use in a survey of 10 to 11 year old children (n= 3773). The measure, which was developed in collaboration with a group of children, had a high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .89). Findings suggest that children's positive experience of their participation rights is higher in school than in community, and higher for girls compared to boys. It is argued that involving children in the 'measurement' of their own lives has the potential to generate more authentic data on children's lived experiences.*

## Introduction

The rationales presented for children's participation cut across academic disciplines, drawing on political, legal and social arguments. Children's participation is thus framed variously within concepts of citizenship and governance (Matthews, 2003); child rights (Lundy, 2007); child agency (John, 2003); and theories of recognition (Thomas, 2007). Likewise, there are a range of practical models of participation examining the extent to which children's involvement in decision-making is realised in policy and practice (Herbots and Put, 2015). As such, the field of children's participation is awash with a wide range of perspectives as to what constitutes the rationale for, scope of and effective realisation of children's involvement in decision-making. Notably, reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) punctuates these debates. This is unsurprising given the dominance of the normative standards of the CRC in child-related policy and practice, and, increasingly, in research in childhood studies (Lundy and McEvoy(Emerson), 2012a). In fact, the CRC has become something of a touchstone for child participation (see Lundy, 2007; Lansdown, 2010).

Cognisant that "children's participation should be regarded as a complex notion, not easily encapsulated by a single definition" (Herbots and Put, 2015:156), the focus of this paper is on participation as articulated in the CRC. The paper outlines the development of a children's rights-based measure of participation (the Children's Participation Rights Questionnaire, CPRQ), and the findings from its subsequent use in a large scale survey of children (aged 10 to 11 years old). We begin by acknowledging the limitations of participation as conceptualisation within the CRC, before providing a justification for its adoption in this study – aligned to an identified need for a reliable measure of the extent to which this right is experienced or 'enjoyed'. What constitutes rights-based participation is then discussed before the process through which this construct was used in the development of the CPRQ delineated - a distinctive feature of which was collaboration with a group of children (aged 10 and 11). Findings from the study are then discussed. These focus on both the statistical properties of the measure (its reliability), as well as the substantive findings from the survey. The latter are presented primarily to speak to the validity of the measure but also to illuminate the extent to which children involved in this study were enjoying their right to participate. The paper concludes by arguing that involving children in the 'measurement' of their own lives has

methodological and epistemological benefits: the development of reliable and valid psychometric measures which in turn generate more authentic data on the reality of children's lived experiences.

### **Rationale for the study**

Before outlining why a children's rights-based perspective on participation was adopted in this study, certain caveats are entered in relation to how this perspective sits within the broad field of child participation. First, the construct of child participation in the CRC arguably is limited when compared to other conceptualisations. Alderson and Montgomery (1996), for example, identify four levels of children's involvement in decision-making: to be informed; to express an informed view; to have that view taken into account; to be the main or joint decision maker. They argue that participation as articulated in the CRC amounts to consultation, limiting the child's entitlement to the first three levels. Whilst we see a CRC-compliant approach to participation as collaborative rather than consultative (discussed below), nonetheless we agree that participation as enshrined in the CRC should not be seen as "participation in itself" (Herbots and Put, 2015: 183). Secondly, given the controversial nature of rights in relation to their universalist claims (Donnelly, 2003), child participation also needs to be understood in the cultural milieu within which it is happening. The participation standards of the CRC should therefore not be regarded as constituting effective participation in every context.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the CRC construct of participation has significance: its participation standards constitute legal benchmarks by which to hold states to account in relation to children's involvement in decision-making. As Donnelly (2003:12) states in relation to human rights in general:

Human rights claims express not merely aspirations, suggestions, requests, or laudable ideas, but rights-based demands for change.

Thus the construct of participation within the CRC is one of the "rightful entitlements" (Freeman, 2002:6) of every child, which states are obligated to respect, protect and fulfil (Steiner and Alston, 2000).

Monitoring the extent to which states uphold these entitlements relies on evidence. However often the data collected in relation to children's rights lack sufficient rigour (Lundy and McEvoy(Emerson), 2012a) and, in relation to children's participation rights in particular, there is a general lack of robust measurement of its extent and quality (Lansdown, 2010: 20). Existing robust measures of participation (for example, Kahne and others, 2005; Flanagan and others, 2007) tend to focus on political participation or civic engagement without detailed reference to the CRC – and are thus limited in the extent to which they shed light on children's enjoyment of their participation *rights*. Further, children tend not to be engaged meaningfully in the process of measure development, arguably limiting the extent to which measures are capturing the reality of participation from the perspective of children. One notable exception is Charles' and Haines' (2014) qualitative study which involved collaboration with young people to develop a five point 'hierarchy' of involvement in decision-making. Whilst the processes of development were highly participatory, the hierarchy

however did not draw comprehensively on a rights-based conception of participation rights, and there is no indication of how the tool could be used for robust statistical measurement.

The study presented here sought to address this lacuna – aiming to develop a psychometric measure of children’s participation, which was rights-based in terms of the construct that underpinned it *and* the processes through which it was developed. The next section outlines the construct of participation adopted in the study; the following section addresses the process.

### **Children’s rights-based participation**

The right to participate is not a stand-alone article in the CRC but rather embedded within it (Skelton, 2007). Thus, a ‘rights-based’ approach to children’s participation must first take account of a cluster of rights in the CRC (Hanson and Vandaele, 2003) and its associated jurisprudence (Lundy and McEvoy(Emerson), 2012a). The Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter, the Committee) who monitor compliance with the CRC, has identified these interrelated provisions as Articles 12, 13, 17 and 5 of the CRC (United Nations, UN, 2009), discussed in turn below.

#### *The child’s right to have their views given due weight*

Article 12 states that those acting on behalf of the state should:

... assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UN, 1989).

This, the Committee notes, means that States parties “cannot begin with the assumption that a child is incapable of expressing her or his own views” (UN, 2009:20). Rather they should presume capacity, solicit actively the views of the child on all matters affecting them, and take these views seriously (UN, 2009). This construct of participation goes beyond what Boyden and Ennew (1997:33) refer to as “taking part in, or being present” to “knowing that one’s actions are taken note of and may be acted upon”.

#### *The child’s right to freedom of expression and information*

As the Committee explains, while Article 12 places an obligation on states to facilitate the involvement of children in decision-making about all matters that affect them, Articles 13 and 17 assert that States parties must refrain from interference in the child’s expression of views and in access to information. Thus the right to freedom of expression and information are “crucial prerequisites for the effective exercise of the right to be heard” (UN, 2009:80). Further, the Committee notes the relationship between these rights and the child’s capability in forming a view, stating that:

[It] is not necessary that the child has comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the matter affecting her or him, but that she or he has *sufficient* understanding to be capable of appropriately forming her or his own views on the matter (UN, 2009:21).

In short, participation in decision-making is not possible without freedom of expression and access to information.

### *The child's right to adult guidance*

The Committee draws attention to the relationship between Article 12 and Article 5, recognising that children will on occasion need support in the exercise of their rights (from parents, legal guardians, members of the extended family and community) in accordance with their evolving capacities (UN, 2009: 84). As Lundy and McEvoy(Emerson) (2012b) argue, this positions the adults in children's lives as "enablers", assisting children in both the formation and expression of views. Moreover, since Article 5 stresses that the level of adult support must take account of the capacities of the child, it suggests "a transfer of responsibility for decision-making from responsible adults to children, as the child acquires the competence, and of course willingness, to do so" (Lansdown, 2010:13).

Taken together, this cluster of rights suggests that a rights-based construct of participation requires that children's views are not only sought actively, but are listened to and taken seriously. What is also significant is the way in which these views are sought and how children's autonomy is balanced with support from adults in forming and expressing their views. For the reasons noted above, this is the construct of participation that we sought to capture in a robust statistical measure. The process through which this was done is outlined below, following a brief introduction to the context of the study.

### **The context of the study**

The data for this study came from the Kids' Life and Times (KLT) - an annual online survey of children (aged 10 to 11 years old) carried out in primary schools across Northern Ireland (see [www.ark.ac.uk](http://www.ark.ac.uk)). Previous KLT surveys indicated that the children were largely unaware of the CRC, but were able to identify some *specific* rights, such as the right to have their views taken seriously. However, there was limited evidence on the extent and quality of children's enjoyment of their participation rights. Thus, funding was secured from 'Improving Children's Lives' (an initiative at Queen's University Belfast which promotes evidence-informed approaches to services for children) for the development of a rights-based measure of participation (the CPRQ) which would be included in KLT.

### **Methods**

A children's rights-based approach to research was employed from the outset of this study. One of the research team members had co-developed this approach and applied it to a wide range of qualitative and quantitative studies (for a full discussion of this approach, see Lundy and McEvoy(Emerson), 2009, 2012a, 2012b). A central aspect of the approach is to collaborate with children in Children's Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs). Children in CRAGs are invited to participate on the basis of the expertise they can bring to the research team: experience as a child in a similar peer group as the research participants. This approach seeks to engage genuinely with children in the research process to the greatest extent possible within adult initiated projects. Unlike child-led

research (see Kellett, 2005), in this approach children do not undertake research themselves, but rather to work alongside adult researchers, pooling combined expertise.

The engagement with the CRAGs goes beyond consultation to collaboration, involving respectful balancing of adult and child expertise. Thus the CRAGs remit is to: advise on the research process including how best to engage with other children on the issues; assist with the analysis and interpretation of the findings; provide insight on the main issues under investigation; and identify potential solutions which might address some of the issues identified by the research. The approach requires building the capacity of the children in CRAGs to engage with the body of knowledge associated with the study, and to assist the children in thinking beyond their own subjective understanding of the issues in order to represent their peers in the process.

In this study, the CRAG consisted of six children (3 girls; 3 boys) aged ten to eleven years old, from a primary school in Northern Ireland. The CRAG assisted the adult researchers throughout the research process, as outlined below. Ethical approval to work with the CRAG was given by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast. Ethical procedures ensured that in particular the children's consent was sought in a rights-based, child-friendly and ongoing manner (see Lundy and McEvoy(Emerson), 2012a for a full discussion of a rights-based approach to ethics). Further, ethical approval was given to identify the children in the CRAG, in particular by using their first names in the KLT survey (see below).

### ***Developing the measure***

As noted above, the projects to which the rights-based approach had been applied had been qualitative and quantitative. However, the latter had not involved the development of new psychometric measures; hence the uniqueness of this study. Involving children in the development of this type of measure brought with it certain constraints; participatory processes had to be balanced with research rigour and pragmatic considerations. First, in terms of research rigour, the measure had to conform to an item style that allowed a scaled response. Secondly, it was important that each item (and hence the overall measure) captured a rights-based understanding of participation, reflecting the relevant standards of the CRC noted above. Finally, in practical terms, the maximum number of questions available in the module was fifteen (due to funding constraints); the items therefore had to be restricted to the contexts of school and community. Following this study, however, the CPRQ was used in another large scale survey and a different group of young people developed items relating to decision-making at home and influencing political decision-making, following the original construct of the CPRQ. Notably, whilst these young people were older than the children in the CRAG they considered the original CPRQ items to be appropriate for their age group (see Children's Law Centre, 2015).

The children in the CRAG were aware of the genuine partnership approach to the study from the outset: the CRAG brought their expertise, assisting the adults to see the issue through children's eyes; the adult researchers brought their expertise, assisting the children in understanding participation from the perspective of the CRC, and also the need for reliable measurement in research. Central to the negotiation of these roles were initial 'capacity building' sessions with the CRAG.

In these sessions, time was spent familiarising the children with children’s rights in general and rights-based participation in particular. Children were introduced to the word ‘participation’ and asked to discuss what it meant. This allowed the adult researcher to draw out different perspectives on participation, aligned to the literature. Children were then informed that the purpose of the study was to develop a *rights-based measure* of participation. They were introduced to the CRC and its content. Articles from the CRC were summarised on cards and the children were asked to decide whether these individual articles were ‘strongly connected’ to the idea of participation or ‘not so strongly connected’, placing these cards close to, or far away, from the word ‘participation’ accordingly. This allowed the adult researcher to explain the interdependence and indivisibility of rights. Further, it provided an opportunity for the children to prioritise which rights were salient and needed included in the final measure. The children identified the articles discussed above as highly relevant (that is Articles 5, 12, 13, and 17). However, they also noted that other rights such as freedom of association (Article 15), freedom of thought (Article 14), the child’s best interests (Article 3), privacy (Article 16) and articles relating to safety were relevant too. In relation to Article 2 (non-discrimination), which they saw as highly relevant, the adult researcher explained that demographic data collected in the survey would allow the responses to the CPRQ to be disaggregated (“broken down”) in relation to different types of children. This set of rights informed how the CRAG approached the next stage of the process.

This next stage involved asking the children to imagine a school where these rights were enjoyed by all children. They were asked to think about what a child might say about this school and to draw/write these statements in a speech bubble (see Figure 1).

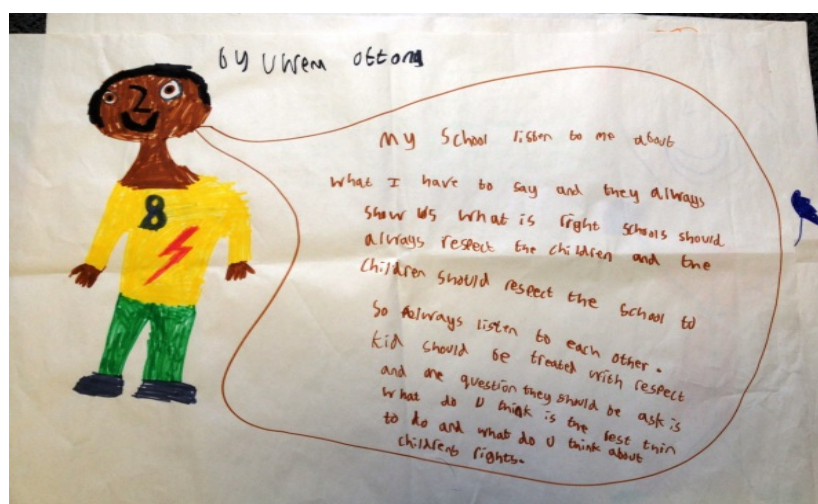


Figure 1: Children enjoying participation rights in school

This generated a number of simple statements which the children discussed and then began to agree on the themes to be reflected in the final items of measure. These themes related to the core rights noted above but also drew on what could be described as the children’s teleological understanding of the CRC and the interrelated nature of its cross-cutting principles. The process was then repeated with children generating statements for a *community* that really respected children’s participation rights.

The adult researcher collated the items and returned to the children with a full set for potential inclusion in the measure, which as noted above, could only include 15 items. The children felt strongly that one of these items should be open-ended to give children completing the survey an opportunity to say how “things could be improved”. They thus negotiated with each other until the full set of statements was reduced to 14 items (8 relating to school; 6 to community). The adult researcher worked with the children to ensure the items selected reflected the core components of rights-based participation as understood by the children. The children were aware compromises had to be made in relation to some items. For example, the statement ‘what we do in class’ was used to encapsulate several original statements relating to curriculum content, pedagogy and resources. The children felt that ‘in class’ summed these up – as in it captured the learning experience better than ‘in the classroom’ which might include rules etc.

The resulting measure (Figure 2) thus reflected the idea of children’s views being sought, listened to and taken seriously, alongside capturing the extent to which children could access information and form and express views safely and, importantly for the CRAG, the extent to which adults supported them in all of this (Article 12, Article 5). As the CRAG explained, not all children can express their views confidently; the responsibility lies with adults to “make this easy”.

**My school listens to what I have to say about.....**  
What we do in class  
What I have to say about school rules  
How to make our school better

**In my school.....**  
I can give my opinions freely  
The adults make it easy for me to give my views  
The adults take my views seriously  
The adults talk to me about how decisions are made  
The adults make sure I can easily get the information I need about what is going on in the school

**In my community.....**  
The adults ask me for my views  
The adults take my views seriously  
I can easily find out about activities (like youth clubs, church clubs, and sports activities) for children my age  
I can easily find out about what’s going on for children in places like libraries, museums, and parks  
I am asked for my views on how happy I am with the activities in my community  
The adults make it easy for me to give my views on the activities going on in my community

**Response** (5 point likert scale): never, seldom, quite often, often, always

**Open-ended question:** What do you think could be done (in your school or in your community) to make sure that children’s views are taken seriously?

Figure 2: Children's Participation Rights Questionnaire (CPRQ)

The CRAG also discussed how best to word the statements so that their peers would understand the items. They also felt it was important to develop an opening statement for the module (Figure 3), explaining that children had been involved in writing the questions.





Figure 3: Screen-shot of introduction to CPRQ module

Thus the final items reflected not only the core elements of a rights-based approach to participation but also the lived reality of the realisation of this right for children in context. Further, the items were articulated in the authentic, and easily understood, language of children. This could not have been achieved without the involvement of the CRAG.

### **Data collection**

The CPRQ measure was included in the 2013 KLT survey of primary school children (P7) in Northern Ireland. Schools were given a unique identification number so that entries could be associated with a particular school. Children completed the online questionnaire anonymously on computers in their school. In total, 3773 children (51% girls; 49% boys) from 212 primary schools participated. Approval for the 2013 KLT survey was given by the Ethics Committee in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. Anonymity does not guarantee that children do not respond in a socially desirable way. However, given the high response level to the CPRQ questions compared to other questions on KLT, and extensive and detailed responses to the open-ended question, we are confident that children engaged as honestly as is possible in this type of survey.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis consisted of three key components: analysis of the properties of the CPRQ measure; analysis of the substantive findings in relation to children's participation rights; analysis and interpretation of the findings with the CRAG.

### *Properties of the CPRQ measure*

Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha and the factor structure was tested using Maximum Likelihood extraction (normal distribution) with direct oblimin rotation. Construct validity was assessed by testing the relationship between children's perceptions of their rights and attendance at 'rights-respecting' schools (UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award) using independent t-tests.

### *Analysis of findings*

The 14 CPRQ items constitute an *overall* measurement of children's participation – thus mean scores (with standard deviations, SD) are reported. The CPRQ data were analysed by gender using independent t-tests. Cohen's *d* was also conducted to test for effect sizes given that the KLT sample was extremely large (by convention, a Cohen's *d* of .20 is considered small, .50 medium and .80 large).

### *CRAG involvement in analysis and interpretation*

The children in the CRAG were engaged in analysis and interpretation of findings. The first stage took the form of a quiz: the children were split into two teams and asked to predict the CPRQ findings (and provide a justification for their answers) before the actual results were revealed to them. When the results were revealed the children were asked to explain and interpret them. In relation to the open-ended question, children were provided with a reduced set of the 3207 responses. The adult researcher had reduced the data set to a manageable amount through an iterative process which strived to ensure that the reduced set was representative of the entire data set. Each response in this set was recorded on a separate strip of paper and the children were then asked to group, or 'cluster', these strips based on their interpretation of connections between each response. Each 'cluster' was then given a 'name' by the children. The children's interpretation and analysis is incorporated into the discussion of findings below.

## **Discussion of findings**

As noted at the outset of this paper, the findings from this study focus on both the statistical properties of the measure (its reliability), as well as the substantive findings from the survey. The latter are presented to speak to the validity of the measure but also to evidence the extent and quality of participation for the children involved in this study. Thus, children's overall enjoyment of their participation rights (that is, the mean scores from the CPRQ) is outlined, followed by findings from specific items of the CPRQ and the open-ended questions, which shed some light on how the participation rights of children could be more fully realised.

### ***Properties of the measure***

The findings from the KLT survey indicate that the questionnaire developed by the CRAG was a reliable measure of children's participation rights with a Cronbach's alpha of .89 (.70 is conventionally used as the threshold). Exploratory factor analysis indicated that there were two domains – school and community.

Table 1: Factor Structure of the CPRQ

	Factor	
	School	Community
<b>My school listens to what I have to say about:</b>		
What we do in class	<b>.650</b>	
School rules	<b>.725</b>	
How to make our school better	<b>.761</b>	
<b>In my school:</b>		
I can give my opinions freely	<b>.694</b>	
The adults make it easy for me to give my views	<b>.776</b>	
The adults take my views seriously	<b>.672</b>	
The adults talk to me about how decisions are made	<b>.537</b>	
The adults make sure I can easily get the information I need about what is going on in the school	<b>.467</b>	
<b>In my community:</b>		
The adults ask me for my views		<b>.728</b>
The adults take my views seriously		<b>.697</b>
I can easily find out about activities (like youth clubs, church clubs, sports activities) for children my age		<b>.461</b>
I can easily find out about what's going on for children in places like libraries, museums, and parks		<b>.521</b>
I am asked for my views on how happy I am with the activities in my community		<b>.748</b>
The adults make it easy for me to give my views on the activities going on in my community		<b>.770</b>

Extraction: Maximum Likelihood; Rotation: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

### ***Children's enjoyment of their participation rights***

Scores on the 14-item CPRQ range from 14 to 70 with higher scores representing more positive feelings about children's enjoyment of their participation rights. As Table 2 shows, the mean score on the CPRQ for all children was 45.39 (SD=11.20). Scores on the CPRQ(school) subscale range from 8 to 40; the mean score for CPRQ(school) was 26.92 (SD=7.17). Scores on the CPRQ(communit) subscale range from 6 to 30; the mean score for CPRQ(communit) was 18.44 (SD=5.46). Children were therefore fairly positive in relation to their overall enjoyment of their participation rights. They were however less positive about participation in their community than in school.

Table 2: Children's enjoyment of their participation rights

	Range	Mean	SD
CPRQ	14 to 70	45.39	11.20
CPRQ(school)	8 to 40	26.92	7.17
CPRQ(communit)	6 to 30	18.44	5.46

### ***Rights-respecting schools and participation***

The data were analysed in relation to whether or not the school was involved in the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award. As Table 3 shows, children who attended such a school scored higher on the CPRQ(school) subscale than those who did not and the difference was statistically significant (t=5.83, df=3641, p<0.001; Cohen's d=0.35).

Table 3: Participation in 'rights- respecting' schools

	Number	Mean	SD
<b>All children</b>	3553	26.92	6.62
<b>UNICEF 'Rights Respecting School'?</b>			
Yes	595	29.14	6.62
No	2958	26.70	7.18

The CRAG were not surprised by this finding and suggested that children who went to a rights-respecting school would know more about rights and find it easier to recognise when their rights were being respected. Notably they suggested that teachers in a rights-respecting school would “have to make an effort to let children have a say”. Further, since previous research indicates positive outcomes in relation to children’s participation rights for schools that had a ‘rights-respecting’ ethos (Sebba and Robinson, 2010), this finding speaks to the construct validity of the CPRQ.

#### *Gender and participation*

Data were analysed in relation to gender. As Table 4 shows, girls had a higher mean score for the CPRQ than boys. The difference was statistically significant ( $t=9.38$ ,  $df=3549$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The girls who responded to KLT were therefore more positive about their participation rights than the boys, although the effect size, measured using Cohen’s  $d$ , was fairly moderate ( $d=.32$ ).

Table 4: Participation rights by gender

	Mean	SD
<b>All children</b>	45.39	11.20
<b>Gender</b>		
Boys	43.57	11.03
Girls	47.06	11.09

Examining the subscales of the CPRQ it is evident that girls are also more positive about their participation rights in school than boys (Table 5). The difference was statistically significant ( $t=9.77$ ,  $df=3639$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the effect size was fairly moderate (Cohen’s  $d=0.32$ ). Similarly, girls are slightly more positive about their participation rights in the community than boys and the difference is statistically significant ( $t=6.54$ ,  $df=3635$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) although the effect size is small (Cohen’s  $d=0.22$ ).

Table 5: Participation rights in school and community by gender

CPRQ subscales	Boys		Girls	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
CPRQ(school)	25.74	7.18	28.03	6.97
CPRQ(community)	17.83	5.36	19.01	5.49

Since extant evidence suggests that girls are more likely than boys to engage positively with participatory practices in school and community (see for example, Nelson and others, 2010) these findings speak again to the validity of the CPRQ. González and others (2015) suggest that girls may be more positive about participation because they are more socially responsible than boys. The views

of the children in the CRAG resonated with this. However, they also suggested that girls were also “more sociable” than boys and spent more time “talking to each other”, which increased their likelihood to express views. In relation to the school context, they suggested that primary schools had “a lot of female teachers” and, as a result, girls might feel more “comfortable speaking out or joining in” than boys.

### ***Towards the further realization of children’s participation rights for all children***

Whilst it is encouraging that many children in this study feel that their participation rights are being respected, from a rights-based perspective the proportion of children who are *not* enjoying their participation rights is relevant. Responses to some of the individual items of the CPRQ and the open-ended question asked in the module, shed some light on the aspects of participation *least* enjoyed by children in this study (for an analysis of all item responses see Emerson and Lloyd, 2014; ARK, 2013).

As noted above, children have a right to have their views sought, listened to and taken seriously. In relation to *school*, just under half of the children (49.3%) in this study felt that their views were ‘very often’ or ‘always’ taken seriously and almost a quarter of children (24.4%) felt they could ‘never’ or ‘seldom’ give their opinion freely. In relation to the *community*, less than a quarter of the children (22.6%) felt their views were ‘very often’ or ‘always’ sought and under a third of the children (30.7%) felt their views were ‘very often’ or ‘always’ taken seriously. Given the relationship between Article 5 of the CRC and children’s participation rights, discussed above, it is notable that just over half of the children (52.3%) felt that adults in school ‘very often’ or ‘always’ made it easy for them to give their views and that only a third (33.4%) felt that adults in the community did this.

The majority of the children (85%) who completed the KLT survey answered the open-ended question in relation to what could be done to make sure that children’s views were taken seriously. As the CRAG helped identify, many of the responses focused on the need to “ask children what they think more” and for adults to “help children to say what they think” both in private and in public settings. Children in the study also suggested the need to raise awareness amongst their peers and with adults about the right to participate. For example, as the CRAG pointed out, they suggested “advertising campaigns” about children’s rights as well as “teaching adults about children’s rights” to “make sure the adults listen to children”.

Taken together, these findings draw attention to the need for adults in children’s lives to not only listen to and respect children’s views but also to support them in the formation and expression of those views.

### **Conclusion**

As noted at the outset of this paper, effective monitoring of the extent to which children’s participation rights are respected, protected and fulfilled requires robust measurement. However, there is an identified absence of rights-based measures upon which to draw. This study sought to address this through involving children in the development of a rigorous measure of their participation rights (the CPRQ). The findings not only demonstrate that the CPRQ is statistically

reliable, but also point towards its validity. To an extent this is unsurprising, given the process through which it was developed. The co-development of the items by the adult researcher and children in the CRAG ensured that: the construct which underpinned it was informed by the CRC and associated jurisprudence; the items reflected the authentic lived experience of children, and were easily understood by them.

Reflecting on the *measure*, the CPRQ provides a useful, and reliable, 'mean score' for children's overall enjoyment of their participation rights in school and community. This score indicates the extent to which children's CRC participation rights are being fulfilled. Individual items of the CPRQ shed light on the extent to which this is mediated by the way children's views are sought, listened to and taken seriously, their access to information and the degree of support from adults. Subsequent use of the CPRQ in other studies (see for example, Children's Law Centre, 2015) suggests that it is a useful measure for other age groups of children than those involved in this study. However, as noted at the outset of this paper, it may need to be adjusted for other cultural contexts. Reflecting on the *findings*, it could be suggested that the latter aspect of child rights-based participation is salient: that is the extent to which adults actively enable children's exercise of their CRC rights. The, arguably more nuanced, picture of children's enjoyment of their participation rights which has arisen from this study we would contend is due largely to the measure employed: a measure which is rights-based in terms of both the construct that underpins it and the process through which it was developed. Reflecting, then, on the *process*: developing a psychometric measure in collaboration with children requires careful balance between participatory processes and the need for research rigour. This too depends on the nature of the relationship between adult researchers and children – a relationship that needs to be characterised by mutual understanding of the expertise *each* bring to the process. However, what is clear is that the CPRQ could not have captured rights-based participation in as authentic a manner had it not been for the involvement of the CRAG. Whilst the adult researchers brought a detailed understanding of the CRC, its associated jurisprudence and the principles of rigorous measurement to the study, it was the children in the CRAG who had the unique ability to place into context, and into the language of children, what would otherwise have been an 'adult' articulation of CRC compliant participation.

Thus, involving children in the 'measurement' of their own lives has methodological and epistemological benefits: the development of reliable and valid psychometric measures which in turn generate more authentic data to illuminate the reality of children's lived experiences. The children in the CRAG were conscious of this, and indeed expressed it in a much more concise and compelling manner. As one CRAG member said, in response to being asked what his experience of involvement in the process had meant to him: "I am so proud that we were able to come up with good questions that children understood – so the survey could get real information to make a difference for children's rights."

## References

Alderson P, Montgomery J. 1996. *Health Care Choices: Sharing decisions with children*. Institute of Public Policy Research: London.

ARK. 2013. [computer file]. <http://www.ark.ac.uk/kltwww.ark.ac.uk/klt> [distributor] November 2013.

Boyden J, Ennew J. 1997. *Children in Focus: A manual for participatory research with children*. Save the Children: Stockholm.

Charles C, Haines K. 2014. Measuring Young People's Participation in Decision Making: what young people say. *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 22(3): 641-659

Children's Law Centre. 2015. *Our Lives in Our Words: Northern Ireland Young People's Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*. Belfast: Children's Law Centre/Save the Children NI

Donnelly J. 2003. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* Cornell University Press: New York

Emerson L, Lloyd K. 2014. *Are children's views being sought, listened to and taken seriously?* ARK: Belfast

Flanagan CA, Syvertsen AK, Stout MD. 2007. *Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescent, Civic Engagement*, Working Paper 55. Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE): University of Maryland.

Freeman M. 2002. *Human Rights*. Polity Press: Cambridge.

González M, Gras M, Malo S, Navarro D, Casas F, & Aligué M. 2015. Adolescents' perspective on their participation in the family context and its relationship with their subjective well-being. *Child Indicators Research* 7: 93–109.

Hanson K, Vandaele A. 2003. Working children and international labour law: A critical analysis, *International Journal of Children's Rights* 11(1): 73–146.

Herbots K, Put J. 2015. The Participation Disc. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 23: 154–188.

John M. 2003. *Children's rights and power: Charging up for a new century*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London.

Kahne J, Middaugh E, Schutjer-Mance K. 2005. *California Civic Index*. Carnegie Corporation and Annenberg Foundation: New York.

Kellett M. 2005. *Children as active researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century?* ESRC: UK

Lansdown G. 2010. The realisation of children's participation rights: critical reflections in *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation: Perspectives from Theory and Practice* Percy-Smith B, Thomas N (eds.) Routledge: Oxon; 11-24.

Lundy L. 2007. 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal* 33(6):927–942.

Lundy L, McEvoy(Emerson) L. 2009. Developing outcomes for education services: a children's rights-based approach. *Effective Education* 1(1): 43–60.

Lundy L, McEvoy(Emerson) L. 2012a. Childhood, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and research: What constitutes a rights-based approach? In *Law and Childhood* Freeman M (ed.) Oxford University Press: Oxford; 75–91.

Lundy L, McEvoy(Emerson) L. 2012b. Children's rights and research processes: assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood* 19(1): 116–129.

Matthews H. 2003. Children and regeneration: setting an agenda for community participation and integration. *Children and Society* 17(4):264–276.

Nelson J, Wade P, Kerr D. 2010. *Young people's civic attitudes and practices: England's outcomes from the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)*. Department for Education: London.

Seeba J, Robinson C. 2014. *Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award*. UNICEF: London.

Skelton T. 2007. Children, young people, UNICEF and participation. *Children's Geographies* 5: 165–181.

Steiner H J, Alston P. 2000. *International human rights in context: law, politics, morals*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Thomas N. 2007. Towards a theory of children's participation. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 15: 199–218.

United Nations. 1989. *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations: Geneva.

United Nations. 2009. *Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 12 - the Right of the Child to be Heard*. United Nations: Geneva.