

Citation: Mannion, G. and I'Anson, J. (2004) 'Beyond the Disneyesque: children's participation, spatiality and adult-child relations'. In *Childhood*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp 303-18. ISSN 0907-5682

# **Beyond the Disneyesque: children's participation, spatiality and adult-child relations**

**Greg Mannion and John I'Anson**

**Institute of Education**

**University of Stirling**

‘...with children you think very differently.’ (Fiona)

## **Abstract**

The article describes a case study of children and young people's participation and the attendant effects on professional practice and child-adult relations. We consider the findings under four headings: professional learning, child-adult relations, childhood memories and the spatial dimensions of change. Evidence indicates that adults and children were finding new ways of working and relating and that these processes were inherent in efforts to reconfigure space. The analysis shows how adult and child identification, relations and associated constructions of childhood and adulthood were connected. We argue that changes occurred in and through the shaping of real and imagined places.

## **Introduction**

This article explores how the participation of children in an arts organisation in Scotland was influential in the learning and approaches taken by three adult professionals. These adults also made connections between children's participation in the organisation, childhood as a social

phenomenon today and memories of their own childhoods. The arts centre in question has a special remit to cater for children and young people's arts and a widespread reputation for enhancing children's participation at various levels in the organisation. The centre's Young Consultants' Group (YCG) comprises a group of young people aged between 7 and 16. This group functions as a voluntary advisory body providing direction for making the centre more child-friendly in terms of its programming, communication, decision making structures and overall ethos. Since the approach has meant close working between young people and staff over time, the YCs have become well-known and accepted in the centre. Anecdotal evidence suggested that this group has had a formative influence on the on-going development of the centre over the last three years. Work is currently underway on a major capital refurbishment of the centre that will house a dedicated space for children's theatre and a gallery. The YCs have worked with the architect on the design of this new space. The YC group includes children from social groupings and geographical areas commonly described as socially excluded. The centre has developed a 'Children's Charter' and a 'Children's Promise' which outline a commitment to delivering the highest quality of experience and level of service in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The data that we draw upon here comes from the first phase of an in-depth case study of the approach taken by the arts centre to children's participation. Data was gathered to address the initial focus on child-adult relations, adult learning and the creation of space. We draw upon empirical evidence from interviews with three professional adults who have worked closely with the YCG over a period of up to three years.

## **Research Contexts**

The concept of children's participation and inclusion in society has become heightened in national and international policy agendas (UK Government, 1999; UNICEF, 1995). The need

to take cognisance of children and young people's views has been enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1995) which was ratified by the UK in 1991. As a result, institutions in the UK dedicated to the care, education and health of children and young people are now expected to respond to the requirements of the Convention. In Scotland, the creation of a new parliament has brought to the fore the need for all citizenry to be involved in decision making. At the same time concerns have been expressed by voluntary organisations and researchers about increasing disillusionment among young people in the political process. A recent study of Scottish organisations (Dorrian et al., 1999) found that only about one in five had developed good practice guidelines for consulting and involving children and young people. Matthews et al. (1999) argue that a culture of non-participation for children is endemic in the United Kingdom.

Problems associated with children's participation in public (Prout, 2000) and institutional spaces (Lee, 1999) have been considered in a British context. Other research agendas have begun to reflect the need to understand and assess the consequences of forms of children's participation for service organisations (Borland et al., 2001; McNeish, 1999; Heath and McLaughlin, 1993) and in families (Morrow, 1998). The spatial implications for children's identities are discussed by Holloway and Valentine (2000a; 2000b) while Moss and Petrie (2002) explore how alternative constructions of childhood might shape the 'spaces' of children's services. However, little has been done to analyse the connections between children's participation, constructions of childhood, professional practice, and spatiality.

## **Methods and Methodology**

It was with the aforementioned international, national and research contexts in mind that a distinctive Scottish arts centre came to light as a possible case study (Yin, 1989). The rationale for its choice as a case included its explicit good practice guidelines with respect to

children's views and its high profile for enhancing children's participation. The distinctive culture of the centre and the sense that researchers, like other professionals, need to take ethical cognisance of the rights of children led to the adoption of a participatory research approach. New theories and techniques are being developed to enable researchers and young people to collaborate on research and evaluations (West, 1995, 1999; Christensen and James, 2000; Dorrian et al., 1999). It was the intention from the outset that the young people and some key staff be involved in as many stages of the research process as possible. Their presence has affected the research process in subtle and sometimes profound ways. In this phase of the research project, young people collaborated with the authors to varying degrees in

- clarifying the initial aims of the research
- nominating possible key adult informants
- contributing to interview schedule construction and
- posing questions during interviews.

Prior to the interviews, the authors had two meetings with the centre's director and three meetings with the young consultants. Young people were informed of the intended purposes of the enquiry and were invited to consider their degree of involvement. The interviews were semi-structured along the lines of Tomlinson's method of hierarchical focussing. This method 'seeks to elicit the interviewee's constructs and deploys interviewer's framing only when necessary' (Tomlinson, 1989: 165). For our purposes, this approach had a number of advantages. It provided freedom for the young consultants to ask their own questions which could then be mapped by the researcher on to a grid. This also enabled conversations to develop spontaneously whilst ensuring that key questions identified in advance were addressed. The involvement of the young people in face-to-face interviewing appears to have enriched the conversational dynamic since adults were at least partially responsive to the

young people themselves; on the other hand, there was a concern that this may have constrained adults in the articulation of their views. In view of this, the respondents were offered the opportunity to follow up any points that had been raised or omitted in a subsequent telephone call, but no one felt the need to take up the offer. Each interview was of an hour's duration. Tape recordings were subsequently transcribed and analysed according to frames similar to those used in the interview schedule (see below). At the time of writing the YCs and staff were invited to respond to the first phase of findings.

We set out to discover to what extent places, professional practices and adult-child association were jointly implicated in attempts to make the organisation more inclusive of children. This involved adopting a relational (Alanen, 2000), emergent (Fenwick, 2001; Sumara and Davis, 1997) and spatial (Massey, 1994) epistemology. The value of this position is that the research focus shifts from attempting to name 'things' to describing processes - a shift from the noun to the verb (Mannion et al., 2002). The relational emphasis means that we focus not on *what* individuals learn but on the *relationships* that link adults and children together and the learning that ensues. This approach follows a recent relational turn in the social study of childhood (Lee, 2001; Mayall, 2002). Taking an emergent epistemological position (Sumara and Davis, 1997) means we look carefully at on-going systems and processes rather than on static 'entities' (Fenwick, 2001: 254). One central process we explore is adult and professional identification.

[T]he discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always 'in process' [...] a process of being articulated 'grounded in fantasy, projection and idealisation (Hall, 1996: 2-3).

We look at how adult identification connected with children's participation, brought changes in the organisation and networks of other relations, such as those between childhood and

adulthood. Our approach demanded that we attend to the role place had in the shaping of these processes. We analyse professional commentaries to explore how identification, professional learning and adult-child relations were constituted within and through space. In turn, we draw attention to how spatial discourses featured in the co-emergent construction of childhood and adulthood. Six frames of reference were identified in advance of the interviews as potential lines of inquiry:

- the development of new professional approaches
- adult-child relations
- adult memories and re-considerations of their own childhoods
- the spatial dimensions of identification, learning and organisational change
- historical and contextual aspects, and
- the effects of participation on the research process itself for all involved.

Space only permits a selective exploration of the first four of these frames. The next sections analyse empirical data from transcripts of three professional adult respondents: an architect responsible for the design of a substantial rebuild and refurbishment, the centre's in-house designer, and the director.

### **Reconfiguring Professional Practice**

All three respondents recognised that working with young people involved new responsibilities and changes to their practice. As Fiona<sup>1</sup>, the director of the centre, put this:

...young people are very demanding, especially if you're going to involve them and you say 'Right we're going to listen to you'. You have a real responsibility to deliver and if you don't deliver you have to really be able to give very detailed answers about why. [...]. Once you open yourself up to the flood gates of demands and expectations, [...] you know, there's no stopping it. (Fiona)

For the in-house designer, Lynn, this involved changes at professional and personal levels. This included some practice changes such as becoming familiar with specific guidelines about font choice when publishing for younger readers. Lynn felt she ‘had to step back and take on all these new rules that apply to children’. Subscribing to a child-focussed, participative culture, brought changes beyond technical awareness, however. Lynn consulted regularly with the children and young people, involving them in writing for the centre’s magazine. She routinely met YCs (young consultants) and saw them as part of the production and editorial team. Young people came in to the centre and got involved in the day-to-day activities of desk-top publishing such as scanning in pictures and choosing articles. She described her approach as being quite distinctive from the work of most other practitioners in her field. The outcome for her as a professional was that her practice was inherently more complex and contingent. This was because she had to attend to the inputs from a wide variety of children of different ages and social backgrounds that she tried to professionally ‘control’ and judge. Her approach appeared to be more client-focussed, even democratic, in the way she engaged with her users and facilitated the voices of young people.

...all the children are coming at you with their different ideas...and [I am] trying to...control the situation because I haven’t done anything like that before... We just try and find our own way... through things, try and hear everyone’s opinion...take it on board, and write all the points down. [...] ...I think they’re given a lot of freedom to speak and say what they want and be themselves. (Lynn)

For the architect, Paul, listening to the potential users of any new building has always been important, but he recognised in hindsight, through working with the YCs, that younger client groups have not always had much of a voice in the design process. He noted that the ‘level of bargaining’ and approach to decision making was different with children: for example, it did

not include going to the pub for a chat after formal meetings. Engaging with the YCs required a new practice of association constructed within the distinctive meeting space of the YCs. But even this did not go according to plan. His engagement with children upturned the norms around the explanatory function of 3-D models:

[I learned] how things [such as models] which are very dear to an architect's heart is not how its perceived [...] it's perceived by 'Where is the tuckshop?' or 'Where can *I* sit?' (Paul, emphasis in original)

His experience of working with the YCs has meant that the effort to hear users' views has taken on a new significance. Paul felt now that it was important to listen to children, rather than second-guess what they would want or attempt to work with child advocates alone. Also, he felt there was a need to acknowledge the variety of different children's needs rather than attempt to cater for children as a homogenous group. Since first meeting with the YCG, he now takes a more proactive approach to engaging with a greater diversity of users and has given talks to other architects reminding them that children are users of buildings too. Fiona likewise found herself becoming an advocate for new ways of working with children. This involved a political willingness to advance the cause of children's involvement when others were sceptical of its benefits.

I had a lot of resistance, not just internally but, you know, externally from, [...] other people [who] couldn't see that young people necessarily have a role to play. [...] The argument I have with [some] funders, um, [is] that children aren't actually the audience of tomorrow, children are an audience in their own right now. (Fiona)

Perhaps the key reconfiguration of Paul's professional role involved, as he put it, 'not speaking *for* children' but listening and understanding the diversity of children's needs. This



was achieved by meeting the YCs as an ‘identifiable user group’ or group of advocates, with all the problems and opportunities this might imply.

The important lesson is the importance of talking to the users of your building [...] it becomes so fundamental [...] I was profoundly affected by listening to Michael [a wheelchair using child, because] the literature on people going around in wheelchairs doesn't include children [...] and [Michael] doesn't mince his words.  
(Paul)

For Lynn, her sense of having a differentiated understanding of ‘children’ was very apparent given the wide age range of the magazine’s readership.

...maybe a problem can be the age range of the young consultants... teenagers and some of them are still quite young, so that can be quite difficult to cover in the magazine.[...] it can be a bit babyish for some of them. (Lynn)

Similarly, the architect has had to consider the variety of possible child, youth and adult users of the refurbished space.

It's like having a kindergarden, a nursery school, a primary school, a secondary school and [3rd level] students as well as all the other people that come in [to a building]. (Paul)

This diversity was, to some extent, reflected in the composition of the young consultants’ group itself. The membership included:

lots of different types of children...you’ve got the ones that are maybe more quieter, more bossy ones and you’ve got your different age groups as well...It’s quite a range. (Lynn)

Recognition of a plurality of childhoods and the distinctive relations these professionals had with their clients meant that they reconfigured many of their professional approaches. The desire to be more client-focussed and inclusive co-emerged with changes in their ways of working. In Fiona's words:

I see [the YCs] as being [...] very much a part of [the arts centre] and our staff now, most definitely see them as part of the whole organization. [...] (Fiona)

### **Reordering Adult-Child Relations**

Other evidence suggested that the reconfiguration of professional roles had consequences for these three respondents beyond their work lives. All expressed changed views as to how adult-child relations were experienced personally and offered explanations for how inter-generational relations might be understood in the light of this. Their responses indicated that they wanted to get beyond the Disneyesque in terms of being against the commodification of childhood (Giroux, 1999). Paul was at pains to explain how the brief was to design 'a space for everyone', a space that is 'child-friendly rather than child-ish'. To achieve this he had to 'scrape off the naive view [and] not to have the Walt Disney, Mickey Mouse images around'. His vision was of a space that would enable inclusive adult-child relationships to emerge. He realised that:

public space means everyone [...] that's where the YCs emphasised their requirements as opposed to assuming what young people would be requiring [...] it gave you a conscience [ ... ] one way out is to forget half the problems but the YCs were there to remind you. (Paul)

He explored his vision for how the new building would work:

We would quite like in the design for people to use all the spaces [...] that it wouldn't overtly be for children, it wasn't overtly for adults - except for the

children's room [...] It was for users of the building so that you didn't feel [...] that you were going into something that was desperately for children. It was for families, or people of any age but with hints [...] some of the lettering would be at lower levels than others. [...] I'm trying not to use the word but [...] to make it look as if it's inclusive. (Paul)

The need to actively resist the Disneyfication and commodification of childhood was important to Fiona:

There are sponsors who would love to be involved, for example, with some of the work we do, but we don't do advertising, [...] the children's magazine just doesn't have advertising on it, and there's no advertising on the website. [...] I think they have a real responsibility to protect young people from that kind of aggressive marketing plot. (Fiona)

Lynn experienced a personal change in her approach to child-adult relations. She would spend more time listening and working with her nieces. Both how they related and the nature of their learning was altered.

Even with issues related to work I would go home, if I was maybe working on something I would sit with [my nieces and] I'd ask them what they thought... I'd maybe [be] doing some designs or drawings ... and they'd come up with some really great ideas [...] I found I've spent a lot of time with my nieces asking their views and opinions, so I think that I've developed in that way as well. (Lynn)

Professionals appeared motivated to involve children as co-constructors of inclusive spaces for adults and children. These adults expressed the desire to create new types of space through collaborative work on the refurbishment of the buildings and a joint editorial approach to the

magazine. In addition, new interpersonal and inter-generational spaces in the organisation were created. We have documented some of the effects on identification for adults: in working towards the enhancement of children's participation within intergenerational relations, both the professional and personal adult identifications shifted. Next, we explore how these adults' own personal childhood biographies get refracted in the light of their current experience.

### **Remembering Childhoods Past**

Respondents were invited to review their own childhood experiences in the light of their work with the YCs. All three adults' noted significant differences between their childhoods and the opportunities the YCs had for participation.

I didn't have these opportunities... I held back more...you'd be afraid to say something especially in adult company. What you had to say wasn't important, you should be seen and not heard... you were apprehensive because it wasn't allowed. Here [i.e., with the young consultants' group] they've been encouraged to speak their mind. (Lynn)

[I experienced] 20 years of received decisions [...] the areas of decision making [open to me] were virtually nil. [There were] all the educational hurdles that you were faced with. [...] Maybe we did [make decisions but] you didn't have a sense that you were making your own environment. (Paul)

Fiona felt that her own childhood experience had been unusual in that she felt she had family that respected her right to have a say in many respects but contrasted her childhood experience in private and public spheres.

I was very fortunate in that my mother and father [...] really listened to their children, probably different to a lot of other families in that [...] my mother always kind of put us first. [...] I think that [...] that helped but then you would go into school which was a completely different environment where, you know, what you said, actually, you had no right to even think that you could say. (Fiona)

The interaction of adults and young people in this setting provided a lens for adults to review their own childhoods. The comparisons made brought about a re-evaluation of the past in the light of new experience. As Paul expressed this:

There is now a culture of participation which there wasn't [and] a vocabulary of rights - old words that are [now] used politically. (Paul)

Whereas, in the past, the views of children tended to be 'brushed off' (Lynn) or at best, deferred, there was now a realisation of the need to work more collaboratively to create new kinds of spaces for adults and children. As Fiona put this:

It's about the relationships [...] other groups [such as youth clubs, school, etc.] are quite structured [...] It's a different kind of relationship that they have in that when they come as YC's, we [at the Arts Centre] should all be listening to what they have to say, so they actually are the most important people in the room.

Whereas with family it will often be the parents and actually it's the reverse of this. (Fiona)

The opportunity for respondents to remember their own childhoods brought into focus a sense that the YCs were experiencing a greater degree of participation than they themselves had in the past. It made apparent that their professional approaches were not about replicating these remembered childhoods through mirroring the relations that went into constructing them, but

were more about providing for a new construction of childhood through adult-child relations that are altered or even inverted. Current circumstances had given rise to alterations in professional ways of working and relating to children while past circumstances were refracted in the light of these new conditions.

The adults interviewed indicated that through their contact with the YCG they had learned alternative ways of viewing their roles as professionals which in turn had issued in the development of new forms of practice. All respondents reported a heightened awareness of the diversity of children's childhoods through their engagement with the YCs. Comments from the adults also suggested that they saw learning occurring 'in-between' the people concerned. Furthermore, adults' own childhoods were re-evaluated in the light of their current sense of where childhood (and presumably adulthood) was going. The adults displayed a form of knowing that was embodied and experiential. Learning how to create a participative, inter-generationally inclusive organisation was immersed within the particular spaces and relations between children and adults. Discourse about local personal and professional practices were contextualised with perceived changes in understandings of childhood and inter-generational relations.

### **The Spatial Dimensions of Learning and Organisational Change**

We have deployed an ecological theory of learning (Fenwick, 2001; Davis and Sumara, 1997) to advance the view that 'knowing' emerges at the intersection of invention, identity and environment. This 'enactivist' position holds that human beings, objects and cognition emerge together as intertwined systems: the 'knower' and the 'setting' are altered together. An important consequence of this theoretical position for this research is that children, adults and places will mutually specify each other. The focus is not on *what* individuals learn but on the *relationships* that give rise to new knowing. We have drawn attention to how working

closely with children to try to create participative organisational cultures and inclusive spaces (for both children and adults) happened within the complex *relations* between adults and children and gave rise to significant learning. The process of creating new kinds of inclusive space was achieved both *within* and *through* these distinctive relationships and *vice versa*. Crucially, new inclusive space for children went beyond the Disneyesque and changed what was the 'normal' adult routine. Attempting to enlarge the 'space of the possible' (Sumara and Davis, 1997) is not without its difficulties and challenges. The director connects the building of expectations with the designing of the new centre.

It is a huge responsibility for us [...] it started with that huge responsibility of building young people's expectations, they were involved in a project that might not actually happen. So there was that kind of, always-conscious worry about what's going to happen? (Fiona)

The desire to create more inclusive space arose within a process of reconstituting adult-child, professional-client relations.

[Addressing the YCs] You have a stake [...] you are a part of it [...] you have an identity with it because you participated in the process of designing it [...] It's your building [maybe that is the main outcome]. (Paul)

Another finding is that attempts to address children's inclusion serves to expose a diversity of childhoods and adulthoods, heightens difference, and dissolves the binaries (between inclusion and exclusion, children and adults). This is achieved *while* adults and children jointly participated in creating new spaces. For the adults' part, their approaches were characterised by an ethic of receptivity to the views of 'the other' (Gregoriou, 2001).

We're saying to them that we really need you to help us; we want to listen to what you've got to say. (Lynn)

Learning for these adults was a socio-spatial and relational activity that involved risk and the negotiation of new demands. Learning occurred while attempting, or struggling, to co-construct space and relate to children in an alternative way. The most 'crucial thing learned' according to Paul was the need to be:

... sensitive to the requirements of all users and the fact that children have not had a clear voice in the past has been rectified by this project.

Interviewer: Has it changed you as an architect or as an adult?

Paul: I would say both ... quite profoundly under both those headings. [...] one has been annoyed that you didn't take on all the users views in the past. Why did we miss out on an obvious group of people? (Paul)

Space itself was inherently involved in learning and identification. Participation by children brought with it a requirement for adults to similarly engage with children in a shared, spatial practice so that alternatives might emerge (Sumara and Davis, 1997: 303). Massey (1994) suggests we take on board the possibility of seeing spaces as imaginary 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings'. At times, processes of space construction actively shifted the boundaries between and among adults and children. Space itself was consequential. It was far more than an immobile container for action, mere set designs or backdrops to the action. These adults proposed that the new spaces for which they had some responsibility could take them beyond the Disneyesque and the adult-dominated spaces of modernity. Perhaps we are glimpsing some of the new 'places for children' (Lee, 2001) where their voice, agency and participation are felt. At times, children's participation dislocated (Edwards and Usher, 2000) or challenged the conditions of professional practice. These adults placed a high value on the relationships built up over time between them and the children. Their work with the YCs has meant that they took on roles that deviated from the norms for



their professions. A socio-spatial analysis of the data suggests that their performative and improvised professionalism and adulthood were co-emergent with an alternative vision of a participatory childhood. These dislocations were expressed in the diverse practices of their personal and professional roles rather than stabilised in identifiable categories. For these adults, the socio-spatial practices described were not seen as the conventional ones expected in the discourse of architecture, arts centre management or graphic design. New spaces such as the web-side, the magazine, the planned new building were not just static arenas for events - these spaces *themselves* were important arenas that enabled locally distinctive forms of adult-child relations and inter-generational practice to emerge.

### **Consequences for Researching Childhood**

The 'new studies of children and childhood' have not tended to focus on child-adult relations or the effects of participation on adults or on adult learning. In sociology of childhood circles the focus has often been on the child and 'childhood', per se, although the debate has been taken forward to some degree by Mayall (1994) through a de-essentialising of how childhood is generationally structured. Oldman (1996) takes a 'generational' reading of child-adult relations and provides a theoretical space for understanding the implications for both adults and children within a class frame. Ennew (1994) sustains an adults-as-oppressors versus children-as-resisters dualism arguing that in industrialised nations, we have trivialised childhood, marginalised and devalorised children, and timetabled their lives. But there are signs that researchers of childhood see the need to shift towards more relational and inter-generational approaches (Lee, 2001; Mayall, 2002). There is a recognition of how constructions of adulthood and childhood are mutually and inextricably interdependent. Qvortrup (1994) recognised some time back that the natures of adulthood and childhood were interrelated but this realisation was then coloured by an almost unquestioned 'fact' that continues to define so much of the 'New Social Study of Childhood'.

... one cannot deny an asymmetrical power relationship between adulthood and childhood. In this sense, children are as a matter of fact - justified or not - dependent on adults. (Qvortrup, 1994: 5).

In response, what little of the research in this area that is relational or inter-generationally focussed is limited by this taken-for-granted view. Aitken (2000) takes a dialogical approach to researching childhood but the analysis conforms to the adult-child oppositional norm. The bulk of data in the social study of childhood, even that collected as part of the relational research on childhood, appears to support the view that a child's 'being' is often 'at odds' with adultist and institutional conceptions of what a child should be 'becoming'. This analysis has, of course, got its place in identifying problems and challenging stereotypes but there may be more to research and other stories to report. Alanen and Mayall (2001) take up Qvortrup's challenge of theorizing and researching within a generational and relational conceptualization of childhood. Alanen's study (2001) draws attention to children's self-positioning of themselves as children (or children's own discourses of childhood which she terms 'childing'). This is contrasted with the everyday effects of the generational positioning of children - locating children in relation to non-children (which she terms 'generationing'). She is successful in looking at these practices without losing the importance of understanding children's agency and capacity in different domains. Alanen's study and our own, we submit, add to a growing recognition that adults and children are inextricably connected in processes of identification which Alanen calls adulting and childing. We have noted adults' desires to reinterpret and reorder elements in everyday and imaginary places in a *politics of space* that impacts on the on-going emergence of childhood and adulthood practices. Indications are that adults *and* children can be conceived of as 'becomings' (Roche, 1999; Lee, 2001) sharing perhaps many of the same problems and inhabiting overlapping or contested spaces. Because of the convergence of the personal and the spatial for these professionals and YCs, the

changing of space must now be understood as always political. Relations between adults, children and places do not simply occur *in* space and time; it is these relationships themselves which create/define adult/child spaces and times (Massey, 1992).

This research can locate itself within the 'New Social Studies of Childhood' (James et al., 1998) where interests in relationality and spatiality have emerged as recurring threads. We have addressed how the spatialised ideas of childhood connect with the socio-spatial practices of adults who worked in this organisation. Previous sociological perspectives neglected children's experience, configured children as 'becomings' and adults as the only legitimate 'beings'. With the interdisciplinary 'New Social Studies of Childhood', the response has been to continue to place the child centre-stage, deploy children's own voices to emphasise their agency and draw out difference. Some of these studies have taken the spatial into account (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b) and some have addressed the relationality of adults and children's lives in different domains (Alanen, 2001). But because so few studies have been relational *and* spatial or addressed adults' discourses on the matter, the interpretations offered provide us with few pictures of how adult and child practices are configured within and through space - in other words, the spatialisation of childing, adulting and inter-generationing. The emphasis on narratives about children's own spaces and children's agency in spite of adult's efforts to control them has meant that we are not offered ideas about how adults might enter into alternative symbiotic if contested partnerships with children. This evidence has shown that the predominance of children's voices in the social study of childhood can be complimented by adult voices to bring out a more dialogical view. Children's voices on their own can only provide a partial perspective on experiences that have inter-generational and spatial dimensions. The socio-spatial study of adult-child relations is, in fact, a necessary component of the 'New Social Study of Childhood'. Further interdisciplinary studies of the relational and spatial nature of adulthood and childhood

discourses are to be encouraged if we are to address the questions raised by Alanen (2000: 503): 'To what extent are children's life worlds still embedded within generational relations?; 'What do child-adult relations in fact contribute to the cultural reproduction of social life?' and Lee (2001): 'What happens to childhood if adult identities are not stable or certain?'

## **Conclusion**

The approach we employed as researchers involved young people in different aspects of the research process mirroring a relational, emergent and spatially sensitive theoretical position. This helped us to collect data on aspects of adult learning and identification while also addressing ethical considerations for engaging with the 'researched' in a participatory manner. Our analysis of this social milieu has shown that adulthood and childhood were interrelated emergent practices that overlapped. The adult professional and personal identifications we uncovered were not stable or fixed. They were fluid and deeply connected to how memories of past childhoods were narrated and influenced by the experience of attempting to engage with children in a participatory way. Spatially, the future identifications of both children and adults were uncertain and destined to co-emerge within the places that they were actively trying to create together.

This study has shown that taking a relational and spatial approach requires being open to a reversal of located, coherent, subjects, whether we consider these to be adults or children. Instead of just emphasising that children are beings too, we have shown the fruitfulness of considering *both adults and children* as partial 'becomings'. Creating more inclusive spaces for children's participation within organisations and services generally will impact deeply on the scope for adult and professional identification. Researchers should remain open to finding evidence that in the struggle for change, both adults and children perform co-emergent and sometimes incoherent identifications and that child and adult agency are inherently

connected. The findings lend support to the hypothesis that adult learning and processes of identification for children and adults are co-determined when professional practice aspires to make space for children's participation.

## References

- Aitken, S. (2000) Play, rights and borders: gender-bound parents and the social construction of children, in S. L. Holloway and G. Valentine, *Children's Geographies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Alanen, L. and B. Mayall, (2001) *Conceptualizing Child-Adult Relations*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Alanen, L. (2001) 'Childhood as a Generational Condition: children's daily lives in a central Finland Town', in L. Alanen and B. Mayall (eds) *Conceptualizing Adult-Child Relations*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Alanen, L. (2000) 'Review Essay: Visions of a social theory of childhood', *Childhood*, 7(4): 493-505.
- Borland, M., M. Hill, A. Laybourne, and A. Stafford (2001) *Improving Consultation with Children and Young People in Relevant Aspects of Policy-Making and Legislation in Scotland*. Scottish Parliament: Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Commissioned by the Scottish Parliament.
- Christensen, P. and A. James (2000) *Research With Children*. London: Falmer.
- Dorrian, L., K. Tisdall and D. Hamilton (1999) *Taking the Initiative - promoting young people's participation in public decision making in Scotland*. Carnegie UK Trust and Children in Scotland: Carnegie Young People Initiative, York Road, London.
- Edwards, R. and R. Usher (2000) *Globalisation and Pedagogy. Space, Place and Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ennew, J. (1994) 'Time for Children or Time for Adults', in J. Qvortrup, M. Brady, G. Sgritta, and H. Wintersberger (eds) *Childhood Matters: Social theory, practice and politics*, pp. 1-23. Brookfield, VT: Avebury.
- Fenwick T. (2001) 'Work Knowing "On the Fly": enterprise cultures and co-emergent epistemology', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 23(2): 243-259.

- Giroux, H. (1999) *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Gregoriou, Z. (2001) 'Does speaking of others involve receiving the "other"?', in G. J. J. Biesta and D. Egea-Kuehne, *Derrida and Education*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1996) Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? in P. duGay and S. Hall (Ed.s) *Cultural Identity*. Thousand Oaks and London: Sage.
- Heath, S. B. and M. W. McLaughlin (1993) *Identity and inner city youth beyond ethnicity and gender*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Holloway, S. and G. Valentine (2000a) 'Spatiality and the new social studies of childhood', *Sociology*, 34(4): 763-784.
- Holloway, S. and G. Valentine (eds) (2000b) *Children's Geographies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- James, A., C. Jemks and A. Prout (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lee, N. (1999) 'The Challenge of Childhood. Distributions of Childhood's Ambiguity in Adult Institutions', *Childhood* 6(4): 455-474.
- Lee, N. (2001) *Children and Society. Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*. Open University Press.
- McNeish, D. (1999) 'Promoting participation for children and young people: some key questions for health and social welfare organisations', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 13(2): 191 -203.
- Mannion, G. (2002) 'Education as a Spatial Practice: the shift from nouns to verbs'. Contribution to conference symposium: *The Altered Spaces of Lifelong Learning*. SCUTREA Conference, Stirling: University of Stirling, 2002.
- Massey, D. (1992) 'Politics and Space/Time', *New Left Review*, 196: 65-84.
- Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Matthews, H., M. Limb and M. Taylor (1999) 'Young People's Participation and Representation in Society', *Geoforum* 30: 135–44.
- Mayall, B. (ed) (1994) *Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced*. London: Falmer Press.
- Mayall, B. (2002) *Towards a Sociology for Childhood. Thinking from Children's Lives*. Open University Press.
- Morrow, V. (1998) *Understanding Families: Children's Perspectives*. York: National Children's Bureau with /Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Moss, P. and P. Petrie (2002) *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood*. London: Routledge Falmer / Taylor and Francis.
- Oldman, D. (1996) 'Adult-child relations as class relations', in J. Qvortrup et al. (eds) *Childhood Matters: social theory, practice and politics*. Aldershot: Avebury Press.
- Prout, A. (2000) 'Children's Participation, Control and Self-realisation in British Late Modernity', *Children and Society*, 14: 304 - 315.
- Qvortrup, J. (1994) 'Introduction', in J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta and H. Wintersberger (eds) *Childhood Matters*, pp. 1–24. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Roche, J. (1999) 'Children: Rights, Participation and Citizenship', *Childhood*, 6(4): 475 - 493.
- Sumara, D. and B. Davis (1997). Enlarging the space of the possible: Complexity, complicity, and action research practices, in D. Sumara and T. Carson (eds) *Action research as a living practice*, pp. 299–312. New York: Peter Lang.
- Tomlinson, P., (1989) 'Having it Both Ways: hierarchical focusing as research interview method', *British Educational Research Journal*, 15(2): 155-176.
- UK Government (1999) *Towards a Child-Friendly Society*. National report presented at Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Family Affairs. XXVI Session, Stockholm, 14-16 June, 1999.



UNICEF (1995) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. London:

UNICEF.

West, A. (1995) *You're On Your Own. Young People Leaving Care*. London: Save the Children.

West, A. (1999) 'Children's own research: street children and care in Britain and Bangladesh', *Childhood*, February, 6(1): 145-153.

Yin, R. K. (1989) *Case Study Research: design and methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used throughout.