

Progressing Participation: Taming the Space between Rhetoric and Reality

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Comment on This Article

Abstract

Participation, as a social and political movement, continues to gain momentum, and the legal and sociological frameworks supporting the rights of children and young people to participate in various aspects of social life are now well established. Yet, there are gaps and silences behind the rhetoric of participation that beg closer scrutiny. Such analysis is important in ensuring "participation" is not unproblematically adopted by policy makers and practitioners without regard to the complex and competing agendas at work in its implementation or any clear evidence of the significance or outcomes for the young people involved. This paper explores some of the complexities and ambiguities of participation through the lens of experience in working with a group of young people, 12 to 22 years old, who are actively involved with the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University, Lismore, Australia.

Keywords: [participation](#); [rights](#); [participatory models](#); [case studies](#)

Introduction

The legitimacy of child and youth participation in decision-making is now well documented (see for example, Lansdown 1995; 2001; Flekkoy and Kaufman 1997; Christenson and Allison 2000). However, as the youth participation movement has gained momentum, it has at times been clothed in a convincing rhetoric of benefits, not always voiced by those who know best, that is, the young people themselves. This rhetoric is strongly underpinned by discourses of rights and social justice (Hart 1992; 1997; Alderson 2000; Kirby 2003) and is increasingly appropriated to justify a wide range of child and youth participatory processes, resources and initiatives that risk being uncritically adopted by policy makers and practitioners without any clear evidence of the significance or outcomes for the young people involved (Chawla 2001; Fielding 2001; Percy-Smith and Malone 2001). Indeed, Davis and colleagues (in press, 2006) argue that the participation of children and young people has become so widely accepted as having a key role in the processes of challenging social exclusion that it has become a “policy mantra” and an “article of faith” in the Western world. Against this background, it is timely to examine and challenge the ways in which both the notion and practice of participation are to be interpreted, implemented and evaluated if participatory initiatives are to have positive and meaningful outcomes for children and young people (Childwatch International 2006).

This paper provides a brief overview of some of the key developments and issues in progressing child and youth participation. It analyzes ways in which the uncritical adoption of the rhetoric of participation as an intrinsic social “good” potentially masks the complex and resource-intensive work of supporting young people for meaningful participation. It suggests that while models of participation (for example, Hart 1992; Treseder 1997; Shier 2001) provide an important conceptual basis for progressing the participation agenda, they leave open the challenge of identifying and translating the underlying complexities that impact participation and influence its benefits. Greater critical scrutiny must now be focused on analyzing the differences between conceptual ideals of participation and the reality of specific situations for children. Any such inquiry must allow for the contemporary complexities that accompany the construct of participation to be opened up for debate and critical examination so that the ontological and epistemological goals of participation can be “re-examined, re-conceived and re-named” (Cannella and Lincoln 2004, 301).

The Case for Participation

The emphasis on increased participation of all citizens has become a generalized feature of late modernity and has, to some extent, been shaped by the construct of “social exclusion” (Hill et al. 2004). As a result, there is now an extensive body of literature focusing specifically on child and youth participation that has significantly enhanced the ways we think about young people’s lives, including the central importance of involving them in decision-making (Cashmore 2002 and 2003; Smith et al. 2003; Smart et al. 2001). This development has been influenced both by the children’s rights agenda and emerging theories of the new social studies of childhood that emphasize children’s capacity as well as their dependency. Recently, Taylor (2005) has suggested that new conceptions of children’s capabilities have

set the stage for a transformation in thinking about participation in terms of citizenship, not only in the routine contexts of children's everyday lives, but also in the social and civic settings where law, policy and practice are created and implemented.

The benefits of participation are well established and have been found to include enhancement of skills, capacity, competence and self-esteem (Alderson 2000); improved self-efficacy (Greenwood and Levin 1998; Morrow 1999); strengthening of social, negotiation and judgment skills through trial, error and compromise (Raynor 2003); as well as increased protection, as a result of having the opportunity to identify issues and be heard (Alderson 2000). Raynor (2003) further suggests that an important argument for children's participation has to do with the benefits that result from adults and children talking together while making decisions, not least because this enables adults and children to mutually propose and agree to decisions, thus improving the chances of the decisions working.

While the identified benefits of participation are often underpinned, or at least accompanied, by discourses of rights and social justice, they also point to the importance of acknowledging children's need for care, protection and guidance in the context of warm, respectful and reciprocal relationships (Taylor 2005; Neale 2002; Smart 2002). This is most evident in views that the participation of children and young people provides opportunities for them to learn they have rights and responsibilities, to explore what their rights and responsibilities are, to identify which rights predominate in what contexts and to become more cognizant of the idea that one's rights and freedoms can affect the rights of others (Lansdown 2001; Hart 1992 and 1997; Alderson 2000; Kirby 2003). It has also been well argued that participation has social benefits in that it contributes to an increased understanding of the democratic process and to the development of notions of citizenship (Blanchard 2003; Flekkoy and Kaufman 1997; Melton 1998; 2002; Limber and Kaufman 2002; Smith et al. 2003; Kaufman and Rizzini 2002). This work thereby progresses key debates about the value of child and youth participation in the everyday contexts in which they live.

The idea that children and young people have a right to participate in decisions about matters that affect their lives is also firmly enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC obliges states to ensure that children and young people have opportunities to exercise the participatory rights listed in Articles 12 to 15.¹ In Australia, courts have held that guidance as to the meaning and effect of the relevant provisions of the CRC can be gleaned from the deliberations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and from the writings of expert international bodies such as UNICEF. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has confirmed the significance and scope of the participatory rights afforded by the CRC:

¹ See *Chan v Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs* (1989) 169 CLR 379 at 392, 396-7, 399-400, 405, 416, 430; *Commonwealth v Hamilton* (2000) 108 FCR 378 at 388 per Katz J.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child principally enshrines children's participation in all matters affecting children. Therefore, States parties must take all appropriate measures to ensure that the concept of the child as rights-holders is anchored in the child's daily life from the earliest stage: at home (and including, when applicable, the extended family); in school; in day care facilities and in his or her community. States parties should take all appropriate measures to promote the active involvement of parents (and extended families), schools and communities at large, in the promotion and creation of opportunities for young children to actively and progressively exercise their rights in the everyday activities. In this regard, special attention must be given to the freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion and the right to privacy of the youngest children, according to their evolving capacity (Recommendations issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child during its 37th Session in Geneva on 17 September 2004).

Two key points arise in relation to this statement. First, the obligations imposed by the CRC on states to facilitate participation by children and young people begin from the child's earliest involvement in family and community life. Article 12, in particular, challenges states to consider children and young people as citizens with both the capacity and the right to agency (Roche 1999) rather than construing children and young people as awaiting transformation into mature, rational and competent adults (Mackay 1973). What is significant in terms of policy and practice is that the right to participate is not static or fixed. Instead, the expression of the right to participate expands with the increasing maturity of the child, which implies the processes enabling participation must be adapted according to the child's evolving capacity.

Second, a substantial proportion of the explicit and implicit participatory rights afforded by the CRC can only be exercised if mechanisms or processes are in place to facilitate the participation of young people as they negotiate access to the personnel, bureaucracies, policies, processes, systems and facilities that govern these areas of public life. Various commentators have made clear that Article 12 poses serious challenges, both in practical terms of how to hear and act upon what children and young people say and in conceptual terms of how to elevate their social status in ways that take account of their rights, their contributions to the social order and their citizenship (Smart 2002; Mayall 2002 and Shier 2001). In practical terms, the discharge of these obligations requires ongoing attention to the conditions necessary for children and young people to exercise their right to participate, providing opportunities for them to do so and helping adults develop expertise to hear what children say in different types of settings (Griffiths and Kandel 2000). A key question emerges, then, as to whether and how adults can best identify the underlying complexities that impact and influence participation so that its principles and prospects are relevant and important to the everyday lived experience of children and young people.

Putting Participation into Practice

The participatory rights of children and young people referred to above have been discussed in policy and program contexts as diverse as healthcare, the environment and urban planning (Chawla 2001; Driskell 2002); school and local government decision-making (Freeman et al. 2003); out-of-home care management (Cashmore 2002); and family law decision-making (Smith 2002; Cashmore 2003; Graham and Fitzgerald 2006). However, while the rhetoric of participation is increasingly evident in policy and program contexts in Australia, there are significant concerns about the extent to which participation rights are being realized (see for example, the Non-Government Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 2005; Davis et al., in press). For many young people, there remains a disjuncture between the participatory rights provisions in the CRC and their lived experience in exercising these rights (Fielding 2001; Graham et al. 2005). Recent research exploring children's participation in forums ranging across education, child policy, child welfare and the law has further highlighted the gap between the rhetoric and reality of children's right to participate (Bolzan et al. 2005).

A number of models have been developed in recent years that seek to conceptualize the different levels of engagement for young people in participatory processes (see for example, Arnstein 1969; Hart 1992; Halldorson 1996; Treseder 1997; Lardner 2001; Shier 2001). Each model represents a participation continuum ranging from non-participation through to full participation. What distinguishes each model is the way that the gradations of participation are conceptualized. For example, Hart (1992) and Arnstein (1969) conceive participation as a ladder, Lardner (2001) as a grid, Shier (2001) and Treseder (1997) as tables, and Halldorson (1996) as a wheel. Significantly, the non-linear nature of both Lardner's and Halldorson's models implicitly acknowledge the power nuances and multi-layered relationships that exist in participatory processes, including that children and young people might legitimately exercise varying degrees of power in some aspects of an activity and not others (for example, planning but not implementation), or in some activities but not others.

The development of these models has also contributed to the identification of processes and procedures that potentially contribute to effective and meaningful participation. Lansdown (2001), for example, advocates for approaches that include the following elements: children and young people must understand what the project or the process is about, what it is for and their role in it; power relations and decision-making structures must be transparent; children and young people should be involved from the earliest possible stage of any initiative; all children and young people should be treated with equal respect regardless of their age, situation, ethnicity, abilities or other factors; ground rules should be established with all children and young people at the beginning; participation should be voluntary and children and young people are entitled to respect for their views and experience. Other indicators that have been offered to identify effective and meaningful participation are the provision of a personal or social benefit to the young people involved, and the achievement of a tangible outcome (McNeish and Newman 2002). It has also been noted that the participation agenda needs to

originate within the relevant organization rather than being imposed by outside actors or entities (Freeman et al. 2003).

What is significant about most existing models of participation is that they analyze participation in terms of outcomes, that is, the focus is on the possible range or level of engagement likely through different participatory processes. The models provide an important contribution toward progressing the participation agenda, evidenced by the degree to which they are widely cited to illustrate the benefits of a participatory process that is more, rather than less, child and youth inclusive and directed. While in recent times there is increasing evidence of scholarly activity that problematizes participation, such as research initiatives undertaken by the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago in New Zealand, more work is needed that makes visible the complexities of translating the rhetoric of participation into reality.

In response to this challenge, the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP)² based at Southern Cross University in Australia established a youth advisory group, subsequently named the *Young People, Big Voice* (YPBV) committee. The following discussion provides an overview of the challenges that have arisen to date in the early stages of undertaking this initiative.

“Young People, Big Voice”: A Case Study of Participation in a Rural and Regional Context

Youth in small towns and rural communities potentially share in the same well-documented benefits of, and resistances to, participation referred to in the above discussion. It has also been found that attempts to address the concerns of young people in small towns and rural communities have been somewhat paternalistic; while young people and various youth organizations may be consulted for their views on different issues, they are seldom invited or encouraged to become active participants in planning and decision-making at the community level (Black et al. 2000). In establishing the YPBV, the Centre sought to address such concerns by

² Paraphrased, these provisions provide that children capable of forming their own views have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them (in particular, in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them) and their views are to be given due weight in accordance with age and maturity (Article 12); children have the right to freedom of expression (including seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas of all kinds) subject only to restrictions as are provided by law and are necessary to respect the rights or reputations of others or for the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals (Article 13); states shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the rights and duties of the parents/legal guardians to provide direction to the child's exercise of this right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. (Article 14) States recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 15) (Hodgkin and Newell 2002). While Articles 12 to 15 of the CRC give all children and young people in Australia under the age of 18 the explicit participatory rights noted above, other provisions in the CRC granting specific rights in relation to education, family and the law also provide implicit participatory rights.

providing young people with an opportunity to collaborate on the Centre's research, education and advocacy activities and to participate in activities in the wider community. Embedded within this aim was a commitment to exploring the issues and implications in setting up a model of participation that was explicitly underpinned by strong, evidence-based, youth-focused practice while simultaneously providing the CCYP with input and advice that could progress its goals and objectives. The approach required that the CCYP provide an explicit statement of its values and assumptions regarding the participation of children and young people. The Centre articulates its values and assumptions in its strategic plan as follows:

- Children and young people are critically important in our communities and they have rights, responsibilities, roles and capacities.
- The voices of children and young people should be heard in the decisions that affect them.
- Children and young people live their lives in a variety of contexts, hence, their experience and perspectives will be diverse.
- The experiences of children and young people in regional and rural areas are sometimes not reflected in national policies.
- Collaboration with children and young people, as well as families, service providers, researchers and policy makers will lead to better outcomes for them.
- A multidisciplinary approach is required to account for the complexity in the lives of many children and young people.
- Children, young people and their families could benefit significantly through the collaborative activities of the University and service providers in the region.

The central importance of the role of young people in the Centre's activities was fundamental to the vision in establishing the CCYP. Eight young people from a diverse range of backgrounds were invited to speak at the Centre's opening conference in February 2004. Four were recommended by local organizations involved with youth. The organizations included CREATE (representing children in out-of-home care), the YWCA (a community-based education and welfare agency), and the Young and Powerful School (an independent school focused on promoting the education of children who might benefit from an alternative to mainstream schooling). An Aboriginal leader recommended another young person to participate; one was known to, and invited by, a staff member at the Centre; and two volunteered to speak after a CCYP researcher addressed their school's Student Representative Council. The group was comprised of three boys and five girls with wide-ranging backgrounds and experiences. They included indigenous youth, young people with out-of-home care experience, an early school leaver and a school leader. This breadth of background within the group generated critically important dialogue – a contribution highly rated and frequently commented upon by the 300 delegates who heard the young people speak at the inaugural conference.

A key insight from the inclusion of the young people in this initiative was the importance of "scaffolding" the young people for participation. "Scaffolding" is a

metaphor that Smith (2002) draws on to explain the support provided to young people by skilled partners for a particular task, which is then gradually withdrawn as the young person's competence increases and a more equal partnership emerges. Scaffolding, in the CCYP context, involved a number of meetings with the group to work productively through issues of concern both to the Centre (such as the meaning and implications of "informed" consent and the importance of the young people taking ownership of what they wished to contribute) and to the young people themselves (their confidence, content focus, strategies for presenting). The scaffolding process prompted a re-visioning of the ethical implications of setting up participatory processes with and for young people – a process that culminated in the development and adoption of ethical guidelines for the Centre to guide the participation of children and young people in all its activities, including research.³

Following the success of the conference, the young people involved were invited to form the core of a youth advisory group for the Centre, an invitation they all accepted. The advisory group renamed itself *Young People Big Voice* (YPBV) at their first meeting (a contribution of the youngest member of the committee). The role proposed for the YPBV was initially identified as informing the activities of the Centre in relation to research projects, educational conferences and seminars, as well as various advocacy initiatives. At its first meeting, the YPBV drew up terms of reference based on its broad role and included tasks such as assisting in the development of a "good practice" participation training program for children and young people, further recruitment and training of participants for the YPBV, developing a process to represent the views and activities of the YPBV to the Centre's (adult) advisory board, assisting with establishment of the website and representing the Centre at seminars and educational activities. The group later added two additional tasks, which were to advise the local City Council and other local organizations about issues requiring youth consultation (at the invitation of that Council) and to pursue initiatives that address concerns identified by young people in the local region.

To date, the YPBV has developed and implemented its terms of reference, designed a flyer to advertise the Centre and YPBV's specific role, produced an application form for membership, developed an information sheet about meeting procedures, and designed a template to record minutes of meetings. The group has been engaged in assessing proposals for the local government area annual youth consultation, taken part in a national youth mental health participation strategy and regularly volunteered at the Centre with other activities such as designing and undertaking the artwork for a YPBV logo and poster to be used at conferences and other promotional opportunities. Members of the YPBV have actively participated in fundraising to support and extend their activities, including the development of a

³ The Centre was opened on February 20, 2004, by then-Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Mr. Larry Anthony, with the support of Southern Cross University. The Centre aims to promote the participation of children and young people in research, education and advocacy by bringing together four important strands: an interdisciplinary approach; a focus on research, education and advocacy for children and young people; an emphasis on cross-sectoral partnerships to promote evidence-based policy and practice; and the inclusion and the participation of children and young people.

youth resource card listing contact information for local services young people may wish to access.

An important role for the YPBV yet to be fully realized is consistent engagement with Ph.D. students and other researchers in the use of more child- and youth-focused methods in their research designs. To date, the group has reviewed a small number of projects in relation to overall research focus, the wording and presentation of survey and interview questions, consent forms and research questions and the development of games and strategies to use with children or young people, particularly in relation to sensitive issues. The development of a role in research for the group, like so many of their other activities, has been necessarily iterative.

A researcher at the Centre was appointed by the Director to provide mentorship and to facilitate the group's activities. Among other things, the mentor organized activities to help develop a stronger understanding and appreciation of each member's different points of view. The mentor and group members sought opportunities to link into existing expertise outside the region to assist with conceptualizing the best approach to participation. The group sent a delegation of three young people to a conference in Sydney to learn about community change-making. A key outcome was that the YPBV then identified the strategic importance of making stronger links with key groups in the community in order to progress change as a result of participation. It is this focus on participation *for change* that has highlighted the complexity of the space the young people occupy between agendas set by themselves and those set by the Centre or other external organizations.

In reviewing the role and processes of the YPBV through the lens of existing models, such as those outlined earlier in this paper, it is evident that the young people involved need to be scaffolded to engage at the highest level possible, subject to their developing capacity for participation, as well as their motivation. Consequently, their participation will continue to vary from activity to activity. In some cases, members of the YPBV participate in an advisory or consultative capacity, while in others they assume a self-directed and autonomous stance with a more apparent role in decision-making. Thus, their participation is somewhat contingent on the nature of the activity and its context and origins, as well as respect for the capacity of the young people for the task, taking into account their personality differences, social and emotional skills, literacy levels and motivation. It is significant to note that the capacity of YPBV members to participate at a more autonomous level has not evolved in a linear manner, as a number of existing models infer. Rather, the young people involved appear to "to and fro" in their desire to participate, sometimes participating more or less depending on a range of factors and circumstances (Graham and Fitzgerald 2006). Clearly, processes for participation, including adult assumptions and expectations, must allow for this movement by being able to recognize and trust young people's capacity to exercise discretion about the level and manner in which they participate.

It is also clear that identification and “ownership” of outcomes by the young people are critically important, as is continual negotiation of the alignment among the outcomes articulated by the young people, the available budget and the CCYP objectives. Critically important, too, are the attributes and skills of the facilitator, including the ability to listen, hear and respond to participants, create an environment of trust and safety, recognize and moderate conflict and difference, provide mentoring and enable a simultaneous focus on both youth and organizational needs.

What Do Young People Tell Us about Their Participation?

Key in any attempt to assess whether the participation provided through the YPBV could be construed as optimal, meaningful or effective is to involve the young people in critically evaluating their experience, not just in terms of whether their identified outcomes are being achieved, but also in relation to whether the experience has resulted in any perceived change in their attitudes, skills or capacity to act. To this end, members of the YPBV were invited to participate in an evaluation consisting of a questionnaire and focus group discussion. However, in response to the young people’s resistance to the formality of a questionnaire, the CCYP and YPBV instead agreed to a semi-structured individual interview evaluation format. The interviews sought to gain a better understanding of whether the model being implemented was providing sufficient opportunities for participation, whether the young people were satisfied with their participation and to what extent the activities identified in their terms of reference were being implemented and in what ways. The evaluation process attempted to capture qualitatively whether and how members perceived their participation in YPBV was of direct or indirect benefit to them.

The most frequently stated significant benefits of YPBV participation include having the opportunity to “give something to the community”; to be part of a group focused on being productive “rather than sitting at home”; to engage with other young people “who you wouldn’t normally meet”; to attend conferences outside the region that broadened understanding and skills, as well as being able to “turn ideas into something practical” (such as the youth resource card project). It is interesting to note that several of the identified benefits emerge simply by virtue of the group member’s perception that his or her participation was valued and respected, not only by other group members but also by the staff in the CCYP and other adults within the wider community.

The benefits identified by the YPBV members appear to depart from those identified in research on participation in other youth development programs, which typically highlights benefits related to young people’s increased self-esteem and educational or employment prospects (for example, Lamborn et al. 1992; Eccles and Barber 1999; McLaughlin 2000; Hall et al. 2003). YPBV members also did not explicitly confirm the issues identified by the facilitator as having potential benefit. They did not, for example, focus on the significance of being consulted about issues within the local community or on having their voices heard in decision-making processes. Likewise, skill development such as chairing a meeting or writing funding

submissions was rated quite low by YPBV members, while it was assumed by the facilitator to be of significant benefit.

Key issues identified by members of the YPBV and the facilitator that have impacted the effectiveness of the YPBV (and limited the opportunities for the young people's effective participation) include constraints linked to limited funding and resources available through the CCYP; limited literacy, conflict resolution and leadership skills of group members; lack of confidence by members in writing emails or letters and in initiating contact with internal or external resource people; problems with transport to meetings; costs associated with provision of quality training; and the impact of changing membership of the YPBV brought about by their own or their families' movement out of the region for employment or education. A further identified constraint was the lack of an analogous model for youth participation within a university setting, which necessitated the establishment and implementation of new processes and procedures associated with risk management, particularly relating to occupational health and safety, duty of care and child protection issues.⁴

Perhaps the most significant emerging issue is how to most effectively identify the ongoing procedural conditions under which the YPBV might best work. To date, this issue has generated a number of tensions in regard to settling the purpose and function of the group and the expectations of the young people for their ongoing and meaningful involvement. While the need for adopting a mentoring-as-training model (where issues of power and decision-making are readily identified and discussed) quickly became apparent, members of the YPBV have not enthusiastically adopted all of the Centre's projects. The facilitator has had to develop a heightened understanding and insight into the possibilities and constraints of imposing consultation and participation when there are clearly limited identified benefits for the young people involved in doing so.

While the issues identified above have presented some challenging moments, we would argue that it is important to resist characterizing these issues as rendering the participation effective or ineffective in terms of its benefits for the YPBV members. The issues are complex, and the perceived strengths of the participatory model can simultaneously provide the most significant limitations. For example, the diverse life experiences of YPBV members potentially make them a representative group that can give voice to a wide range of issues and concerns. Paradoxically, such disparate backgrounds can result in quite polarized views which, when coupled with varying levels of literacy, social skills and conflict resolution, often requires skilled facilitation in ensuring the processes and decisions are underpinned by the ethic of care and respect deemed by participants to be so important to their participation. Nevertheless, we suggest that greater attention to how we might better navigate the complexities of participation, as it is applied in practice,

⁴ See CCYP Code of Ethical Research Practice at www.cryp.scu.edu.au and CCYP Policies at www.cryp.scu.edu.au.

together with broad dissemination of the resulting insights can only contribute positively to more informed practice with children and young people.

Conclusion

While initiatives that attempt to develop participatory involvement by children and young people in areas of research, policy or practice might appear to be progressive and liberal in their focus on "child and youth centeredness" there remains some uncertainty as to whether or how such ideals translate into reality (Taylor 2005; Smart 2002). The experience of attempting to implement a model of youth participation has provided some important insights, not the least of which is the critical importance of approaching "participation" from an assumptive base that recognizes and values the complexities and contradictions associated with its perceived benefits. At the Centre for Children and Young People, this means further consideration needs to be given to the critical importance of a reflexive approach to participation that is realistic, enabling and sustainable, particularly from the perspectives of those who know best — the young people themselves.

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The full text of Recommendations issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child during its 37th Session in Geneva on 17 September 2004 is available at:
www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/Recommendations.doc