

Book review

Book review: *Children's rights to participate in out-of-home care: International social work contexts*, edited by Claudia Equit and Jade Purtell

Nina Jann^{1,*}

¹ Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Social Pedagogy, University of Tübingen, Germany

* Correspondence: nina.jann@uni-tuebingen.de

Publication date: 22 May 2024

How to cite

Jann, N. (2024). Book review: *Children's rights to participate in out-of-home care: International social work contexts*, edited by Claudia Equit and Jade Purtell. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 13(1): 6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2024.v13.x.006>.

Peer review

This article has been through editorial review.

Copyright

2024, Nina Jann. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2024.v13.x.006>.

Open access

International Journal of Social Pedagogy is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Book review: *Children's rights to participate in out-of-home care: International social work contexts*, edited by Claudia Equit and Jade Purtell

Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023, 214 pp., ISBNs: 978-10033-1936-8 (ebk); 978-1032-21566-2 (hbk)

The participation of young people living in residential and foster care has emerged as a central international concern and a significant challenge, due not least to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children and young people should be empowered and supported in advocating their concerns and interests, as well as enabled to participate in the decisions that affect them. In many countries participation has been established as a professional standard of successful child and youth welfare, with institutions being obliged to implement participation rights. However, although participation is advocated at various levels, empirical studies indicate substantial shortcomings in its practical implementation (p. 13). This edited volume addresses this observation and substantiates it with results from current research projects.

There are 10 articles drawing on knowledge from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. The first three chapters cover

theoretical perspectives on participation within residential and foster-care settings. There are then seven contributions presenting empirical results from research projects on the participation of young people in out-of-home care. The volume concludes with a synthesis article by the two editors, which integrates the themes and issues explored in preceding contributions.

Two articles in particular illustrate the volume's thematic focus. On the one hand, Kiaras Gharabaghi (Canada) argues in his contribution that the participation of children and young people too often runs the risk of being reduced to its function as an aesthetic feature. Consequently, he pleads for leaving behind the 'concept of youth centeredness' (p. 14) and instead focusing on the power dynamics that permeate the relationship between adults and young people in out-of-home care (p. 22). As an alternative approach Gharabaghi suggests understanding participation as playing games. He justifies his proposal with the assumption that you cannot play a game without players: 'And young people are players in the game of participation' (p. 25).

Valentina Calcaterra and Maria Luisa Raineri (Italy), on the other hand, discuss the concept of independent professional advocacy in day-care centres promoting young people's participation in Italy. Their premise is rooted in the idea that children can be considered 'key experts' (p. 167) of the situations that they experience. For this reason, they should be supported 'to be active partners in defining interventions in their favor' (p. 167). To facilitate children's participation, the authors relate to advocacy based on their research findings. They define it as 'an anti-oppressive relational social work practice aimed at helping people express their opinions and be heard in the decision-making process that affect them' (p. 170). Through the analysis of five case studies, they show the positive outcome of advocacy work, both in terms of developing care plans and of increasing awareness among adults about child participation.

Elsewhere in the book, attention is given to issues such as ethical and trauma-informed approaches to youth participation (Bollinger/Purtell/Scott), professional practice in rights-based foster care (Falch-Eriksen/Toros), the link between everyday spaces and agency of young people (Join-Lambert) or the way authorities responsible for monitoring care deal with participation (Palsson). Further, the volume includes a reflection on the collective participation of youth in foster care (Brady/Forkan/Jackson/Tierney), the perspective of professionals in the welfare system as critical agents and facilitators of young people's participation (Calheiros/Magalhaes/Pinheiro) and the question, how the experiences of children in residential care can be better understood and services can be designed from the point of view of its users (Eberitzsch/Keller/Rohrbach). Finally, Equit shows the correlation of different subcultures in residential groups in Germany and their implications for participation and the victimisation of children and young people.

In summary, the book is suitable for people who are just starting to deal with the concept of participation, as well as those seeking new insights into the topic. The contributions summarise the current state of the debates and emphasise the need 'to address the fundamental power issues that are at the root of participation' (p. 14). However – and here lies the decisive contribution of the volume – it shows theoretical approaches and practical developments that push participation further by articulating developmental needs as well as innovative approaches to enhance participation by children in residential and foster care. The international comparative perspective is particularly enriching for this purpose: despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the different social contexts and welfare state systems, reading the volume and examining the practical examples presented is inspiring and thought-provoking, enabling the reader to think outside the box of participation models. This may bring innovative impulses for regional practice development.

In addition to these content-related aspects, the distinctive feature of the book, involving the new review process by care leavers must be emphasised. The editors highlight their intention 'to do research not only *about* children and adolescents but also *with* them' (p. 1). The fact that all chapters in the book have been reviewed by care-experienced individuals is an exceptional approach that hopefully will spread in the field.

The volume is a valuable contribution to the national and international discourse on participation, but one critical point must be raised. The book compiles empirical results and practical examples exclusively from the context of the Global North. The editors declare the implementation of children's rights 'as a global requirement' (p. 1). Hence, it would be enriching for international debates to shed light on the implementation of participation in the Global South – maybe in the context of another volume addressing this pressing issue.