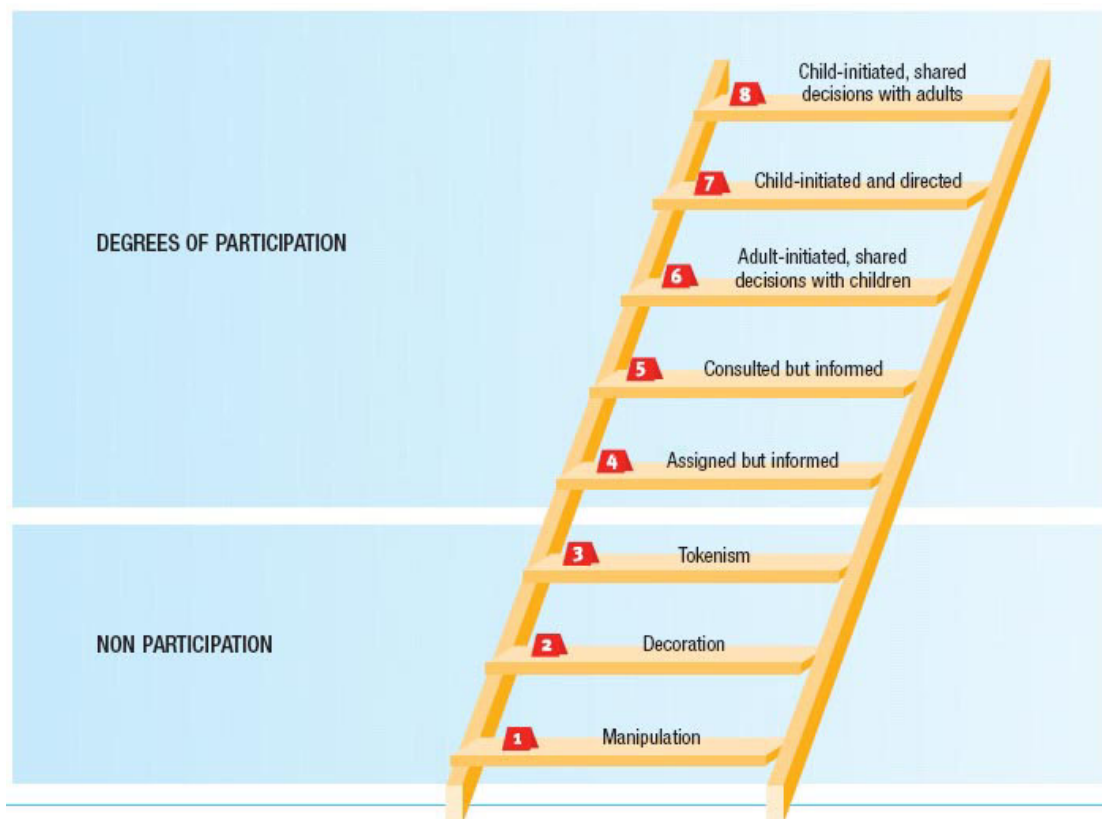


The Ladder of children's participation

Participation - in what, and how?

What are the types of decisions children and young people can be involved in, and what is the relationship between the young people and the adults when the participatory approach is being used in practice? When should teachers and adults be more active in guiding children, and when should they step back and allow the children to work independently? Roger Hart developed a model, the *Ladder of participation*, which contains eight steps, each step representing increasing degrees of pupil participation and different forms of cooperation with adults.

Figure: The Ladder of children's participation by Roger Hart



Hart calls the three lowest steps on the ladder “non-participation”, and emphasises that many projects claiming to involve children could be characterised as non-participation rather than as belonging to the higher steps on the ladder or what he calls “real participation”.

As shown in the figure, the Shape Up approach suggests a non-hierarchical format representing different forms of participation and acknowledging the diverse possible degrees of children's involvement, initiative and influence in order to avoid signifying lower and higher levels of participation and normative use of the levels description. This representation points to five different, but nonetheless equally valid, forms of participation enabling the choice that is most helpful given the specifics of the context (e.g. school, the educational system, city,



culture, etc.) and the particular situation (e.g. the project phase, the specific topic at hand, pupils preferences, etc.).

Source: HART, R. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*, Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
 HART, R. (1997), *Children's participation, the theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*, London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.

How to use the ladder of participation

The following template can be used to consider children's influence in various stages of decision-making. Where is it possible for children to get influence and how big will that influence be?

	Participation in the project?	Deciding the subject	Investigation	Vision and goals	Action	Evaluation
Children's initiative. Dialogue with teachers and joint decisions.						
Children's initiative. Children decide alone.						
Teachers' initiative, dialogue with children and joint decisions.						
Teachers' initiative. Teachers decide alone.						

Source: Jensen, B.B. (2010): Sundhedspædagogiske kernebegreber. I: Kamper-Jørgensen et al.: *Forebyggende sundhedsarbejde*. Munksgaard Danmark

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