# Children's Participation and Adult-Child Relations

*A critical analysis of looked after children in*
*Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies*

**(An Ethnographic Study)**


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# Contents

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## Abstract

The study was informed by an interest in the relational aspects of children's participation and how children's participation can practically be shifted from being a transactional experience to a transformational, participatory experience. It highlights the complexity of the issues involved in children's participation and how it actually works in practice in a residential child care context. It provides deeper insights into the social, cultural and political issues that influence how children participate and relates these to the larger discourse of development ethics, children's citizenship and agency.

Ethnographic research was conducted in two major children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago for a period of two years where children's participation in decision making processes was the key focus of attention. Data analysis using a combination of the scientific qualitative software, Atlas.ti7, and the constant comparative method, revealed five essential themes related to the participation experiences of children in residential care. These themes are: the complexity of caring relationships between adults and children; participation, paternalism, resistance and resilience; Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a new site of conflict for children's participation; how adults and looked after children negotiated meaning at the broader policy level and positive aspects of residential child care. A combination of ideas from development ethics, critical social work theory, children's agency and care ethics has been applied to the analysis of children's participation, which includes four key areas: (1) the meaning of increasing children's agency in residential care; (2) the interdependence of adults and looked after children; (3) children's participation as an indigenous experience and (4) children's experiences as collective decision makers.

This research therefore presents useful insights into children's participation in post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago and presents findings which challenge traditional assumptions held about children by adults as being incompetent and dependent. It also provides an alternative approach to understanding children's participation which incorporates adult-child relations as opposed to only taking a rights-based approach. Although the findings cannot be generalised to all children's experiences regarding participation, knowledge about how to identify children's participation and its relational issues might be transferable. There are lessons from the adults' and children's experiences which will be useful to policy makers, researchers, children themselves and practitioners in the field of child welfare and children's rights.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following individuals who supported me throughout my journey: My supervisors, Professor David B. Smith and Dr. Carolyn Taylor, Department of Sociology for their tremendous support and critical review of my work; The Board and Management, staff and children of St. Mary's Children's Home and St. Dominic's Children's Home; all research participants; The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development; The Board and Management of The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago; Artist, Shawn Peters, Sydney Henry, Former Manager of The Sunbeam Boys' Home, Jamaica; Heroes Foundation/ Big Brother Big Sister of Trinidad and Tobago; Investing in Children, Durham, UK.

A special thank you to my family and friends who supported me throughout my studies. Your contributions, encouragement and patience are greatly appreciated.

May God continue to bless all of you.

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to all the looked after children I worked with before the study, during the study and those I continue to work with. A special dedication is made to those participants who have left care and continue to seek purpose in life.


Khadijah Williams

(Formerly Khadijah Williams-Peters)

## List of Abbreviations

**CATT:** Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

**ICTs:** Information and Communication Technologies

**H1:** Home 1/ St. Mary's Children's Home

**H2:** Home 2/ St. Dominic's Children's Home

**HDI:** Human Development Index

**JHS:** Juvenile Home Supervisor (I, II, III after the title suggests seniority)

**NFSD:** National Family Services Division

**SASC:** Statutory Authority Service Commission

**UN:** United Nations

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund

**UNCRC:** United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme

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# Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

## 1.1: Introduction

Having become a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991, Trinidad and Tobago has made strides to develop legislative and regulatory frameworks which provide guidance to support children and the relationships that support their best interests. However, while the efforts are commendable, the actual implementation of legislation and necessary child care support systems are lacking. At the time of this study, there were no state owned children's homes and the establishment of private homes was on the rise without any regulatory framework. Also, a ten year old foster care pilot programme and an adoption system were yet to be reviewed. The central child protection agency to coordinate or monitor child care services, The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, was not operational due to legislative delays. As such, there was no formal child protection system in Trinidad and Tobago, although attempts to establish one were underway. There are significant gaps that are indicative of deficiencies in: i) meaningful children's participation; ii) the government in the fulfilment of its role to safeguard the welfare of children, especially children in state care; and iii) parents' and caregivers' roles in ensuring that the best interests of children are considered in decision making.

This study of child care in Trinidad and Tobago is ground breaking and it focuses on the cultural and social conditions which influence children's participation, the perceptions of children about care and participation, and care givers' and other

stakeholders' perceptions about their experiences and relationships with children as they relate to children's participation. The study builds on earlier research which focused on various aspects of children's participation in decision making, and attempts to gain further insights into the relational issues involved. It seeks to bring understanding of a culturally sensitive approach to children's participation, which can help contribute to children achieving participation in civil society, self-protection and personal independence. The theoretical approaches applied to the analysis of the findings of the study include Roger Hart's (1992) model of participation, ideas about children as social actors and citizens with agency (Cockburn, 2013; James *et al* 1998; Oswell, 2013), care ethics (Noddings, 1984, 2002; Slote, 2007; Held, 2006), critical social work (Allan *et al,* 2009; Fook, 2002, 2012) and development ethics as developed by Denis Goulet (1995). This study therefore provides analysis that is relevant to understanding the needs of looked after children in a socio-cultural context and contributes to our understanding of intergenerational linkages in decision making between children and adults.

## 1.2: The significance of the study

It has been the custom in Trinidad and Tobago as in other countries to have the needs of children in care determined by statistical data generated through activities such as the national census, surveys or recommendations made by international corporations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations (UN). In relation to

poverty, the World Bank has criticised this top-down approach for being ineffective in meeting targets (World Bank, 2002). The limitation of this approach is further substantiated by local evidence that funding allocated to children failed to reach them directly, with the majority of funds allocated to personnel and equipment and less investment in child development programmes (Pantin, 2010a). This may be attributed to the fact that children are often excluded from participation in areas such as planning how to use resources for their benefit (Thomas, 2007; Tisdall & Davis, 2004). As a result, 'expert' panels in the form of Boards and Committees are usually responsible for designing policies and developing intervention plans for children without their input. Experts often lack familiarity with the children and their issues (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

The study is timely given the increasing focus on the need to improve children's welfare in Trinidad and Tobago and is relevant to calls to re-examine public care systems in the country – systems which have long been criticised for their shortcomings in other countries (Mallon & McCartt Hess, 2005). In Trinidad and Tobago, the child welfare system is very traditional with residential care playing a major role. The traditions which exist have little place for children's participation in decision making but there is potential for development in this area. Children in care are among the excluded and may be more prone to institutional and socio-cultural barriers to participation than children not in care, despite evidence of the benefits of their participation (Clark & Moss, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Thomas, 2007). Adult-child interaction plays a significant role in developing opportunities and experiences for

children; this impacts on their levels of participation (Mannion, 2007) and requires further exploration. The study therefore examines how the dominant views held by adults about children and the interaction they share with them influence children's participation experiences and contribute to safeguarding children. It is anticipated that by studying this aspect of child welfare, it will be possible to understand how children's participation can be systematically and sustainably included in child care.

### 1.3: My personal interest in children's participation

My interest in children's participation stems from my experience as a professional social worker and school counsellor and my earlier experiences as a youth leader in my community. These experiences have provided me with practical knowledge of the benefits and challenges of children's participation in decision making. My work with looked after children stems from professional roles I held in several governmental and non-governmental organisations. My postgraduate training in social work management and administration further fuelled my interested in policy and managerial issues and more specifically how service users can become more involved in decision making which affects them. Children's experiences of being excluded from decision making about their care always interested me. I often noted occasions when the children I interacted with had little or no say concerning their after-care, sometimes because there were no alternative placements for them, because of family rejection or lack of information about their family or relatives' whereabouts. The final decisions remained with management and some children had

to comply although they were unhappy with the decision. At the same time, there were high expectations of children to be responsible and decisive about their actions. My encounters with care leavers in various settings where they were either street dwellers or ex-convicts interested me further. These experiences motivated me to investigate the circumstances in residential care which contributed to children's outcomes and more specifically, how they were prepared for independent living. One area I decided to explore was that of looked after children's decision making opportunities.

### 1.4: Context

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island state (5,128 square kilometres, or 1,980 square miles) with a population of 1,328 019 of which 330, 109 (24.9%) are children (0-17 years) according to the 2011 Population and Housing Census. Two out of every three households are headed by men, with 33% of households female-headed. The population is predominantly East Indian (35.4%) followed by Africans (34.2%) and Mixed races (22.8%). Roman Catholics comprise the largest religious group (21.6%) and Anglicans comprise 5.7% of the population (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012). For the purposes of this thesis it is relevant to provide the statistics on religious affiliation as the Homes in the study are religious based, as are most of the other homes in the country.

In 2011 the Gross Domestic Product stood at TT$129, 753.2 million dollars (GBP12, 758.4 million) (Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011) and the Human

Development Index (HDI) value was 0.760. The country is placed in the high HDI category (67th out of 186 countries) (UNDP, Human Development Report, 2013). Economically, the country is said to be stable, with adequate resources, which suggests opportunity for greater investment in child welfare services.

Trinidad and Tobago's early history was dominated by slavery, colonialism and indentureship, which is manifested in our culture, social institutions and leadership. The Caribbean economy has maintained the plantation system to a large extent, thereby making little structural change since the establishment of the slave plantations over 300 years ago in the 17th Century (Best *et al,* 2009). Trinidad and Tobago's economy tends to be passive and continues to be influenced by North America and Europe. The institutions therefore maintain their link to mother institutions, in the UK and USA for instance, and the region has little control over its own domestic affairs. This experience may be described as a form of neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965).

Colonial influence has pervaded the welfare system of Trinidad and Tobago and dates back to the late 1930s when, following major social unrest, the British government appointed the Moyne Commission to investigate the social and economic conditions of the country and other Caribbean islands that had similar experiences. Social Services and poverty alleviation programmes are reported to be remnants from the welfare measures instituted following the Moyne Commission Report (Lloyd & Robertson, 1971).

### 1.4.1: Problems affecting children in Trinidad and Tobago

According to the Ministry of Social Development (2006), the major issues affecting children in Trinidad and Tobago could be grouped into the categories of sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, child labour, and children in conflict with the law, with such experiences being more common among disadvantaged groups. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been a rapid escalation of awareness of these issues (UNICEF, 2009). One in every five girls and one in every six boys have been reported to be sexually abused before the age of eighteen (Rape Crisis Society, 2011). Such reporting of sexual abuse is probably attributable to increased public sensitisation and legislated mandates (Sharpe and Bishop, 1993; Jones and Trotman-Jemmott, 2009, Rape Crisis Society, 2011) and not necessarily to increased incidence. However, underreporting of crimes against children remains a challenge due to lack of confidence in the reporting system and the sensitive and invasive nature of some crimes (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012).

Research conducted in the Eastern Caribbean indicates that technology and the effects of globalisation have a serious impact on child welfare as evidenced by internet usage and child sex tourism (Jones & Trotman-Jemmott, 2009). HIV/AIDS has also affected children, with the highest prevalence among the 15-24 age group (UNICEF, 2009). Serious crimes such as murder, drug-related crimes, kidnapping, wounding and sexual offences continue to affect children (Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, 2012).

### 1.4.2: Child Welfare and Protection in Trinidad and Tobago

The child welfare system in Trinidad and Tobago may be considered to be a hybrid of the approaches of the UK and the USA. As such, it may be difficult to identify a distinct Trinidad and Tobago system, and it also has ties to Jamaica and Barbados, which were forerunners in child welfare in the Caribbean (Maxwell, 2002). The child welfare system has its roots in non-governmental organisations such as the Baby Welfare League, Child Welfare League and the Church during the nineteenth century (Patrick, 1989). The Homes in this study were established out of British influence and they continue to sustain a model of child care which has received much criticism in Britain, where de-institutionalisation has become commonplace (Smith, 2011). However, the value of residential child care in Britain is not totally discounted (Crimmens & Pitts, 2000; Smith, *et al*, 2013; Smith, 2011; Utting, 1997). This is also true for Trinidad and Tobago, which continues to value this approach to child care.

Social work as a profession was only introduced to the country in the early 1980s; before then, Welfare Officers[1] or voluntary organisations worked with children and families. In a less formal way, child care has traditionally been undertaken by women in the community. In Tobago for instance, an informal system of kinship care persists (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012), whereby children are cared for by elderly relatives or close friends in the community in the absence of parents. This practice demonstrates indigenous characteristics of child care which

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[1] Welfare Officers are public officers who hold a minimum of 5 Ordinary level passes. The role of the Welfare Officers was designed after the old British model and can be considered remedial and rehabilitative.

need to be recognised by the formal system. Formal foster care, adoption and kinship care systems can provide some answers to child protection (Stewart, 2013). However, they should be regulated to safeguard children from any possible risks associated with such arrangements, such as neglect or abuse.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which are predominantly faith based continued to lead the child protection system (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012), with limited resources and a religious philosophy of taking care of the less fortunate. Over time, the government has become more actively involved in child welfare, mainly through funding to children's homes, which began in the 1930s, and the establishment of a Child Guidance Clinic in the 1960s (Maxwell, 2002), but a formal and well-coordinated child care and protection system is still non-existent. Child protection at the time of the study was within the purview of the National Family Services Division (NFSD) of the Ministry of Gender Youth and Child Development. Services offered included counselling, placement of children in homes and in foster care, and public education on family related issues (National Family Services, 2012). Family counselling comprises the majority of casework (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012) and women and children comprise a significant percentage of service users (UNICEF, 2010, p. 159). The Probation Department of the Ministry of Justice also provides support to children and families through counselling, representation in court and placement in care.

Child welfare services have developed over time, with foster care and adoption as alternative care systems being used as pilot projects. The Foster Care

Programme was a pilot project started in 2004 with seventeen active providers and approximately 40 children in Foster Care (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012). There is an Adoption Board which processes applications for adoptions. As of June 2012, there were 85 prospective adopters on the Unit's waiting list (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012, p. 16). The situation in Tobago is slightly different with the Department of Social Services and Gender Affairs of the Division of Health and Social Services under the Tobago House of Assembly[2] taking responsibility for child protection. This department collaborates with the various departments in Trinidad. The newly established Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago will eventually become the central child protection agency. It will monitor, evaluate and coordinate services for all children as well as act as the key child advocate. This organisation is further discussed below and in Chapter Seven. These developments in child care and protection indicate the influence of the UNCRC. Measures are being developed to formalise child care and protection systems which will have implications for reorienting child care workers and policy makers to new attitudes, approaches and behaviours when working with children in care.

Four dominant paradigms in child care policy have been identified by Fox Harding (1997). These are laissez-faire, state paternalism, birth family defender and children's rights approaches. Applied to the analysis of findings of Lloyd and Robertson (1971) and Yearwood (1992), on the history of social welfare in Trinidad

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[2] The Tobago House of Assembly was established by Act No. 37 of 1980, assented to on September 23rd, 1980, for the purpose of "making better provision for the administration of the island of Tobago and for matters therewith"(Tobago House of Assembly, 2012)

and Tobago, all positions seem to exist. The laissez-faire position is however the least prominent due to increased external influence by the state and international bodies such as the United Nations. However, there are commonly held views that the family's role in child welfare remains valuable, with child care, development and protection being central to family life (Barrow, 2002). This is further reflected in efforts by the relevant authorities to strengthen families so that children in care can be reintegrated with their birth families as much as possible. As in other societies, the Caribbean family has historically been the place where primary socialisation takes place and children are nurtured by adults, whether parents, grandparents, or the extended family (Barrow 2002; Rodman, 1971). As mentioned earlier, over the last few years, the state has taken a more active role in the welfare of children and takes an authoritarian position when it is absolutely necessary, for example when abuse and neglect are reported or when the family is unable to adequately provide for children. Where the state intervenes, it aims to safeguard and protect children through its various programmes and services, which is characteristic of state paternalism.

It may be concluded that child welfare in Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing a subtle and gradual transformation. An approach which focuses on children's rights is in its infancy in Trinidad and Tobago. This approach adopts the view that seeking children's best interests is central to all decisions made with and on behalf of children, and is guided by the UNCRC. The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, as the first child protection agency which adopts a rights-based approach to child welfare, illustrates the novelty of this approach.

### 1.4.3: The child protection framework in Trinidad and Tobago

There is no set definition of 'child' in the legislation of Trinidad and Tobago, which was under review at the time of the study. The Children Act of 2000 defines a child as below fourteen years and a young person as above fourteen and under sixteen years.  The National Youth Policy 2012-2017 defines a youth or young person as between twelve and 29 years and goes on to describe the period in terms of social, biological, economic and psychological experiences associated with becoming independent of parents (Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, 2012 p. 4).  The definition of 'child' is inconsistent with the UN's definition and the period of 'youth' remains a complex concept to define, because of the wide range of factors to be considered and the changing experiences of young persons.

In Trinidad and Tobago children's rights issues are neither high nor consistently present on political and public agendas.  This is due to the lack of fully functioning legislative and social structures to support children and persons that care for them.  Nevertheless, since the ratification of the UNCRC in 1991, the state is legally obligated to implement such child welfare policies.  Following on from regional attention to children's rights issues, in the 1999 Lima Accord and the 2000 Kingston Consensus, Trinidad and Tobago developed a series of laws, now commonly recognised as the "Children's Legislative Package", to ensure that national policy was consistent with regional and international directives.  In 2000, several laws passed through the local parliamentary process: The Children Act of 2000, the Children's Authority Act of 2000, The Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and

Nurseries Act of 2000, Adoption of Children Act of 2000, Children (Amendment) Act of 2012, International Child Abduction Act of 2008 and the Family Court Bill of 2009. The Children Act of 2000 is the main legislation which currently addresses children's issues in the country. The Children (Amendment) Act of 2012 was passed in parliament in March 2012 but has not yet received Presidential assent, so the Children Act of 2000 remains in force.  The remaining pieces of children's legislation have not been fully proclaimed and do not offer the protective services that they were designed to provide.

Recommendations made since 1981 by the Trinidad and Tobago Committee on Children's Services to improve opportunities for children have not been adopted thus far. Children continue to be viewed as being vastly different from adults and are seen as passive members of society, who are incompetent at making decisions and dependent on adults for protection (Brown & Johnson, 2008). Although child participation has been articulated in the UNCRC, it has not been clearly defined or understood in the Trinidad and Tobago context (UNCRC, 2006). It therefore remains one of the more complex elements of the UNCRC to operationalise, and has met with much resistance from adults in Trinidad and Tobago and the other Caribbean islands (Brown, 2003), which is reflected in the approach to addressing legislative and policy issues.

The failure to develop and implement a modern system of child care has resulted in inadequate services for children. Adults' failure to make provisions for children is reflected in the vagueness that exists in defining 'young offender' and 'child

in need of care and protection'. This affects, for example, female juvenile offenders, who are placed in children's homes and other institutions such as the women's prisons and the psychiatric hospital[3] in the absence of suitable facilities. There is presently no formal juvenile justice system for young offenders, although attempts to establish one are being made by the Ministry of Justice and The Children's Authority. Such efforts remain dependent on legislation which is due to be amended and proclaimed. These concerns and others which relate to the deficiencies of the youth justice system and the desire to strengthen services were highlighted by the Minister of Justice at a Youth Justice Symposium in October 2013 (George, 2013).

The Children's Authority Act of 2000, which identifies a central authority to act as 'guardian' for the protection and implementation of children's rights, was introduced to ensure proper monitoring of children's homes, community residences, nurseries and foster homes, and that required standards of care were met. It is the principal authority for granting licences and setting standards for children's institutions as well as establishing child protection policies and operational frameworks. The primary reasons for the introduction of the Children's Authority Act 2000 were to address concerns about the abuse of children within institutions, between staff and among the children, and to facilitate the integration of services among social service agencies.

Children's homes tend to come under heavy public scrutiny and occasionally there are allegations of abuse (Bishop, 2013), which have resulted in strained

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[3] There is only one women's prison and one psychiatric hospital in Trinidad and Tobago.

relationships between staff and children. Some caregivers complain that children's concerns take precedence over theirs regarding working conditions and abuse by children, and feel that they are unfairly treated. This became apparent in the study where staff felt fearful, frustrated and uncertain in dealing with children. The Children's Authority's mandate to set standards of care can present a solution to this challenge by ensuring better reporting procedures for both staff and children and a better work environment. The Children's Authority also aims to increase the chance of earlier reintegration of children into their families of origin where possible. As it stands, the minimum standard for truly safeguarding children is through the UNCRC, which has limited enforceability under present domestic laws. At the time of the study, regional standards for residential child care and a formal child protection framework for Trinidad and Tobago were being developed, which sought to incorporate the UNCRC, A World Fit for Children and the Millennium Development Goals. These can be useful starting points for analysing the experiences of looked after children.

### 1.4.4: Childhood experiences in Trinidad and Tobago and institutional responses

The conception of childhood in Trinidad and Tobago varies as in other societies. Caribbean children's experiences have been adversely affected by questionable parenting practices, diverse family structures, migration, social inequity and an expanding drug culture (Barrow, 2002; Sharpe and Bishop, 1993). Additionally, unclear policies on child labour and sexual offences serve to place children in vulnerable positions (Ministry of Social Development, 2006), with the adolescent male

population being more negatively affected than their female counterparts (Deosaran, 2007). The pervasive crime rate has its impact on children and young people, with an increasing number of young people engaging in criminal activity and those from marginalised groups being over-represented (Deosaran, 2007). Consequently, there has been a tendency to associate childhood with criminality, which influences attitudes of both adults and children. This outlook on children has affected the ways in which children in care have been treated. Their outcomes are also influenced by these adult perceptions, as evidenced in the aftercare experiences of children, where males are overrepresented in the prison system and girls in dependent and abusive relationships.

Applied to working with children in institutions, adults' increased engagement in protecting and monitoring children conflicts with the principles of participation. Guided by their own fears and concerns about children, adults assume the position of protectors and embrace more rigid child protection approaches, thus reducing chances for children's participation. The adults approach children according to their personal biases and the children are viewed in three ways: as victims in need of protection, as a threat to social order, or as a source of hope for the future (Hendrick, 2003). It remains uncertain whether institutions are responding to the forces of children's liberation that promote self-determination and autonomy (Archard, 1993), or to the pressures of recent developments that seem to warrant overprotection and monitoring or control of children (Munro, 2001). For Munro (2001), there is a thin line between protecting children and overprotecting them. The latter results in children

being restricted from participating in regular activities for fear of harm being done to them or by them. One outcome of the overprotection of children is that they become more passive as adults make decisions for them based on their (the adults') personal fears and inadequacies (McLeod, 2007). This approach prevents children from taking the risks that are needed to develop, and can be harmful as it prevents them from developing good decision making skills (Archard, 1993; Hendrick, 2003; Leeson, 2007; Thomas, 2002).

The importance of contextualising childhood will be a recurrent theme in this thesis as childhood is influenced by the macro environment (Archard, 1993). The interrelationship between social and economic development is undisputed and emphasis has been placed on the need to increase mutually supportive strategies for both (Midgley, 1995). For instance, by promoting human capacity-building, a productive and motivated population is ensured (Girvan, 1997). Child participation, as an approach to increasing children's agency, is a developmental task (Munro, 2001) and it has been suggested that economic sustainability requires full development of human resource potential, which includes child development (Barrow, 2002; Newman-Williams & Sabatini, 1997) and by extension, active child participation and citizenship. Development ethics, which applies moral values to development practice, can be a valuable framework for analysing issues of development as related to children and will be useful for addressing questions such as: Who determines what is best for the child? How is children's participation understood in the cultural context? And how do we facilitate the developmental transformations of children in

ways that take into account their levels of competence when making decisions? Development ethics will be discussed further in Chapters Two and Nine. These are critical areas of focus when taking a child-centred approach, given adults' roles as the primary authority in the process of determining the best interests of the child, which they may not always do well (Alderson, 2010; Munro, 2001; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

### 1.4.5: The situation of looked after children in Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago adheres to traditional values about children that see them as needing protection and control. Large residential homes remain the preferred alternatives for children in difficult circumstances, who may require long-term, therapeutic care that some foster parents are unable to provide (Barton, *et al*, 2012). Up to July 2013 there were approximately 830 children (0.25% of all children) living in 49 children's homes (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013) compared to 1230 in 2005 (Jones & Sogren, 2005) – a notable decrease. 46 of the Homes were located in Trinidad and three in Tobago. 43 were privately run and had religious affiliations (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013). Five children's homes were established to provide specialised care - two for juvenile offenders, two for children at risk and one for physically challenged children. Four are government approved institutions which receive funding and are faith-based. Of the 830 children placed in care in Trinidad the majority were placed through formal means - that is, through the Court/Magistrate (335), Police (145) and social workers (54). Family members and guardians continue to place children in Homes (101). 44% of the looked after children were between eleven and fifteen years old and eight per cent

were over seventeen years of age. The majority of looked after children are Christian, which is also associated to the fact that the children are encouraged to practise the religion of the Home in which they are placed. 49% of looked after children are reported to be of African descent, with less than one quarter being of East Indian descent (23%) and another quarter of Mixed heritage (24%) (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012). The children range between six and eighteen years old. There were 429 (52%) males and 401 (48%) females in care. The numbers in the Homes in the study are given below.

The most prevalent reasons for placement of children in care was beyond control (18%), Safe keeping (15%) followed by abandonment (12%) and neglect (12%). Sexual abuse and incest represented 4%, physical abuse, 2.5% and poverty 6% (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012). The children in my study were in care mainly because of abuse, neglect, abandonment and being 'beyond control' of their parents and guardians and were placed by the court or relatives. These figures compare to the 2005 figures where the main reasons for children being in care in Trinidad and Tobago included poverty and malnourishment (13.9%), neglect (13.8%), abandonment (12%), and being 'beyond control' (11%) (Jones & Sogren, 2005). The data from this 2005 study revealed that in some instances the reason, although attributed to one of these categories, was linked to parents developing AIDS and being unable to care for the child. Parents or guardians were the main referrers of children, and contrary to popular belief that they do so out of lack of care and concern, they

took such action to protect their children from harms such as HIV infection and exposure to drugs and violence.

Some homes are not ready for the implementation of the Children's Authority Act 2000 and may be forced to shut down, which means that if it were implemented there could be fewer facilities to cater for abused and neglected children (Jones & Sogren, 2005). In the absence of regulations and standards, there is a proliferation of smaller homes throughout the country that are run by concerned citizens and religious bodies. The report by Jones and Sogren (2005) noted a marked decline in the number of children being sent to large children's homes, which may be attributed to the increase in smaller homes that require less red tape to place a child. So it may not be that smaller homes are better but rather that they require less demanding procedures for placing children than the larger statutory homes.

### 1.4.6: The two Homes in the study: HOME No. 1 (H1) and HOME No. 2 (H2)

**Selection of the Homes:**

The history of children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago dates back to the period of indentureship in the early part of the 19th century after the abolition of slavery. Home 1 (H1) was initially designed in dormitory-style to accommodate over 60 children in each of the buildings, which were located at various points throughout the compound. The buildings were dilapidated and unsuitable for accommodation (**See Appendix I).** As H1 undergoes renovations, as an interim measure, the younger children in the nursery and girls have been relocated to a new area on the compound

which they will occupy for a period of three years, beginning 2013. Each unit was constructed to allow smaller groups of children, around eight to ten, to live in self-contained accommodation (**See Appendix II**). The boys remained in their larger dormitories. On completion of the renovations, there will be a permanent structure of smaller units designed to promote a family environment, as with the temporary units. Children's activities included karate, a transition programme called 'eighteen and beyond', and sibling therapy groups. Most activities were held on the compound and were less structured than in H2, which had more formal activities.

The best way to describe the living arrangements at H2 is group home care, with eight houses catering for ten to twelve children at any one time and six Juvenile Home Supervisors (caregivers) at grade I and one Juvenile Home Supervisor at grade II[4] (House Mother) assigned to each house. Children's activities included music, trades (masonry, sewing), sports such as water polo, track and field and social programmes such as life skills development, transition groups, which were either hosted on the compound or in an external facility, and meditation at a designated location on the compound. See Table I for a comparison of the Homes.

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[4] Grades I and II suggest the levels of seniority of public officers in accordance with the public service regulations. The grade II officers are senior to the grade I officers.

**Table I**: **Comparison of HI and H2**

| Themes: | Home 1 | Home 2 |
|---|---|---|
| **Religious Affiliation** | Anglican (UK) | Roman Catholic (UK) |
| **Time of establishment** | 1857 | 1870 |
| **Geographical location** | Sub-urban | Urban |
| **Geographic origin of children in care** | Rural/sub-urban | Urban |
| **No. of children in care / Sex Ratio** | 88<br>Male: Female – 2:1 | 53 live on compound and 40 live on other compounds/in trade schools<br>Male: Female – 2:1 |
| **No of staff/ Sex Ratio** | 46 caregivers<br>Male: Female – 1: 5 | 36 caregivers<br>Male: Female – 1:10 |
| **Staff to Child Ratio** | 13 children: 1 caregiver (13-18 years)<br>6 children: 1 caregiver (5-12 years) | 10/12 children:1 caregiver |
| **Type of dwelling** | Communal setting | Small group home setting |
| **Transition programme** | Structured, active, less flexible<br>No separate transition homes | Structured, active, flexible<br>Transition homes (26km and 5 km away) |
| **Leaving care process** | Inadequate/unstructured<br>Late preparation | Adequate/Structured<br>Early preparation |
| **Formal assessment** | Inadequate | Inadequate |
| **Care planning and review process** | Inadequate | Inadequate |
| **Structured disciplinary process** | In progress | Practised |
| **Qualifications** | Minimum | Minimum |
| **Referral to Magistrates' Court** | Low | High |
| **Social Work Intervention** | Short term/Inconsistent | Long term/Consistent |
| **Potential for participatory work** | High | Low |
| **Access to social services** | Low | High |
| **Ethos of relationships among children and caregivers** | Very Good | Good |

The ages of children living in the Homes ranged between three and eighteen. Both Homes catered for both genders but the houses, or 'units' as they were called, catered to either boys or girls with limited contact between the sexes. The minimum requirement for caregivers was three Ordinary Level passes[5]. Caregivers have been known to leave the Homes upon receiving qualifications, thus not allowing for skills to be transferred to the institution. This may be attributed to the low wages set by the statutory body and how workers perceived their function in relation to their earnings. There were however a few senior staff members who had worked at the institutions for over 25 years. There was also a high presence of volunteers at the institutions who came from the community or international organisations. Various student bodies, such as student councils from nearby schools and universities, visited the Homes as part of their voluntary service.

The institutions are governed by the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development and Board members are selected from their respective churches. Staffing includes Managers and Assistant Managers, two Welfare Officers stationed at each institution, administrative staff, Juvenile Home Supervisors and other auxiliary staff (**See Appendix III)**. It should also be noted that despite both institutions being run by the church, staff members did not necessarily belong to the affiliated religious denomination as they were appointed by the government's personnel department.

Both H1 and H2 were undergoing renovations due to poor, unsanitary conditions. Both are located on approximately two to four acres of land with large

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[5] Caribbean Examination Council - Similar to GCE Ordinary level

playing fields (**See Appendix IV**). Both Homes are subsidised by the government and received some financial support from businesses and well-wishers in the community, including schools and their church. The institutions are not adequately funded, however, and often depend on fundraisers to meet expenses. This affects the ways in which children participate as the activities they engage in are dependent on the level of sponsorship and the interests of funders. TTD7.2 million (GBP 720 000) was allocated to H1 for renovations during 2010 and 2012 (Ministry of Social Development, 2011).

Contributing to the leadership and decision making approach adopted by management is the fact that H2 has better access to social services for children and families such as counselling services and a Family Court. H1 relied on more informal approaches and because of this was a more fertile ground for participatory work with children. Children in H2 seemed to be more aggressive than the children in H1, probably due to their background and community life. The Homes in the study have also been the focus of attention for claims about residential child abuse and this has had a significant impact on the workers. As a result, pressure was placed on management to strengthen the quality of care for children, but their efforts have been frustrated by bureaucratic constraints such as hiring and disciplinary practices that are beyond their control but critical to the process of child care and protection.

Judging by interviews with officials at both Homes, other issues affecting the institutions include a high reported incidence of verbal and physical abuse towards children and inappropriate interactional styles of carers towards the children, poor

staff-management relationships and inadequate facilities. The problems identified here are not new as others have highlighted similar concerns (Committee on Children's Services 1981; Deosaran 2007; Jones and Sogren 2005; Sharpe & Bishop, 1993). The available evidence shows that most caregivers working in children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago do not possess the necessary competencies or knowledge to work with looked after children (Jones & Sogren, 2005). Despite such challenges, my study revealed quite good practices, as described in Chapter Eight. These were exemplified by caregivers who were willing to try new approaches to child care and caregivers who advocated in children's best interests.  Both Homes have an active culture of unionisation and staff seemed to be well organised around labour issues, which affected caring relationships both positively and negatively.

The predominant approach used in both institutions was a management and control model, with the Magistrates' courts playing a major role in determining discipline for children. However both Homes were moving towards a care model that was more consistent with children's rights and building better relationships.

## 1.5: Conclusion

In summary, children's participation in decision making in care is influenced by social, historical and cultural factors. The traditional views held of children by adults continue to be a challenge to child development. It would appear that the moral, political and legal status of the child is conveniently negotiated by adults on the basis of their own motives and fears. Children's participation is an integral part of effective

child development and welfare (Hart, 2007), given that children's views of their situation are relevant to understanding changes in the life of a society. Participation challenges traditional customs regarding family life, children's roles and responsibilities, as children become more active in their daily affairs and are allowed to contribute to their environment. As we witness a change in the way children are viewed and the changing roles of adults in a dynamic environment, understanding children's participation in relation to adults has become more crucial to the development debate (Freire, 1976; Girvan, 1997, Hill *et al*, 2004; Mannion, 2010; Mayall, 2002; Prout, 2005; Sinclair, 2004), and therefore participation needs to move beyond the level of tokenism (Fielding, 2008; Hart, 1992; Thomas, 2007). This discussion will be developed further throughout the thesis.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

## 2.1: Introduction

In this literature review, I will cover key themes, starting with participation as a political principle and as a democratic ideal, and highlighting political and social debates on issues regarding citizenship. The position of institutions such as the World Bank and the UN will also be reviewed. The review also outlines the development of children's participation, justifications for children's participation and issues involving residential child care. A general overview of participation is first presented, followed by a discussion of the theories which I found to be useful in my analysis.

## 2.2: Participation

Participation is an old idea which has been of interest to philosophers for centuries (Cornwall & Pratt, 2003; Richardson, 1983). Recently, it has been the focus of much political debate and has become prominent in public policy. In its simplest form, participation means people partaking in events affecting them. Roger Hart (1992) defines participation as 'the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives - it is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured' (p. 5). The use of the term raises questions such as: what is the focus? Who should be involved and to what extent? How should participation take place and what are the processes involved? Participation takes place in various domains of life - social activities, relationships, the labour market, consumption, education, collective or individual

decision making, recreation and leisure (Davis & Hill, 2006). Participation is therefore multi-dimensional (Richardson, 1983; Sinclair, 2004). Its supporters argue that it contributes to better outcomes as people are more responsive (Chambers 1997), and that it promotes competence and responsibility (Hart 1992, 2007).

Participation is considered a social good and is recognised for its benefits across disciplines such as social work and social care (Biestek, 1957; Meagher & Parton, 2004), management (Lewin, 1946; Robins, 1997), psychology (Rogers, 1961) and project development (Chambers, 1997; World Bank, 1998). Two main approaches have been taken to understanding the benefits of participation: the efficiency approach and the equity and empowerment approach (Cleaver, 1999), which may be summed up as participation as a means to an end and as an end in itself. The efficiency approach sees participation as a means of ensuring that objectives are met and resources are not wasted (Girvan, 1997). It is said to promote more effective development through better planning, greater information dissemination, greater accountability and more effective implementation (Sharma & Sharma, 1984). The equity and empowerment approach, which is aligned to participation as an end in itself, sees participation as a means of empowering people through developing consciousness or by giving them control over processes from which they have been excluded (Chambers, 1997; Freire, 1988; Goulet, 1995; 2006). Both approaches stress social and political benefits at the individual or collective level.

The concept of participation has also received much criticism, and conflict arises between those who see it as a means to an end and those who see it as an end

in itself. A main criticism is that it is often tokenistic and used as a control mechanism by the powerful to meet their agenda (Craig & Porter, 1997). It is also believed to be a façade that disempowers marginalised people who continue to hold no 'real' power (Cooke & Kothari, 2007; Nelson & Wright, 1995). Cooke and Kothari (2007) question the legitimacy of participation and re-emphasise its technical, theoretical, political and conceptual limitations. They criticise the naïve and simplistic approach towards participation adopted by some authors, which discounts the importance of power and power relations, and affirm the need to re-evaluate the tools, rationale and processes being used in participatory approaches.

It should also be noted that despite what appears to be the general assumption that people will want to participate because they see benefits in doing so, there is evidence of situations where people choose not to participate. Alderson (1999b), Tisdall and Davis (2004) and Hill (2006), for instance, found that young people fail to place a high value on participation because of its tokenistic, unrepresentative nature, and see it as primarily adult-led and ineffective in turning their opinions into action.

As mentioned earlier, participation has a political connotation as a means of empowering people to have voice, access and control. For this reason, its political meaning is sometimes contested as it suggests shifting power to those who were previously excluded. Children are a clear case of a group that is liable to be excluded from decision making. In relation to children, participation has been analysed by authors such as Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1992; 1997), who identified models of

participation from a relational perspective, looking at the quality and levels of interactions between the child and adult. Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1992) developed 'ladders of participation', with the latter focusing more specifically on children and their power sharing with adults (see **Diagram I**). Each ladder outlines degrees of participation in a sequential order with manipulation at the foot and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969) or child-initiated shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992) at the top. Other authors have developed alternative models to reflect the degree to which power is transferred from adults to children within a less hierarchical structure that promotes adaptability to context and equity in task (Franklin, 1997; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997). In this body of work, researchers try to understand how the adult-child interaction can be mediated to facilitate shared power (Christensen, 2004; Mannion, 2007; Tisdall & Davis, 2004).

**Diagram I: Hart's Ladder of Participation**
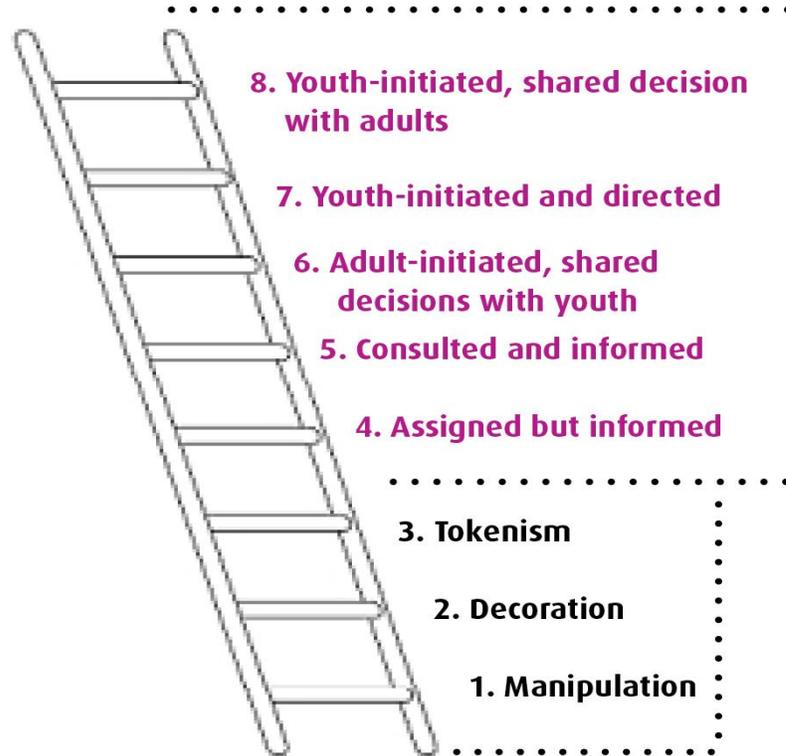


Adapted from Hart (1997; 2007) *Children's Participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care.* London: UNICEF/Earthscan.

### 2.2.1: Participation as a democratic ideal

Participation has become a central concept on the development agenda for international agencies such as the UN and the World Bank. The World Bank has long acknowledged the economic benefits of including people in decision making, which include effectiveness and greater sustainability (World Bank, 1998). Participation is viewed by the World Bank and the UN as a vehicle for strengthening democratic societies and is valued for promoting peace, inclusiveness, responsiveness and

sustainability, thus serving to counteract the exclusion of disenfranchised and poverty stricken people.

Evidence of the value of the participatory approach is the establishment of a 'Learning Group on Participatory Development' that was launched in December 1990 (World Bank, 2011). This participatory approach has also been reflected in the United Nations' pledge in the Millennium Declaration to 'spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development' (UNICEF, 2002, pp.11-12). The UN has stated its position that democracy starts with children (UNICEF, 2002) and therefore made a commitment to protect their rights and safeguard their well-being through various development processes. Based on these claims by the UN and the World Bank, there appears to be a clear link between democracy, children and development, and it is suggested that there are unfavourable socioeconomic effects if provisions are not made to promote children's rights and well-being. This would also mean that the Millennium Development Goals to be reached by 2015[6], six of which relate to children, would have failed.

While there is this thrust towards increasing participation, people have become discouraged about its processes due to the lack of systems of accountability and manipulation of outcomes by facilitators (White & Pettit, 2007). It therefore

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[6] Millennium Development Goals: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and global partnership for development. Source: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals

becomes necessary to understand the power dynamics involved in participation at the macro level, which implies engagement in structural analysis and issues of politics and governance (Hickey & Mohan, 2004).

Participatory approaches have been criticised for their limited outcomes (Hill *et al*, 2004; Kirby & Bryson, 2002). This reality has presented some inconsistencies as far as it involves agencies such as the UN and the World Bank which insist on children and young people's participation without adequately taking into consideration the context in which this can take place (Skelton, 2007). Their approach to structural adjustment - restructuring the economy and reducing government intervention through reduced public spending and promoting market competition - includes reduced investment in social services. This makes it appear that the World Bank's primary interest lies in efficiency, sometimes at the expense of citizens (Brown, 2003; Chambers, 1997; Girvan, 1997). The focus seems to be on the overall agenda of promoting liberal democracy and preparing children to take their role as active, conforming, productive citizens (Hart *et al*, 2004: pp 11-12).The World Bank's approach therefore sees participation as a means to an end.

Caribbean economies have long experienced the harsh realities of the policies of international financial institutions which impede social progress, thereby placing locals at a grave disadvantage (Best *et al*, 2009; Brown, 2003; Payne & Sutton, 2001). It is therefore welcome that international financial institutions have recognised the need to integrate participatory approaches to development whereby citizens are

included in decision making. However, social auditing and evaluation of efforts are needed to ensure that the approach results in meaningful changes (Girvan, 1997).

### 2.2.2: Participation in governance

Participation in governance has been a long-standing issue in development studies (Cornwall & Pratt, 2003; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). It has been put forward as a solution to problems in social and economic policy development (Vazquez-Barquero, 2010; Meighoo *et al,* 1997) and the government of Trinidad and Tobago has incorporated participation in their national agenda for this reason. They have outlined in their manifesto, under pillar six, the building of a culture of inclusion rather than one of maximum leadership. The objective is to nurture and build a participatory culture that promotes democracy (The People's Partnership Government, 2010). Participation and democracy are therefore linked to citizenship, which places children in a central position in policy development that includes them in decision making from an early stage – an approach recommended by Caribbean planners Newman-Williams & Sabitini (1997).

According to Barbalet (1988), the aim of citizenship is to create a productive, responsible and devoted labour force, which implies conformity, adherence to predetermined values and acceptance of the status quo - that is, to contribute to the 'public good'. For the modern democratic state, the basis of citizenship is 'the capacity to participate in the exercise of political power through the electoral process' (Barbalet 1988, p. 2). Barbalet presents a very restrictive view of what counts as participation and sees it as an essentially conservative force in modern democratic

states. Participation as related to children and citizenship for this reason is vague and can be two-pronged, with children seen as the future of the nation, suggesting that they are in a state of becoming, or as active social participants (Kjorholt, 2001, 2007). This ambiguity was highlighted by Skelton (2007), who provided a critical discourse analysis of UNICEF's 2003 Status of the World's Children report, looking at how childhood and participation were constructed by the UN. She reported that children were considered to be less than 'full' citizens as they were seen as 'becoming', which was inconsistent with self-reports of children that indicated their sense of 'being'. This latter view implies that children should be regarded as rights holders who are capable of contributing to governance (James & Prout, 1990; Lansdown, 2010). Skelton (2007) also highlighted the reasons for the UN's interest in participation: preparation for adulthood, growth and development of the future. Hence their present value is disregarded.

Despite recognition of the need to involve both adults and children in governance, a further contradiction exists that prevents citizens from engaging in meaningful and genuine participation given their dependence on a system that has been designed for a different model of development (Best *et al*, 2009). Caribbean society was constructed to serve the purposes of the economy, which was controlled and continues to be influenced by metropolitan based organisations. The problems of participation and democracy also lie in the construction of meaning as those with the power usually define democracy and design the structures for it to function without participation by the people who are supposed to benefit from it (Brown, 2003).

### 2.2.3: Participation agendas

Radical perspectives concerning the agenda of participation come from the work of Best et al (2009), Chambers (1997), Freire (1988) and Payne and Sutton (2001). Freire (1988) called for collaboration between leaders and people in order for real change to take place so that they are each able to understand their different realities. Such participation for Freire counteracts oppression and exclusion of the poor but must be based on reflection and action. Participation is therefore an active process which will be difficult to achieve if structures impede dialogue and the sharing of views. As suggested earlier, how participation is defined and who defines it are therefore important, as it can be manipulated to maintain the status quo (Freire, 1988). For example, the institutions of education and family patterns evolved from oppressive structures designed by adults that result in authoritarian relationships (Freire, 1988). This paternalistic authority might suggest that children belonging to such structures may be confined to dependency and limited thinking which is detrimental to meaningful participation. As such, socio-economic development that is child-focused may be difficult to achieve (Freire, 1988).

Freire's view is supported by the work of Chambers (1997), who examined the concept of participation from the perspective of the poor in rural communities using participatory rural appraisals (PRA). He found that the distance between decision makers and the poor is too wide, which contributes to critical issues in development being overlooked, and he attributes this distance to professionalism, cognitive and social difference and power. Because of these factors, the views of the powerful or

'uppers' as he prefers to call them are usually uncontested, which hinders participation of the 'lowers' or the poor. There is opportunity for assimilation into the culture of the 'uppers' and manipulation in decision making processes which prevents true inclusion even when there is a desire for change.

Applied to the Caribbean context, similar experiences occurred with the Jamaican government in the 1970s with its 'democratic socialist' experiment under Michael Manley's administration. Attempts to overcome dependency on the metropoles using new reform strategies which included 'the politics of participation' proved to be futile in the long run as a result of dependence on international corporations and an economic situation that led to the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (Payne & Sutton, 2001). The Caribbean economy has undergone little structural change since slavery over 300 years ago and retains features that hinder its progress. Nevertheless, transformation in development is possible as long as the constraints of historical, social and political legacies are taken into account (Best *et al,* 2010). For Best et al, development is seen as a process from "within'' where the scope for change needs to go beyond economic change and include the social, cultural and political spheres (Best, *et al*, 2010). Having acknowledged the shortcomings of participation in democracy, I wish to now focus on less radical positions which provide further insight into the issues involved in child-focused development as it relates to democracy.

The growing interest in children's citizenship and by extension political participation is well aligned to the goals of international organisations as they pertain

to child welfare and development (White & Choudhury, 2007). As a result, emphasis is placed on developing a child-focused agenda, which comes with its own challenges in a paternalistic Caribbean society (Barrow, 2001).   Additionally, as the shift towards efficiency hastens due to modernisation, the features of some child-focused organisations have changed to a more problem-focused approach that promotes efficiency over empowerment and participation. Managerialism therefore appears to override professionalism, which limits social workers' responsiveness to children's unique circumstances, while simultaneously providing hindrances to children's empowerment (Dhalberg & Moss, 2005; Munro, 2001)  - a shift which development ethics ( Goulet, 1995) can help to address by promoting participation in decision making among those most affected. Critics of social work drawing on a feminist perspective (Meagher & Parton, 2004) acknowledge this shift in social work and argue that it contributes to 'emphasis on centralised and formulaic regimes of inspection and scrutiny' (Meagher & Parton, 2004, p. 2) which negatively influences participatory approaches. This argument emphasises how the ethics of child care can be compromised as a result of shifting priorities.

### 2.2.4: Participation, globalisation and development in developing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago

Debates on the process of development are critical to developing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago given the effects of globalisation and the present economic crisis that is closely linked to the global economy. Vazquez-Barquero (2010), in his work on policies for endogenous development in economic crisis, sees

globalisation as a multidimensional process that has been coupled with rising poverty levels and widening income differences among countries and regions with growth in foreign direct investments. Endogenous development for him includes local communities using their existing resources and development potential for sustenance. The increase in multinational corporations operating in developing countries might suggest a shift in power and control from locals. This has been a long lasting struggle in the Trinidad and Tobago economy and based on this argument, it may be reasonable to conclude that the economic difficulties of recent years may intensify (Best *et al,* 2009).

Another aspect of influence is modern technology. The ways in which children participate in society through play, learning and socialisation are heavily influenced by technology (Selwyn, 2009; McRobbie, 2008). Identity development, which includes self-exploration and developing a self-concept and self-esteem, is influenced by individual and societal factors during the adolescent and young adult period (Erickson, 1963). There are aspects of one's identity that can be controlled, such as social relationships, and others such as sex, gender, age that cannot be controlled in the real world but which young people can now have control over as they explore identity in the virtual world. Such identity exploration is further influenced by advertising and consumer culture which shapes young people's desires (France, 2007; Hill, 2011). The way in which globalisation and more specifically new digital technologies have affected residential child care is of significance as children now have access to computers and other ICTs. The thrust to increase the technological competence of the

population has not bypassed looked after children, who have benefitted from free laptops from the government on entry into secondary education. As such, the children are now exposed to more global information, which can inform their decision making about their lives (France, 2007; Valentine & Holloway, 2002).

### 2.2.5: Conclusion

In summary, in order for participation to become a democratic reality in Trinidad and Tobago, the social structures that have been influenced by historical, cultural, political and economic elements that influence people's capacity to participate should be considered (Brown, 2003).The bureaucratic paternalism that pervades institutions may present challenges to participation of the kind advocated by Freire (1988), Goulet (1995, 2006), Best *et al* (2009) and others – and this includes children's institutions.

Development ethics provides a useful framework for understanding participation with vulnerable groups as it facilitates the exploration of the realities of marginalised groups in which members decide how to approach issues of inequity and injustice for themselves. It recognises the importance of taking historical and cultural facts into account, which is vital to any analysis of Caribbean policy (Best *et al,* 2009; Brown, 2003). Development ethics encompasses a methodology that includes direct observation and dialogue with constituents so that there can be greater responsiveness to their needs (Goulet, 1995). Development ethics might therefore be an appropriate framework for examining development issues affecting marginalised children. More will be said about this in the sections on methodology and theoretical

framework. Applying a framework which provides guidance on integrating efficiency

and empowerment as a new force in child centred development is also recommended

by the child rights community (UNICEF, 2003) and development theorists (Newman-

Williams & Sabatini, 1997; Girvan, 1997). This child centred development provides

new ground for children's participation so that both adults and children can benefit

(Mannion, 2007).

## 2.3: Children's Participation

Children's participation rights are enshrined in the UNCRC, which was ratified

in Trinidad and Tobago on December 5th 1991. The articles which refer to children's

participation include Articles 5, 9, 12 to 17, 21-23 and 29 (UNICEF, 2003), with Article

23 being most explicit. Children's participation means the direct involvement of

children in decision making (Hill *et al,* 2004). Davis and Hill (2006) make the distinction

between exclusion and social exclusion, stating that although the two concepts are

directly related there is a different focus. They argue that exclusion focuses on access

to material resources whereas social exclusion refers to relationships. I am more

concerned with the latter in this thesis. For Davis and Hill (2006), participation is an

active process whereas social inclusion suggests a more passive role of being allowed

or enabled to take part (p.1). Children's exclusion is attributed to experiences of

poverty which reduce their chances to participate in activities. Such exclusion arises

from hazards in their environment, inadequate services and support and lack of access

to social rights and relations due to inequalities at the macro level (Hill & Davis, 2006).

Others have argued that social exclusion is not only caused by structural inequalities

(Hill & Davis, 2006), but also by children's input being ignored by parents and other adults such as policy makers and researchers (Alderson, 1995; Morrow & Richards, 1996). This might suggest that children are ignored as present beings, a view which fosters the notion of dependency on parents and other adults for future success (James & Prout, 1997). Lansdown (2002) further supports this position in her European study where she found that children felt they had lesser status than adults and as such were disregarded in public policy development.  At the micro level, people exclude themselves because of personal feelings and attitudes about belonging to a group; for example, children may be excluded from family decision making and see their input as meaningless (Alderson, 1995; Brown & Johnson, 2008). Such self-exclusion is a direct result of intergenerational and intragenerational beliefs about children's competencies (Hill & Davis, 2006), which children accept and as a result experience conflicts when they are placed in a position to make decisions.

For Davis and Hill (2006), the best way to understand social exclusion and by extension participation as it impacts on children, is by transcending the norm of adult-led initiatives and allowing children to define their problems and solutions. This approach will help overcome the challenge of seeing children as passive citizens-in-waiting or 'becoming' (Lister *et al*, 2005), and instead views them as active participants with agency and choice influencing their present (Burk, 2005; Morrow & Richards, 1996). This position is supported by several authors (James and Prout, 1997; Sinclair & Franklin, 2000; Skelton, 2007) but is criticised by Richardson (1983), who highlights the power issues involved in participation in general, whether with children

or adults.  As such, the limitations of children's participation based on the power differences between children and adults are emphasised (Hart, 2007; Mannion; 2010; Pupavac, 2002; Ray, 2010) and recommendations are made that these issues be addressed in order for meaningful rather than tokenistic participation to occur.

### 2.3.1: Some complexities involved in children's participation

Children's participation is sometimes used synonymously with listening to children or giving them a voice and consultation (Sinclair, 2004). This interpretation of children's participation has been criticised by Lansdown (2010), Percy-Smith (2006) and Tisdall and Davis (2004) for being an inadequate description of children's participation. Listening to and consulting children on issues does not negate exclusion (Percy-Smith, 2006). Children have various ways of expressing themselves beyond voice (Lansdown, 2010; Mannion, 2007; Thomas, 2005): through avoidance and active resistance (McLeod, 2007), or by using art (Dockett & Perry, 2005) or graphic responses and diagrams (Darbyshire *et al,* 2005) and games and photography (Einarsdottir, 2005, 2007).  Despite this, much of the research around children's participation as it relates to children's rights emphasises listening to and consulting children (Clark & Moss, 2001; Franklin & Sloper, 2005; McLeod, 2007; Tisdall *et al*, 2002). This view may be the result of the way in which the main initiator of child rights, the UN, constructs childhood and participation (Skelton, 2007). This presents another consideration for children's participation - the validity of processes used to elicit responses and interpret children's views so that children's meanings are made clear (Sinclair, 2004).

Children's participation has been criticised for shifting adult responsibilities unto children (Aries, 1962) and using children to promote adult agendas, and as causing emotional stress for some children (Warshak, 2003; Cashmore & Parkinson, 2009). It has also been criticised for being unrealistic, especially where children are institutionalised and bounded by bureaucracy and their influence can only be tokenistic (Barrow, 2004; Lansdown, 2010; Spicer & Evans, 2006).

### 2.3.2: Children's Participation from paternalism to a rights-based approach

One source of the emphasis on children's participation is work to improve service user involvement, which is associated with welfare state provision and its responsibility and accountability to citizens, the children's rights agenda and a view of childhood which sees children as competent beings (Beresford & Croft, 1993; Sinclair, 2004). The issue of competence is highlighted by Holt (1974) and Farson (1974). They maintained that the competence argument which does not regard children as having the capacity to make decisions is invalid. They were concerned about the way in which modern society defined childhood and childhood experiences based on age and argued that children should have the same rights as adults including the right to self-determination, because they are capable of making decisions. They also argued that too much emphasis is placed on children's incompetence and not on the structures that should be improved to increase equity for both adults and children so that both groups can participate. A view of children as incompetent leads to paternalism, which further marginalises children and denies them the right to self-determination (Archard, 1993).

There has been a shift away from paternalism towards a rights-based approach (Theis, 2004), with the UNCRC providing a good reference point. Although not explicitly stating children's rights to participate (except Article 23 that relates specifically to children with disabilities), there is a cluster of Articles which provides sufficient argument for their participation, as mentioned above. It is important to note, however, that participation is not new to the children's arena, for children have always naturally participated in families, communities, schools, and work (Kjorholt, 2001, 2007) - and this is certainly the case for Caribbean children (Crawford-Brown, 2001; Lewis, 1993). What is new is the approach taken by organisations to promote participation, the degree to which this may vary from naturally occurring experiences (Hart, 2007), and the stress on the way in which the concepts of childhood adopted by a society influence children's experiences. This growing interest has provided a relatively large volume of literature on areas such as children's participation in educational policy (Mannion, 2003); institutional care (Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998); social work services (Butler & Williamson, 1994); governance (Arnott, 2008; Hinton, 2008); and research (Fraser *et al*, 2004). However, there is not much literature addressing the views of looked-after children (Holland, 2009).

Adopting a rights-based approach to child welfare (Fox-Harding, 1997), in which children's participation is included, may be deemed paternalistic (Calder, 1995) as it de-emphasises children's agency and their usual ways of participating. It also promotes dominant adult ideologies of participation which may not be compatible with children's interests (Calder, 1995). There are standard ways in which children

participate in care that adopting a rights-based approach may interfere with. This includes interfering with children's desires not to participate and their informal ways of organising themselves. In addition to a rights-based approach, some authors have advocated a values-based approach (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998), which includes respecting children's inherent competencies and facilitating their participation based on this. While a child rights approach is welcomed, it should not ignore the everyday experiences of children and adults with both informal and formal decision making processes.

### 2.3.3: Justifying Children's Participation

Warshak (2003) highlights two rationales for taking children's views into account: the enlightenment and the empowerment rationales. The former states that children can provide vital information about their experiences that contributes to better decision-making concerning them, which includes the development of better services. This rationale has been criticised for viewing children as deficient and dependent on adults to improve their welfare (Mannion, 2003). The empowerment rationale is more political as it relates to issues of power, challenge and change (Thomas, 2007). It states that the process of participation is beneficial to children in many ways, including learning decision-making skills, developing self-efficacy, and being respected as subjects or active participants in affairs concerning them (Warshak, 2003). Children are therefore seen as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994) and as holders of rights which should be respected (James & Prout, 1990).

This may not be as straightforward as it sounds, as children are not a homogeneous group. Those belonging to low income, marginalised groups may need extra support and resources in order to make participation meaningful (Ridge, 2002), given their lack of experience with participating in decision making. In addition to this, socio-cultural factors such as traditional views of children and the roles they are ascribed also contribute to the complexity of children's participation and should be addressed to avoid potential miscommunication (Warshak,2003; Mannion, 2007).

Further justification for children's participation includes its ability to strengthen young people's status in relation to adults (Matthews, 2003; Mannion, 2007). It is important to consider the interactive and contextual nature of participation between adults and children (Christensen, 2004; Mannion, 2007). Children and adults may have different understandings of similar experiences and therefore different priorities (Holland, 2009). This draws attention to issues of power in the adult-child relationship (Cairns & Brannen, 2005) and implies that adults need to accept a challenge to their authority for participation to be meaningful (Lansdown, 2001). For looked after children, it has been found to be rare for the adults to share power with children (Mason, 2005), as some adults are unable or reluctant to effectively listen to a child or some children simply use their power by resisting the adults' agenda (McLeod, 2007), for example by walking away (Levin, 1997). Specifically applied to looked after children, participation in decision making helps prepare them for responsible, independent living, to be self-determined and competent beings (Smith *et al,* 2013).

After studying the relationships between social workers and looked-after young people, McLeod (2007) recommends that adults working with them should understand how powerlessness can shape the responses of marginalised children, and should therefore be prepared for resistance and challenge. She found that the biggest barrier to effective listening could be when adults do not want to hear what children have to say (p. 285). In her study, she found that there were serious implications for looked after children who succumb to the power of adults unable or unwilling to shift their authority, resulting in children having limited opportunities to make meaningful contributions and thus reducing their chances of positive outcomes. One way of facilitating this shift in authority is through applying participatory approaches (Hart, 2007).

Taking a participatory approach when working with children is said to be an effective way of diffusing unbalanced power relations between children and adults and of promoting creative ways of engaging children so that their voices can be heard (Hart, 2007; O'Kane, 2000). Participatory work with children promotes their empowerment through participation in problem analysis and the development of solutions (Alderson, 2010; Kirby *et al*, 2003; Kjorholt, 2002) and requires the preparation of both children and adults as well as infrastructural support (Kirby et al 2003; Ray, 2010). Such support includes relevant training in using strategies and preparing children for a different way of interacting with adults, or setting standards to institutionalise participation. Key to effective participatory work with children is adequate time for relationship building (Kirby *et al*, 2003), and this is even more

important for looked-after children who frequently struggle with long-standing issues and need high 'caregiver engagement' (Berridge, 2002). With institutional support, there is a need to change traditional attitudes which do not support children's participation and to focus on children's strengths, motivations and how power is balanced in the children's interest (McNeish & Newman, 2002).

Common themes in this review of work on children's participation have been the emphasis on children as 'becomings' and the view of children as powerless. Also, the literature highlights how adults activate systems and structures to determine how children should participate, if at all. The complexities involved in children's participation reminds us that children are diverse and that careful consideration is needed about means of participation, processes and expected outcomes when promoting children's participation rights.

## 2.4: Residential child care

The key themes highlighted in the residential child care literature include staff-child relationships (Gilligan, 2008; Ward, 2007); what contributes to a safe and nurturing  home (Smith *et al,*  2013); children's participation in decision making in residential care (Holland, 2010; Smith *et al,*  2013; Thomas, 2002, 2007); offending behaviour in care (Hayden, 2010); restorative justice in residential care (Littlechild & Sender, 2010; Willmott, 2007); the outcomes of residential care (Berridge, 2002; Crimmens, 2000; Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998, 1999); alternatives to residential care (Cantwell, 2005; UN, 2010); and positive residential child care practice (Crimmens & Pitts, 2000; Stewart, 2013).

The themes of this literature review will be addressed under three main headings: the experience of residential child care; arguments for and against residential child care; and children's participation in residential child care. There is a dearth of research on residential child care in Trinidad and Tobago, with studies being generally broad and policy-oriented, focusing on quantitative data (Jones & Sogren, 2005; Sharpe & Bishop, 1993). I will draw on these as well as government reports and policy documents, but also on international literature. I do recognise the challenges of transferring findings from cultures such as the US, Canada and Europe to Trinidad and Tobago, but at the same time acknowledge common experiences which can be transferred regarding institutionalisation, abuse of children and adult-child relationships.

At the most general level the principles of child care are set out in the UNCRC, but these need to be interpreted in practice in order to be meaningful for children. In addition to making general statements about provision, participation and protection of all children, the UNCRC has made specific statements about children in state care. Such statements are reflected in Article 3: 'The best interest of the child'; Article 12: 'Respect the views of the child'; 'Article 19: Protection from all forms of violence'; Article 20: 'Children deprived of a family' and Article 25: 'Review of treatment in care'. I will begin my review with the experience of residential care for children and staff and conclude with an overview of some gaps between general policy statements related to residential child care and what happens in practice in Trinidad and Tobago.

### 2.4.1: The experience of residential care for children and staff

Staff-child relations are said to be central to residential child care and positive outcomes for children (Berridge, 2002; Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998). The staff in children's homes often have limited personal and physical resources to work with, despite evidence that they play a significant role in the lives of the children. A study conducted in the US which examined transition planning for youth with emotional and behavioural disorders in a residential treatment centre found that strong and positive relationships with at least one adult caregiver, role model or family member were the most common source of strength for adolescents in treatment (Nickerson *et al,* 2007). The quality of relationships established outside the care setting, and the level of preparation for family re-integration and independent living, are therefore affected when limited opportunities exist for establishing positive caregiver-child relationships (Nickerson *et al,* 2007). According to Thomas (2005), the key tasks involved in caring for children in residential care include:

- Conducting assessment,

- Engaging in therapeutic work,

- Working with group dynamics,

- Managing challenging behaviour,

- Working to prepare young people to return home,

- Working with families,

- Preparation for foster care and independence

(Thomas, 2005 p. 122)

Caregivers are therefore expected to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to work with children in care effectively. Unfortunately, the low profile status of the job often attracts persons with minimum qualifications and training (Thomas, 2005; Crimmens, 2000), which impacts on how they relate to children.

The literature also highlights the challenges of a caring environment when the nature of care is instrumental, focusing on accountability and procedures (Fewster, 2004; Smith, 2011) and when rules about demonstrating affection towards children, which includes touching children, are complex (Piper & Smith, 2003).There continues to be some ambiguity in the role of caregivers where keeping professional distance and the maintenance of positive relationships with children are concerned (Ferguson, 2011; Kendrick & Smith, 2002; Steckley & Smith, 2011). The practice of staff rotating every few hours of the day, and the resulting difficulty of ensuring that care for the children is consistent, presents another challenge – of building close relationships with children and sustaining them. The challenge to ensure stability and continuity in relationships is further complicated by the fact that most children in care were already neglected and lack positive long term relationships with caregivers (Jackson, 2002).

Researchers are undecided about the impact of routinised care on children. The idea of exposing children to routines in care is seen as contributing to children developing a sense of safety (Maier, 1979). Some researchers have placed less emphasis on procedures and rules for caring and advocate the need for a more rhythmic approach to setting boundaries and maintaining healthy relationships between adults and children by showing acceptance, respect and understanding

(Steckley, 2010). One English based charity sought to explore the approach to care that distrusts any display of affection towards looked after children in a campaign called 'feelgOOd'[7] and to explore how to find the balance between restraint and control and showing affection towards children (A National Voice, 2013). The literature indicates that a care environment which is supportive of caring staff and keeps children safe with a sense of security and purpose makes an important difference for children (Smith, 2011; Smith *et al,* 2013). Beyond the field of child care, the literature on care ethics provides useful responses to such problems of boundaries and accountability (Noddings, 2002), as it promotes an alternative approach to caring in highly regulated environments. This is covered in detail in Chapter Four.

Recent research has shown that children associate their residential care experience with family-like experience, where children ascribe terms to adults such as brother, sister, auntie, uncle, mummy, daddy. The children seem to be responding to their need for emotional support and positive relationships with adults - not that residential care can replace their birth families (Kendrick, 2013). Earlier research has shown that despite staff members' efforts to make care more homely, children still recognise that their situation is abnormal (Anglin, 2002). Such claims about residential child care being unable to compensate for lost family relationships have contributed to the heavy scrutiny that it has faced over the years. The arguments for and against residential child care are covered in the following section.

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[7] The FeelgOOd project is meant to convey a message to children in care and adults about the importance of showing natural warmth and affection such as a hug, which makes people feel good about themselves.

### 2.4.2: Arguments for and against residential child care

Residential child care has become a resource of last resort in many countries, used for children with psychological and behavioural problems when family-based settings are not practical (Barth, 2002). It is thus seen as a residual service. Residential child care has also been plagued by allegations - and more than allegations - of child abuse (Corby, 2000). It is also criticised for its rising costs and lack of evidence of effectiveness (Clough *et al,* 2006). This has resulted in powerful criticisms of residential child care, and from this has arisen, among other things, a call for more studies of its effectiveness. Researchers such as Gibbs & Sinclair (1999) highlighted the treatment outcomes of children in care by examining the changing moods, relationships with their family and adjustment of 141 young people in 48 children's homes. Improvements in family relationships were noted mostly where promoting family ties with children was prevalent at the home and improvements in adjustment were found where the head of the home identified and articulated clearly areas for improvement in the young persons' lives and how these could be achieved. From this study, it may be concluded that the outcomes for children in care can be improved by emphasising improvements in family relationships, effective leadership by heads of homes, a positive social environment and support from social workers for healthy caregiver-child relationships. Such findings have been supported by more recent work (Berridge, 2002). These studies emphasise the importance of those simple, yet very important aspects of child care, which can sometimes be overlooked due to managers' desire for ambitious treatment outcomes. There is a lack of research to

determine the extent, quality and impact of children's participation, which Lansdown (2004, 2010) has argued needs to be addressed. This aspect of care is a particular focus of my study.

The children who end up in care are often the most vulnerable (Berridge, 2002). Behavioural problems among children in care are therefore widespread, demanding increased adult surveillance and effective relationships with caregivers. The literature discusses some negative experiences among children in care such as bullying, sexual harassment and absconding, which seem to be more of a problem in some homes more than others (Sinclair & Gibbs, 2000). Children in care are more likely to come into conflict with the law because of their behaviour than if they were in a regular family environment (Taylor, 2003). One study found that managers distinguished between behaviour problems and criminal behaviour (Hayden, 2010), which determined whether staff addressed the behaviour informally or involved the police. Managing children's behaviour is therefore critical and requires proper leadership and mechanisms to counteract the negative elements of the residential care system. Restorative justice is presented in the literature as one way of promoting children's participation and reducing the criminalisation of children in care (Littlechild & Sender, 2010; Willmott, 2007). It is defined very generally as 'a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future' (Marshall, 1999 p. 5). Adopting approaches with a restorative focus has proven to have a positive impact on relationships among children and staff and to be an effective way of conveying to

children the limits of acceptable behaviour, and it could reduce the need for criminal justice procedures such as police intervention ((Littlechild and Sender, 2010; Nacro, 2003; Taylor, 2006).

Family placements such as foster care, kinship care and adoption have become alternatives to residential child care (Meadowcroft et al 1994; Barth 2002). Such arrangements, where children live in a family environment, are considered better by anti-residential care advocates, but there is limited research evidence to inform thinking about such a complex issue (Sellick & Thorburn, 2002). Residential child care and alternative care options should be seen as complementary rather than as separate options, with caregiver-child relationships central to the success of both (Kendrick, 2013). A range of options is needed for the diverse needs of looked after children (Berridge, 2002). Residential care remains a viable option for children who require special treatment (Barton *et al,* 2012) and several models have been used in residential child care settings in an effort to improve children's outcomes.

Some studies have examined the effectiveness of different treatment models of residential child care (James, 2011; Jones & Timbers, 2003; Rivard *et al,* 2005*)*. James (2011) examined five treatment models for children in the US who exhibited behavioural problems and who were severely traumatised. The models were Positive Peer Culture, Teaching Family Model, Sanctuary Model, Stop-Gap Model and Re-Ed[8].

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[8] **Positive Peer Culture** aims to transform a negative peer context into a positive peer culture in which adult authority is de-emphasised.
**Teaching Family Model** emphasises family-style living and learning in a normalizing care environment.
**Sanctuary Model** is a trauma-informed method for creating or changing organisational culture in order to more effectively provide a cohesive context within which healing from psychological and social traumatic experience can be addressed.

All but the Re-Ed model were found to be supported by research or to be promising. There was insufficient evaluative data to rate the Re-Ed model although it has been used widely in homes. One comparative study of the Boys Town Residential campus in the US found that residential care can be more effective than fostering for some children. The boys were more likely to be favourably discharged, more likely to return home and less likely to experience subsequent placement in the first six months after discharge (Lee & Thompson, 2008). It can be concluded from the available studies that determining the best option for children in care is complex and requires further examination to inform decisions (Hair, 2005). In defence of residential care, Taylor (2006) and Smith (2009), for example, report more positive experiences of residential care for children based on positive adult-child interactions. They emphasise that there are many benefits for children in residential care which can be enhanced by improving the quality of relationships between adults and children.

### 2.4.3: The challenges of enabling children's participation in decision making in residential care

Participation is likely to be especially hard to achieve in residential child care, where children are more likely to be overlooked as potentially able to contribute to decisions about their future because adults perceive them as needy and dependent.

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**Stop-Gap Model** is an arrangement aimed at stabilizing youth sufficiently for discharge to a lower level community based treatment.
**Re-Ed** is an ecological competence approach to helping troubled children and youth and their families entering child serving systems.

*Source: James (2011) pgs. 311-318*

The diversity of experiences and circumstances surrounding children's admission to care (Gibbs & Sinclair, 2000) will shape their ability to participate in their new environment (Taylor, 2006). Looked after children have their own psychological and physical consequences to deal with (Smith, 2009), which are associated with feelings of shame, stigmatisation and lack of self-esteem (Ray, 2010). These areas require time to be addressed (Kroll, 1995). Looked after children therefore require additional motivation to participate in decision making and non-traditional approaches such as participatory methods should be applied to encourage meaningful participation and to manage the power dynamics between them and adults (McNeish & Newman, 2002; Thomas, 2005).

Where decision making opportunities exist in residential child care, this is usually at the collective level with groups of children (Emond, 2003; Thomas, 2005). The UNCRC has not accommodated collective participation as much as it should and rather tends to support participation through individual decision making, which presents difficulties in making children's participation in care practical. This expectation is reflected in Trinidad and Tobago legislation which governs children in care, including The Domestic Violence Act of 1999 (Amended in 2006), The Children Act 12 of 2012 and The Children's Authority Act of 2000, which specifically mentions children contributing to decisions by the court as witnesses and respondents.

In defence of the criticism that an emphasis on child rights fails to adequately address collective decision making and promotes selfish individualism, Alderson (2000) posits that the child rights approach increases mutual respect for all. The

author claims that it promotes 'social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity' (p. 442). This argument further demonstrates the complexity of children's participation in care, as the reality of their everyday experience of group decision making is still not adequately addressed with such an abstract and macro focus.

Another area of complexity for children's participation in care is finding the balance between enabling young children to participate and protecting them from harm (Alderson, 2008; Lansdown, 2010). Because looked after children are seen as most vulnerable and dependent on adults for their well-being and their participation, they can easily be excluded as adults determine what is in their best interest (Thomas, 2002; Lansdown, 2010). For the child in residential care, participation therefore becomes more complex. This is highlighted in research conducted by Nigel Thomas where he examined the extent of children's participation in decision making about their care (Thomas, 2002). He found that adults made decisions about children's participation based on age, the nature of decisions to be taken, the forms and procedures used in the decision making process and children's perception of their abilities to contribute. It may be assumed therefore that the very undemocratic structure of institutions impedes children's participation under the guise of child protection (Thomas, 2007).

There are also notable differences in how looked after children and children living in birth families participate in decision making, mediated by the communication process between children and adults (Thomas, 2002). Thomas found that the way in

which adults communicate with children influences their participation and this presents a major difference when compared to the children living with birth families who prefer participation to be less formalised and more private, with little intrusion from adults outside their family boundary. This may also suggest that the ways in which both groups of children demonstrate their preference to participate or not participate may vary, with children living in birth families having more options to avoid participation (Mayall, 2006; Thomas, 2002). The formal arrangements of assessments, care planning and reviews and disciplinary procedures, for instance, give looked after children fewer options for opting out if they want to.

### 2.4.4: Policy and practice related to children's participation in residential care in Trinidad and Tobago

In Trinidad and Tobago, the importance of children's participation in decision making has been identified among government institutions (Ministry of Social Development, 2006). Among the reasons for promoting children's participation nationally are better representation, empowerment, improved services and youth development (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2006). The first National Youth Policy was launched in September 2006 and highlighted youth participation and inclusion as its second theme. In addition, government-supported children's homes were mandated to take on a more participatory approach to child care (National Plan of Action, 2006). Children's participation is also embedded in the 21 care standards outlined by the Children's Authority, but there is more scope for collective than individual participation. This is most prominent in the section on complaints procedures - for

example, "children are encouraged to meet together regularly with management and staff to resolve issues and problems pertaining to their care in the community residence" (Final Draft Standards for Community Residences, Standard 4.8).

Actions to promote children and young people's participation in Trinidad and Tobago appear to be directly related to a 2003 World Bank report and the Second Periodic Report under the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2006 which recommended:

*'The state party should promote and facilitate respect for the views of children and ensure their participation in all matters affecting them in all spheres of society, particularly in the family, in school and in communities, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention' (UNCRC 2006, p. 7.)*

This draws attention to the problem of the authenticity of participatory approaches when children's participation is imposed rather than accepted naturally - which may have a direct impact on the adult-child relationship (Sinclair, 2004).

### 2.4.5: Conclusion

While it would be useful to have further research on residential child care, some general conclusions can be drawn from existing work (Ray 2010; Sinclair & Franklin 2000; McNeish & Newman 2002). A major outcome of the studies reviewed above is that there is no one right way to practise residential child care, but we can identify important issues and principles. Both looked after children and children living in their families of origin are expected to participate at school, in health care, community and environment, young people's associations, political processes and media (UNICEF, 2001). However, the literature reviewed highlights the need to treat children in residential care as a special group, given the circumstances which bring

them into care. The decision to de-institutionalise children's homes is not as straightforward as it appears and residential child care should not only be seen as a last resort. More focus should be placed on determining how residential child care can be developed as a balanced approach which embraces care ethics, control and protection, motivation to participate and scope for practice that has the rhythm to integrate emerging experiences and the routine to ensure safety and security (Smith, 2011).

## 2.5: Theoretical Framework

As I engaged in fieldwork and began to analyse my findings, the usefulness of theories such as the ecological systems theory, ethics of care, children's agency as an element of the strengths perspective, development ethics and critical social work became apparent to me. The theories provided concepts which helped me to identify the interpersonal and broader structural issues which affect residential child care and how the institutionalised system of residential child care operates and links to other systems. An examination of the theoretical approaches that have informed understanding of residential child care shows that most have relied on psychological theories such as psychodynamic (attachment theory, resiliency theory) and behavioural (social learning, cognitive behaviourism, solution-focused) approaches to better understand the experiences of the children (Smith, 2011). Attachment theory, for example, helps us to understand how children's early relationships with their parents or caregivers will determine their relationships in later years. Where inconsistency or instability exists, children may become avoidant or ambivalent

(Ainsworth *et al*, 1978) and their decision making capacity can be negatively affected. This absence of positive attachments can result in children being uncertain about how they should respond to situations that confront them.  As related to this study, most of the children have been in care since early childhood, which is consistent with other findings about the length of time children are known to live in residential care in Trinidad and Tobago (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012; Jones and Sogren, 2005; Sharpe & Bishop, 1993). As such, caregivers have assumed the role of their parents, which has implications for attachment outcomes. I have however chosen to deviate from such traditional approaches to examining residential child care as my focus is less on psychological issues and more on the connections between interpersonal issues and macro issues related to adult-child relationships.

As my research developed I saw complexities surrounding residential child care and children's participation which needed to be critically examined and decided to take a critical approach to analysing adult-child interactions in residential care. I therefore needed to focus on a set of theories which could explain the influence of paternalistic structures and cultural influences on interpersonal relationships and how personal resources were utilised to facilitate personal agency – that is, people's capacity to actively influence social change (Alway, 1995). I will begin by looking at development ethics and ethics of care and how they relate to each other, and then look at the strengths perspective and children's agency and how this perspective facilitated an understanding of the important role children play in adult-child relationships. I will conclude with an overview of critical social work theory, which

provided a lens for exploring the hidden macro structures such as power relations that exist in residential child care and the influence of external forces such as the UN and government institutions.

### 2.5.1: Development Ethics:

The term development ethics was coined by a French socio-economist Louis-Joseph Lebret (1897-1966), who adopted a humanist approach to development (Goulet, 2006). Denis Goulet developed his work on development ethics from the ideas of Lebret, and it is Goulet's work which informs this thesis. 'Development ethics aims to diagnose value conflicts, assess policies and justify or refute valuations placed on development performance' (Goulet 1995, p. 8). For Goulet, it is an important criterion that development initiatives consider the 'ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning and practice' (p. 5). Development for Goulet is viewed as being fundamentally self-development where societies define their own goals and encompass human values and attitudes in defining such goals (Goulet, 2006). Participation is therefore central to development and includes a mixture of 'material and moral incentive' (p. 97) or investment of time, energy, interest and resources by non-elite people (Goulet, 1995). In practice, development ethicists engage local people in planning that affects their lives, taking into account their cultural values and lived experiences, and they seek strategies to minimise economic wastage and mobilise national resources to meet local needs. Universal values that guide development practices are challenged and policies are constantly assessed to determine how they affect local people.

As related to residential child care, development ethics as posited by Goulet (1995) provides a useful theory for understanding the ethical basis for increasing children's agency through participation as a means of mitigating value conflicts. Such value conflicts include the way that we look at children's decision making opportunities – are we responding to the needs of children or to adults' perception of their needs based on cultural norms and experiences?

The concept has been useful in providing me with guidance for thinking about ways of balancing traditional values regarding childhood, children and new approaches to child care, given the local and international influences. It has also provided useful guidance on principles and strategies for thinking about decision making in child welfare work as an aspect of development. Its usefulness also extends to the conceptualisation of the broader context of politics, economics and culture, which became significant to this research. Goulet criticised development that does not value local experiences as he believed that the solutions to essential development concerns exist within local populations. Development existed where human potential was perceived to be enhanced, 'when growing freedoms can find their expression in institutions, norms of exchange, patterns of social organisation, educational efforts, relations of production and political choices' (Goulet, 2006, p. 59). Like Sen (2000), who saw development as the process of advancing people's freedom, Goulet saw freedom as an end and a means to development. Freedom from poverty, powerlessness and hopelessness can be achieved when people are able to decide and act on their own behalf with little or no interference from the elite group (Goulet,

2006). From a development ethics perspective, it is possible to identify how adult-child interactions influence decision making so that more can be understood about meeting children's needs adequately.

In general, long term participation is necessary for sustainable development (Stiglitz, 1998; White & Choudhury, 2007). Children's participation is therefore important for active and sustainable democracy and looked after children should be included in decision making if they are not to be marginalised and stigmatised. Goulet's approach to development, like those of Paulo Freire (1970) and Sen, therefore acknowledges the dialogical approach which avoids manipulation by elite groups and the importance of considering historical and cultural factors. Dialogue that allows members of society to share their views on matters affecting them is necessary at both the micro and macro levels in order that structural changes can be made to facilitate meaningful development.

Goulet's work did not specifically address children in care but he did highlight the ethical challenges in development for marginalised populations such as women and children, which are applicable here. Acknowledging the usefulness of his work, the way forward for residential child care is a process of including children in decision making such that they are able to contribute to outcomes in their life space (Smith, 2009; Thomas, 2005). The response should be sufficiently flexible to take into account the values of a diverse society, respect the rights of adults and children alike (Smith, 2011) and provide opportunities for adults to reflect on participatory engagement by children (Kirby *et al,* 2003; Lansdown, 2004). Participation should

therefore be seen as an ethical value that allows people 'to become agents and not merely beneficiaries of their own development' (Goulet, 1989 p. 165). In this way, 'natural elites' or 'popular elites' will emerge among the people to represent communities more authentically, not to replace leaders but rather to hold them accountable in ways that help people to live as they choose (Goulet, 1995).

### 2.5.2: Ethics of Care

The ethics of care as posited by Maier (1979), Noddings (1986) and Tronto (1994), and later developed by Noddings (2002), Held (2006) and Slote (2007) to incorporate the social and political context, is a useful set of ideas that can be applied to understanding looked after children. It has arisen from the experience of women and been developed by feminists to promote an understanding of care ethics as a relational ethic, where the cared-for and the carer are equally important and where reciprocity and mutuality are critical. It was used initially to understand the caring relationships between teachers and students and the concepts were then transferred to nursing and welfare and family and community relationships. Ethics of care postulates that caring should be a foundation for ethical decision making and should therefore be relational, ethical, reciprocal and receptive to feelings and emotions (Held, 2006; Noddings, 1986, 2012). Issues of ethics of care (Moss, 2006; J. Hart, *et al,* 2004) are highlighted in the examination of relationships between children and caregivers.   It makes important contributions to our understanding of the interdependent and inter-subjective elements present in the adult-child relationship

(Ennew, 1994; Moss, 2006). At the micro level of interpersonal relationships, ethics of care promotes participation by the beneficiary of service to ensure that needs are identified and addressed. Related to children's participation in decision making, care ethics can help explain how children's participation can be enhanced through better adult-child relationships.

Held (2006) outlines some features of the ethics of care - it challenges universal rules about what is morally acceptable as context changes experiences for others; and the interests of the carer and the cared for are intertwined, which means that people act selfishly and for others simultaneously. Further, it reconceptualises traditional notions of the private and public, highlighting their interconnectedness and how care as a private issue applies to wider societal issues and need not be stigmatised and associated only with the vulnerable in society. Held (2006) therefore extends the concept of ethics of care from personal to political arrangements. For instance, the ethics of care can enlighten us on issues of empathy and caring and of respect for children's right to privacy and confidentiality (Held, 2006). Ethics of care, according to Held (2006), has resources for dealing with power such as between adults and looked after children, as it takes into account the complexities of caring relationships. The caring relationship between adults and looked after children is within a public domain and is responsive to the social, political and cultural forces that shape the context for practice.

Care ethics provides useful guidelines for what constitutes a caring person. To effectively care for another requires certain qualities of the caring person

(Mayeroff 1971) and an understanding of what the cared-for needs (Noddings 1984).

To care for another requires trust, hope, devotion, humility, courage, empathy (Mayeroff 1971; Noddings 1984), reciprocity and sympathy (Noddings (1984). This according to Noddings (1984) is the 'affective state of attention in caring', where the beginning of a caring encounter requires an open, receptive attention to the other and results in a motivational shift (Noddings 1986), which facilitates an appreciation of the needs of the other. Understanding the role of sympathy and empathy in the caring relationship is therefore important. Both sympathy and empathy are seen as relevant to the caring relationship of a caregiver and looked after child, but this level of care may be difficult to achieve given that both emotional states require information about an individual so that one can relate to them at a deeper level. The carer needs to relate to the child in a way that promotes development and self-actualisation, and requires an awareness of what it is like to be in the child's world. This arouses feelings which allow the caregiver to be *with* the child while being objective (Mayeroff, 1971), and to act in the best interest of the child. This is challenging in the care setting where children's privacy, either in the form of having personal space or securing personal file information, is to be respected despite their circumstances. Additionally, where sympathy or empathy is demonstrated, this would be in a general sense, directed to all children given knowledge of their reasons for being in care, which does not move the care relationship to a more personal level of 'being with' (Mayeroff, 1971) the child. Additionally, what adults in general demonstrate as caring may not be regarded as the kind of caring that allows children

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to engage in opportunities to grow and be self-determining, because of their overprotection of children (Mayeroff, 1971). They are also unable to provide individualised attention to children and to be responsive to their individual needs. Another important element of caring is the ability and willingness of caregivers to be consistent and accessible to the cared-for, but this remains a challenge in institutionalised care. The residential child care setting does not afford opportunities for caregivers to be reachable to children or be consistent in the ways that are required.

### 2.5.3: The Strengths Perspective and Children's Agency

The range of analysis applied to this research includes the strengths perspective, which is related to empowerment theory. There are debates about the positions held by the social work profession about the meaning and value of empowerment (Fook, 2012), which I choose to avoid at this time, turning instead to the strengths perspective as being less conceptually problematic. The strengths perspective seeks to identify pre-existing strengths and capacities of service users and complements our understanding of children's agency. It encourages an interactive social work practice (Saleebey, 1996) that allows service users to define their needs and areas for intervention. It is a process that facilitates the use of inherent strengths and resources to identify and apply solutions to current situations. The strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2006) affords the opportunity of yet another view of the experiences of looked after children, in which their identified competence and innovation are implicitly the evidence that supports a strengths based approach to

their participation rights.  It is also relevant to the discourse of children's citizenship, affirming the capacity of children to possess the skills to cope and adapt, in addition to the resilience needed to be conscientious and responsible citizens.

The strengths perspective has been criticised for placing responsibility for social change upon service users (Lee, 2001). It is arguably not fully consistent with critical social theory because of its focus on personal issues (Cowger, 1998). Strengths are also culturally defined and it is difficult to determine what is considered as a strength in a given context (Saleebey, 1996). Despite these criticisms, the strengths perspective offers ideas that can be used to support the children's participation agenda (Cockburn, 2013, 2005; Jans, 2004; Matthews, 2003). It offers a useful framework to examine children's demonstration of their strengths and capacities, thereby providing a counter-argument to assumptions about children and childhood that stress incapacity and dependence. It also fills a gap that critical social theory has been criticised for neglecting - the personal issues of service users. Applied to this study, the strengths perspective helps in the analysis of how a risk-averse approach to child protection, which fails to recognise children's strengths, can be destructive to children's development (Munro, 2001).  As posited by Beck (1992), a strengths approach can facilitate self-protection, as children's personal resources are recognised and engaged. The strengths perspective is useful to the analysis of my findings in so far as it provides a counter-argument to children being seen as incompetent and weak, as well as providing a useful analytical perspective on children's agency (Oswell, 2013).

Children's agency refers to the capacity of children to influence the prevailing

construction of their life's experiences, where these are physical, cognitive or

emotional (Oswell, 2013). It was usefully applied to the analysis of the links between

structural issues such as staffing and personal issues and how power is exercised by

children. Emphasising children's agency allows us to see children within a global

context, and how it is influenced by politics and technology. Such ideas have been

developed by Oswell (2013) in his work on children's rights and political participation,

where he notes that adults' views of children's competency have been complicated

'in the context of the international and a notion of global humanity' (p. 258), which is

reflected in the application of the UNCRC. The key theoretical questions related to

children's agency in this study are derived from Oswell (2013):

- 'What is meant by agency?
- Is it individual or collective?
- Is it only social or is children's agency hybridly formed across the social, psychological and biological?
- Is it purely human or does it rely on non-human resources such as technological and natural resources?
- Do some children have more agency than others?
- Does agency always rely on others to mediate and translate one's actions?
- How does agency transform over time and context?
  (p. 41)
  These questions help us to explore how children's participation can transcend the

personal realm and move towards more complex issues of looked after children's

reality of communal living, technological advancement and experiences of abuse.

### 2.5.4: Critical Social Work Theory

Critical social work as developed by Fook (2002) provides a useful framework for understanding the issues presented in this research. It facilitates the analysis and understanding of context, such as that of residential child care, which Healy (2005) and Fook (2002) argue is essential to critical social work practice. It also helps us to recognise, confront and work in the best interest of the children where challenges of contradiction, inconsistencies and incongruence exist.

Critical social work theory focuses on the lived experiences of subjects within social structures and their capacity to be reflective, construct their reality and influence social change (Allan *et al,* 2009; Fook, 2002, 2012; Mullaly, 2003). It allowed for a critical analysis of children's participation as defined by children and experienced with adults. It illuminated the challenges and possibilities associated with children's participation and the social systems which influence their experience (Fook, 2012). Additionally, it provided helpful practical responses to the issues that arose in the research. The outcome was a non-deterministic way of appreciating the complex and diverse experiences between adults and looked after children. As a consequence, the social relations which describe adult-child interactions and issues of social justice, such as children's participatory rights, are examined in the diverse constructions through which they are experienced.

Critical social work has been applied to an analysis of children's identity and its relationship to adults' conceptions of childhood (D'Cruz, 2004). In residential child care, such identities are defined by children's age, sex and class and include them

being identified as 'children in need of care and protection', 'junior girls and boys, senior girls and boys'. These constructions bring complexities to the experiences of children such as how they participate in decision making (D'Cruz, 2009). Such complexities also include how children come to be perceived as perpetrators or victims, as in the case of child offenders or children becoming pregnant. Critical social work has also been useful in linking personal issues such as children's participation in care to the wider political discourse of citizenship. It ensures that the immediate needs are addressed and long term change is acted upon (D'Cruz, 2009).The complexities of children being seen as citizens, participating in decisions which affect them, have been highlighted by McLaughlin (2005). Concerns about which children should participate, what decisions they should contribute to and whether or not adults should represent their views, are raised in the children-as-citizens debate. Emancipatory (immediate action for short and medium term results) and transformational (action to influence structural changes as in policies and systems) outcomes can be achieved when we understand how to engage children in meaningful decision making, and critical social work provides a compass for achieving such goals (Payne, 2005).

In applying critical social work theory, understanding how power manifests in social relationships is essential. This is important to note in the relationships with children in care who are confined by the formal hierarchies of their homes (Wattam & Parton, 1999). Critical social work has been criticised for having a limited view on power, which it equates with control, thus neglecting the complexity of power

relations. Foucault's (1988) concept of power provided useful insights in this regard. He saw power as an aspect of all social relationships that is relational and contextual, rather than a possession. It is therefore a dynamic phenomenon which is exercised and applied in creative and challenging ways, including through resistance. The act of resistance by those who are expected to be subdued is in turn the power they possess. Using this lens to examine residential child care therefore illuminates such power relations between children and adults, as well as the possibilities which exist for creating collaboration between children and adults as they work towards a common agenda (Allan *et al,* 2009).

In conclusion, the theories that I chose as useful for explaining children's participation in decision making in residential care were all interrelated. Where one theory had a shortcoming, the other compensated, as in the strengths perspective and critical social work. Also, the concept of ethics of care, as related to looked after children, fits well with my understanding of macro issues such as development ethics, as related to policy development, which can also influence long term, structural changes. Combined, all the theories I applied are consistent with social work practice and they reflect my approach to this study, which was to examine both micro and macro levels of influence. The outcome is that linkages are identified which could contribute meaningfully to the discourse on children's participation in decision making.

### 2.5.5: Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted vital points of concern about children's participation in decision making as it relates to children as citizens and looked after children. It outlines the arguments on participation in general, varying perspectives on children's participation, the diversity that exists for different groups of children and the role of adults and institutions in shaping children's participation in decision making.  Arguments were presented which highlight the varied nature of children's participation that extends from natural settings, to children's institutions, to the societal demands of citizenship. The literature provides a frame for developing thinking about children's participation from the micro level of the ethics of care to the more macro level, policy focused position of development ethics.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1: Overall approach and rationale

This research is a qualitative case study of looked after children. As a researcher, I approached the study with certain knowledge and values from my experience as a social worker and educator working with children. This experience influenced my study as I had my own sense of what good child care means. As a result of this, I cannot claim that my study was fully inductive (Miles & Huberman, 1984), as I held some assumptions about child care - for example, that greater participation was desirable. A broadly ethnographic and social constructionist approach was applied in order to find out about children's participation in decision-making in residential care. The social constructionist approach essentially focuses on how people construct knowledge and truth based on their own subjective experiences (Hammersley, 1992), which acquire an objective reality through interactions with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Adopting the less rigid version of social constructionism, I acknowledge the importance of attending to how people think about social phenomena but hold the view that their version of reality may not necessarily be true. I also believe that social constructionism can be useful for research in an institutional setting such as children's homes, as my data revealed important things about the relations of power between children and adults in the Homes and about caring relationships, which emerged from their accounts of their personal experiences. I do not claim that this is the only reality of children's homes but I believe that what I found

is true and useful for understanding what was going on in the Homes at the time of the study and how caregiving can be improved with children in care.

I applied participatory techniques to facilitate varied means of expression and to ensure full engagement of participants and I collaborated with participants throughout the different stages of the research process. Children and adults assisted in focusing the study as they identified specific areas which should be explored, they provided suggestions which informed the methodology and they provided feedback during and after my data analysis. For example, during my pilot study, child-friendly approaches for conducting research with children (Fraser, 2004), such as using games and artwork, were identified as productive, based on the feedback from children. The primary methods for data collection included participant observation, focus group interviews and individual interviews. Some documentary analysis was also involved where written correspondence, policies and guidelines were available. The primary assumption was that children's own voices and experiences provided the greatest insights into their reality as participants in residential care. Observation was used to verify and explore their accounts of these experiences.

Qualitative research was my preferred approach given its ability to provide rich descriptions of experiences that quantitative methods may not be able to provide and because, more than quantitative methodology, it allows new ways of thinking to emerge from the data (Creswell, 1998; Gubrium, 1988; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Silverman, 2006). It reduces the tendency to apply pathological labels, for which some

quantitative studies have been criticised. For example,  Leon et al (2008), who studied trauma resilience among young people in substitute care who exhibited sexual behaviour problems, failed to examine how the young people come to be categorised in that way. Qualitative research such as ethnography addresses this limitation by deepening our understanding of how social meaning is derived by research participants and allows the researcher to examine at first hand their experiences and the context in which they occur (Brewer, 2000; Neuman, 2006). Qualitative research facilitates collaboration between the researcher and the research subjects within a social-historical context such that it is locally constructed, pragmatic and participative (Smith, 1987). Qualitative research is also consistent with social work values and principles such as partnership and purposeful expression of feelings (Biestek, 1957; Thompson, 2009) and it promotes reflection for both the researcher and the participants. Also, qualitative methods of data collection, interviews and observation allowed for greater control of researcher bias and the perception of power on my part, while supporting greater motivation and participatory responses from children and their care givers.

Much of the research conducted on residential child care focuses on children's individualised needs (Barth 2005); continuity of care (Barth, 2005; Jackson, 2002); participation in decision making (McLeod 2007; Munro, 2001; Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2012); and resilience (Gilligan, 2001; Houston, 2011). The main methods used in these studies were interviews, process reviews and action research. McLeod's (2007) UK-based study looked at issues of power in relationships when listening to looked-after

children. She used semi-structured interviews, which provided deep insights into the meaning of listening and effective dialogue with socially excluded children and the influence of power in their interactions. Qualitative approaches were also used by Munro (2001), who conducted a similar study using interviews with looked-after children in the UK. The study focused on children's experiences of being looked-after and how they felt about their capacity to influence decision making.

There are a few ethnographic studies on children in residential care (Delfabbro & Barber, 2005; Holland, 2009). Applying critical ethnography in a US study (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012), the researchers examined young people's lived experiences in foster care and how they transitioned to independence. Other researchers have used ethnographic studies that sought to explore the experience of juvenile offenders in residential care (Abrams, 2006) and peer sexual violence in residential homes (Barter, 2006). As a research method, ethnography allows the researcher to observe concrete experiences of participants' everyday lives rather than only depend on accounts of them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) - thus providing detailed descriptions that may not be available otherwise. This is where my study offers something different – I spent extensive time with children and adults in the Homes. In addition to relying on the reports of children and adults' experiences, I gained first-hand accounts of a wide range of those experiences, which included different data sources and scheduled events such as Carnival celebrations, staff events and meetings.

Power dynamics exist between researchers and child participants (Fraser *et al*, 2004), but these can be partly overcome by using ethnographic research because of its participatory nature. Although earlier ethnographic research was criticised for neglecting power relations inherent within research (Hammersley, 1998), recent work has recognised this problem and suggests facilitating dialogue with children by making tasks more meaningful for them (Christensen, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, my research is not value free, which may threaten the validity of my work (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Bearing this in mind, to limit the threats to research validity, opportunities for triangulation[9] were taken so that different data could be systematically compared and to determine where they intersect. Two of the main residential child care institutions were used in the study and a range of data collection methods were used in each. These methods included focus groups, interviews, participant and non-participant observation, photographs and documentary analysis. An ethnographic journal was also useful in helping me to manage my subjectivity. How this was used will be discussed in the 'Methods' section (3.6).

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[9] Triangulation is the process of comparing different kinds of data and methods to determine if they corroborate each other (Silverman, 2010)

The research seeks to examine children's participation in decision making in residential care in Trinidad and Tobago and the relational issues related to their decision making. More specifically, its objectives are to:

1. Examine the adult-child interactions to determine how they negotiate values and agendas in their relationships, which may provide insights into participatory work with children in care;

2. Identify what are the motivations and experiences of looked after children and how to encourage their participation in decision making;

3. Identify the socio-cultural structures that influence children's participation in decision making;

4. Explore child participation as viewed and experienced by the children themselves, care givers, policy makers and other key stakeholders, thereby increasing our understanding of child participation in a local, Caribbean context.

As well as an academic study, an aim of this research was for it to have concrete application for policy and practice which will influence children's care experiences. Hopefully, the research will provide further insights into child-centred approaches which can further inform ethical and empowering practice with looked after children. The five decision making points within the care process I chose to focus on were: (1) assessment, care planning and the review process, (2) disciplinary proceedings, (3) participation in education, (4) accessing specialist services and (5) the leaving care process. I was unable to focus on all of these as the study progressed and I worked

with what became available. As such, children's participation in care planning, ICT use, disciplinary proceedings, leadership in care, volunteer and external services, extra-curricular/cultural activities and the leaving care process were most prominent in the care experiences of children.

### 3.3: Research questions:

Linked to the objectives of the study, the questions used to guide my investigations were:

1. How do children experience being in residential care and what is the quality of relationships they experience?

2. To what extent do children in residential care experience participation in decision making?

3.  How do adults and looked after children give meaning to participation?

4. What does children's participation mean to the various social actors in the care system?

5. How could 'participation' in care be improved for children?

### 3.4: Assumptions

The main assumption which underlies this study is that participation in decision making by looked-after children is influenced by the dominant traditional beliefs of adults. These traditional beliefs are reflected in structures and systems which shape the interactions between children and adults. In more specific terms this suggests that:

1. There is no single version of children's participation but rather an observable process that could help us to understand how to make sense of it. For looked after children, an understanding of this process can contribute to a better appreciation of the interdependence of adults and children as it relates to children's participation.

2. The contexual (structural, socio-cultural, organisational) and relational aspects of children's experiences in care are fundamental to understanding children's participation. This can be conceived in ecological terms as shown in **Diagram II**.

3. Residential child care exists in Trinidad and Tobago and is likely to continue in existence for some time and therefore needs to be made as participative as possible to promote better outcomes for children in care.

**Diagram II:** The bioecological approach to understanding Children and Young People's (CYP) participation in residential care
(Adapted from Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development)

**MICROSYSTEM**
Looked after CYP
(Institution, community, parent, caregivers, school, religious setting)

**MESOSYSTEM:**
Institution, Religious setting, community, school, family, caregivers

**EXOSYSTEM:**
Home Board of management, Children's Authority, the church, mass media (ICTs), corporate sector, UN, Laws, school boards

**MACROSYSTEM:**
Dominant beliefs about children and childhood and participation rights, cultural beliefs

**CHRONOSYSTEM:**
De-institutionalisation, Technological influence, Needs based to rights based approaches

## 3.5: Sample

In order to obtain reliable and detailed accounts of children's participation experiences in care, I selected male residents, 13-17 years old, with over two years' experience living in residential care, who were preparing to leave care. Males were selected because of the concerns shared by adults about their aftercare experiences and this group was reported by adults to be more expressive and responsive than the girls. In some instances girls were used for comparison as gender differences/segregation are highly significant in the running of the Homes. Girls'

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experiences were notably different from the boys', especially with respect to their safety and protection as perceived by staff, and this made for interesting insights into the gender dynamics of children in care. I relied on retrospective accounts of children's and adults' experiences, which this age group provided. I observed the interactions of younger children and interviewed past residents in addition to observing the participants of the study. See **Appendix V** for my data sources.

### 3.6: Methods

I engaged two types of research participants: primary participants – the children and caregivers – and secondary participants – other adult stakeholders such as policy specialists, managers, probation officers and magistrates. In terms of the sequencing of the research methods, I first held focus group discussions with the children and then observed them in various settings. The observations were not restricted to those children in the focus groups as they interacted with other children in the Homes. Being guided by suggestions from the caregivers, I first interviewed them individually, then I observed them interacting with the children. The interviews with secondary participants were ongoing and followed observations, focus group discussions and interviews with children and caregivers as this information guided the policy-focused interviews. The timing depended on the availability of secondary participants and my ability to capitalise on opportunities to interact with them at meetings and events held at the Homes and outside, such as sporting activities, cultural events and skills training workshops.

**Participant observation** was the primary research method used in the study although there were times I was a non-participant observer. More specifically, I was in the role of observer-as-participant as opposed to participant-as-observer (B. Taylor, 2009), as direct observation took precedence. This role was more suitable for me as it allowed me to balance emotional involvement and detachment. It also allowed me to observe research participants in their natural settings and helped to overcome the challenge of receiving limited data in interviews. It was a means of collecting primary data as well as of triangulation, as mentioned earlier, which allowed me to clarify any inconsistencies or vagueness in children's and adults' expressions. For instance, some experiences had different meanings based on the context in which activities took place. Opportunities were presented where children were more directly involved in the interpretation of their actions such as when they debriefed after activities and interpreted artwork, which I captured through observation (Clark & Moss, 2001). I learnt not to take experiences for granted and assume that they were uniform patterns. Rigorous and detailed recording was necessary, so I manually recorded observations to capture vivid accounts of events while in the field and then used an ethnographic journal which allowed me to reflect on my fieldwork. I also took photographs as needed and collected relevant documentation. In keeping an ethnographic journal, a systematic method outlined by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), I recorded my notes under three headings – observational notes, methodological notes and theoretical notes. I returned to my work station immediately after completing my observations and interviews and spent between two and four hours

writing up my field notes each time, and reflected on what transpired. The observational notes were descriptive statements about the events I experienced, primarily through watching and listening. At this point I deferred any interpretations or analyses (See **Appendix VI**). The theoretical notes went a bit further to derive meaning from the observations. Here I attempted to conceptualise experiences, in a thinking process where I made my connections to earlier experiences and literature in the field and attempted to create new knowledge. The methodological notes reflected my approach to fieldwork, critiquing how I did what I did and making recommendations for improvement. The timing, sequencing and location of the data collection process were important (Scott-Jones 2010).

In addition to observing the children in their Homes and at off-campus sites, I also visited Durham's Investing in Children in the UK to interview a manager about their approach to getting children involved in decision making. Durham's Investing in Children is a non-governmental agency devoted to promoting children's human rights and ensuring that they can participate in decisions which affect them. The agency is acknowledged for its exemplary practices by Ofsted, UK, and I felt that it was a good site to review. I also observed consultation sessions at the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago where I was a Board member. I benefitted from first-hand accounts of the policy and practice issues which affected children's participation. At Investing in Children, the accounts of the manager's experiences with engaging children and documentary reviews proved to be useful. Observations at the Children's Authority with Managers during the care standards development process

were useful as I clarified information, acquired in-depth understanding of the larger policy issues affecting the Homes and verified information which I collected at the Homes. I spent a total of twelve hours observing this process as a participant observer. These experiences provide the context for later discussions on children's participation at the broader policy and practice levels in a regional and international context (see Chapter Seven).

**Focus groups** allow for the production of data through the social interaction of participants (Kitzinger, 1994). They can also have an effective empowerment function (Skop, 2006), in that participants gain insights into their situation and through discussions are motivated to take action or change undesirable attitudes and behaviours. According to Kitzinger (1994) the focus group is a good way to obtain varying views on a topic. It was an effective method for building relationships with the children and encouraged interaction and dialogue among them. I benefitted from hearing the children's collective responses as well as their disagreement on issues as they challenged each other. The outcomes of the focus group guided the design and focus of this study as important themes emerged. The process in itself revealed important information which guided how the research should be conducted. A total of six focus groups were conducted with children.

**Structured participatory activities** such as role play and multisensory approaches including art, photography and maintaining a profile book were utilised so that there was less reliance on children's oral communication skills. These approaches have been used in studies with younger children and have proved to be

valuable means for them to express their feelings and engage all their senses to give researchers greater insight into their experiences (Cousins, 1999; Finch 1998; Miller, 1997; Clark 2005). For instance, Cameron and Clark (2004, cited in Clark, 2005) have outlined that the major benefit of using art as a tool for listening to children is that the process in itself is more beneficial than the formal analysis of the final work. Art became a dominant tool for engaging the children and was used to stimulate discussion on sensitive issues. It served to raise their self-confidence as they participated in the focus groups. Apart from the focus groups, it was used in sessions I delivered at both Homes as the children responded well while they painted or drew. I observed the dynamics between them as they discussed their artwork and assisted each other. They participated in a professional art show and shared their views about the artists' work as it related to their life experiences. Such approaches helped me to gain insights into the children's lives and were also useful in demonstrating how positive relationships between children and adults can be fostered (Alderson, 2010; Kirby et al, 2003; Kjorholt, 2002).

**Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Although I did not intend to engage participants in any major action-oriented work, PAR seemed inevitable and became a natural part of the study. It entailed strong involvement of participants in the research process (Whyte, 1991). Participatory approaches are responsive to cultural diversity (Chambers, 1997, 2005) as they are drawn from the experiences of the participants. I engaged the children in projects such as the 'Responsible living programme' in H1 where children identified their needs and resources and the outcomes were used to

inform adults about decisions affecting them. I also observed where PAR was used by a volunteer in H2 to help the children inform management about decisions. One outcome of the study itself is an enhanced sense of the usefulness of participatory approaches in child care. Apart from using participatory approaches to engage children, they served as lessons for caregivers and policy makers who were able to witness and learn about the preliminary outcomes of the study. My involvement in the process of developing training programmes for staff of children's homes was informed by the experiences of this research. A major component of the training modules was strengthening interpersonal relationships between children and adults using participatory approaches.

Further, the design of the study was participatory, in that children were consulted from the design phase of the study, throughout the research activities and at the analysis stage (Jones, 2004). The process proved to be a powerful medium for fostering a healthy, open and trusting relationship with children where they identified their needs, described their lived experiences, assisted me in interpreting their expressions and made me feel comfortable in their environment where I experienced, as much as possible, what being a child in care was like.

**Interviews** were used with children, caregivers and secondary participants. Interviews were either one-off or on-going. The one-off interviews were with secondary participants, and were usually structured. On-going interviews were carried out with managers and caregivers who worked at the Homes and children during the course of the study. The on-going interviews were similar to ordinary

conversations, were semi-structured and were used when I sought new information, clarification and verification of information collected. All interviews with adults and children lasted between one hour and 1½ hours per interviewee (**See Table II on page 104)**.

The children's interviews were designed using Thomas and O'Kane's (1998a) guidelines (also known as the TRANSACTS model) which outline nine elements for effectively communicating with children, which were developed from research with looked after children (**See Appendix VII**). Throughout I applied guidelines for research with children and young people (Fraser, et al 2004; Lewis and Lindsay 2000). Some of these included: giving children an active participatory role in research from design to dissemination; differentiating between researching 'on' children and researching 'with' children; acknowledging the power relations between the researcher and the child and how they affect the research process; recognising the necessity of positive engagement; negotiating engagement and clarifying roles.

| Caregivers | Children | Managers | Police Officer | Probation Officers | Magistrate | Policy Specialists | Past Residents | Social Worker/Welfare Officer/Counsellor | Volunteers | Supplementary Service Provider |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 (6 structured; 4 semi-structured) | 6 focus groups (24) 4 semi structured interviews (4) | 2 (S;SS) | 1 (S) | 2 (S) | 1 (S) | 2 (S;SS) | 5 (S;SS) | 6 (S;SS) | 5 (S;SS) | 1 (S) |

**Table II: Interview Participants (S – Structured interview; SS- Semi-structured interview)**

### 3.7: An overview of the pilot study

3.7.1: Procedures

Fieldwork procedures in ethnography were adhered to, as described by Silverman (2006) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983). These included careful selection of sites, gaining access, defining the social context, following observation procedures for establishing adequate coverage and careful analysis of a portion of data. The pilot study was conducted between January and March 2011 in the two Homes. Data collection methods included focus group discussions with three groups of children between the ages of twelve and seventeen years (n=20). Two sessions were conducted with the fourteen to seventeen year age group in both Homes and

there was an additional focus group session conducted for six boys aged twelve to thirteen years in H2. The twelve year olds were only included because they belonged to the junior group at H2 and the caregivers and I agreed to include them to avoid their feeling excluded from the activity. I took note of this in my transcriptions. The length of time the participants had been at the Home ranged from one year to sixteen years. All the boys were currently attending secondary school except for two in H1 and three in the junior group in H2. At both Homes, the boys appeared to share a cordial relationship with each other but there were varied dynamics between the senior boys and junior boys in H2 based on the schools they attended. Their interaction may be described as competitive, which affected the group's progress at the first meeting when they were seen in one group. This led to the group being divided according to age – hence two focus groups at H2.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two children at each Home and with two caregivers, a manager and two Welfare Officers. Informal discussions were also held with three male caregivers of H1 and a volunteer social worker at H2 who voluntarily provided information. Observations were undertaken at different points throughout the January to March 2011 period and included adult-child interactions and peer to peer interactions at meetings, structured activities (art activities, vacation camp site, sports and a cultural event), informal interactions and a house meeting. Overall, the pilot study provided a good basis for exploring relationships between children and adults to gain a better understanding of children's participation in care. The interviews and observations were included in the final study

as the participants remained the same. Important themes were identified which were explored in detail in the final study.

### 3.8: Ethical procedures

Official letters requesting permission were delivered to each Home seven weeks prior to entering the field. Meetings were set up with Welfare Officers and Senior Juvenile Home Supervisors to explain the pilot study and elicit support. Consent forms were prepared for the adults and assent forms for the children (**See Appendix VIII**)**.** Compared to consent forms which are signed by adults, assent forms are used for children who are not of legal age to make a formal agreement. They facilitate children having an opportunity to make a decision about their participation in a study and must be co-signed by an adult. Assent and consent forms had to be approved by the Managers of the Homes. Research request letters were also sent to the Office of the Chief Justice, The Youth Training Centre, Boards of Management of both Homes, the Ministry of the People and Social Development and the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development. Where official letters were not required and I sought information, I made my objectives as a research student explicit to the relevant authorities.

The focus groups were guided by Kitzinger's (1994) and Krueger's (1994) recommendations for conducting focus groups. All focus groups followed the required protocols of introduction and explanation of the aims of the study and ethical guidelines. The interviews with the children were guided by Thomas and O'Kane's TRANSACTS model (**See Appendix VII**) and other research guidelines as mentioned

above. The first sessions were devoted to building trust and commitment, explaining the research and ensuring that there was full understanding of the purpose of the study - which, according to Silverman (2006), is important for ensuring validity in qualitative research. In addition to literature on researching children and young people, I was obligated to practise ethically as a trained social worker, upholding specific core values of integrity, competence, respecting the dignity of subjects and valuing relationships (Hepworth *et al,* 2010). I held strongly to my training in social work which prepared me to employ skills of empathy, being sensitive to diversity, maintaining professional distance and principles of confidentiality, non-judgement and controlled emotional involvement, among other areas. In addition, I concede that examining the lives of looked after children from an academic standpoint was new to me as researching the lives of looked after children has never been my focus in my earlier roles.

There are ethical issues concerning my involvement in the Children's Authority, which was a new development in my field work. I had access to confidential information and as such had to manage the information used in my research so as to not breach confidentiality. I addressed this by seeking permission from the Chairman of the Board of Management and the Director, informing them of how I intended to use the information. I also used information that was made available to the public.

## 3.9: Interpretation and Data Analysis

The data was analysed in a rigorous, consistent, comprehensive and systematic way. Data analysis involved coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) - both manually and using the scientific qualitative data analysis software programme Atlas.ti7 to assist in content analysis. Thematic analysis involved inductive coding where themes emerged from interviews and observations, which followed the conventional procedure of patterned regularity and significance (Creswell 1998, Luborsky, 1994) or the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), negative case and discrepant data methods (Creswell, 1998), where noteworthy differences in experiences added to the quality of analysis. Interpretive criteria included credibility, repeated statements or strong assertions, placing the meanings in context, negative examples or instances (Luborsky, 1994) and pattern saturation (Bertaux, 1981). Central to this process was the verification process, where data was cross-checked by research participants to ensure the validity of themes and conclusions. This was done in both the pilot and the final study and proved to be quite useful in providing clarification, and in some instances additional information.

In the final study, feedback sessions were held with children and adults at the Homes where I completed the data triangulation process and verified the final themes and the importance placed on them by participants. Although I provided feedback consistently throughout the study, the final sessions provided a comprehensive overview of the data analysis for participants as well as serving to validate their input to the study. The research process informed my approach to reporting feedback as I

had a different strategy for children and adults. Feedback was delivered to the children with less formality than to the adults during the study and at the end, as I learnt that children were more receptive to informal, interactive sessions. The primary aim was to reinforce their value to the research and to demonstrate how their input could be used to inform practices and policies for looked after children, which addressed their initial concern about the usefulness of their contributions. At the feedback session with the adults, I learnt that the adults' main concern was about the practicality of the recommendations for improving child care experiences - for example, differentiating between discipline and punishment; how to practically get children to contribute to decision making; how to use restorative approaches to deal with conflict; and how to balance paternalism with caring approaches. These were all real issues facing the caregivers and management. I also learnt how the research in itself served as an advocacy tool for sharing the experiences of looked after children.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word and the field notes I mentioned earlier were entered into the Atlas.ti7 software programme. It was very useful in organising large sets of diverse data such as audio files (interviews), text (interviews, articles, reports), video recordings and images (photos, diagrams). It facilitated inductive data analysis in a more organised way, and provided a systematic way to categorise and link data segments to achieve reliable thematic analysis. Atlas.ti7 also facilitated reflective analysis and a comprehensive approach as I analysed various forms of data at the same time (see Friese, 2012). A more detailed account of the use of Atlas.ti is provided in the following section.

I also acknowledge that I engaged in theory-driven analysis from the onset of my work as my codification process was guided by literature on children's participation and residential child care. This influenced the induction process so I cannot claim that my methods were purely inductive. I systematically linked the codes with relevant theoretical concepts which were related to my area of study. My approach to data analysis is outlined in **Diagram III.**

### 3.9.1: Manual coding and computer-aided qualitative data analysis

Due to some initial challenges with accessing the Atlas.ti7 software, I resorted to manual coding, which involved open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I reviewed my text in detail and named the experiences so as to conceptualise the data. I then grouped the concepts into categories based on similarities across topics and assigned codes to them (open coding). I then linked the codes based on their relationships (axial coding) and finally refined the categories and assigned a main category to the data (selective coding). Because I had first-hand experience with the data this was not too difficult as it was an active process which began during the fieldwork. Another benefit of using this approach was that it helped me to understand how the Atlas.ti7 software programme worked. Although I did not utilise all features of the programme, I actively engaged with the software, closely examined the data and identified concepts and codes (open coding) and applied theoretical knowledge. I also identified relationships between categories and codes (axial coding) and verified outputs. Using the memo function in the programme was also useful for reflection and interpretation while I engaged in analysis, which was

similar to my manual system of keeping an ethnographic journal. Five code families were thus identified and served as the basis for my analysis (selective coding). Atlas.ti7 was particularly useful in supporting theory building with its features that identified connections between codes, which facilitated a deeper level of analysis of classifications and categories and a conceptual framework which fitted the data. This could be done without losing the context of the data despite having to work with over 284 codes, 184 primary documents and 44 memos (see Smit (2002) and Friese (2012) for more about using Atlas.ti in qualitative research). This approach to data analysis, which included my active involvement, addresses the criticism that computer-aided qualitative data analysis software has a narrow approach to data analysis, which includes 'imposing a particular analytic logic' (Silverman, 2010 p. 259). Some examples of outputs of Atlas.ti7 are provided in **Appendix IX.**
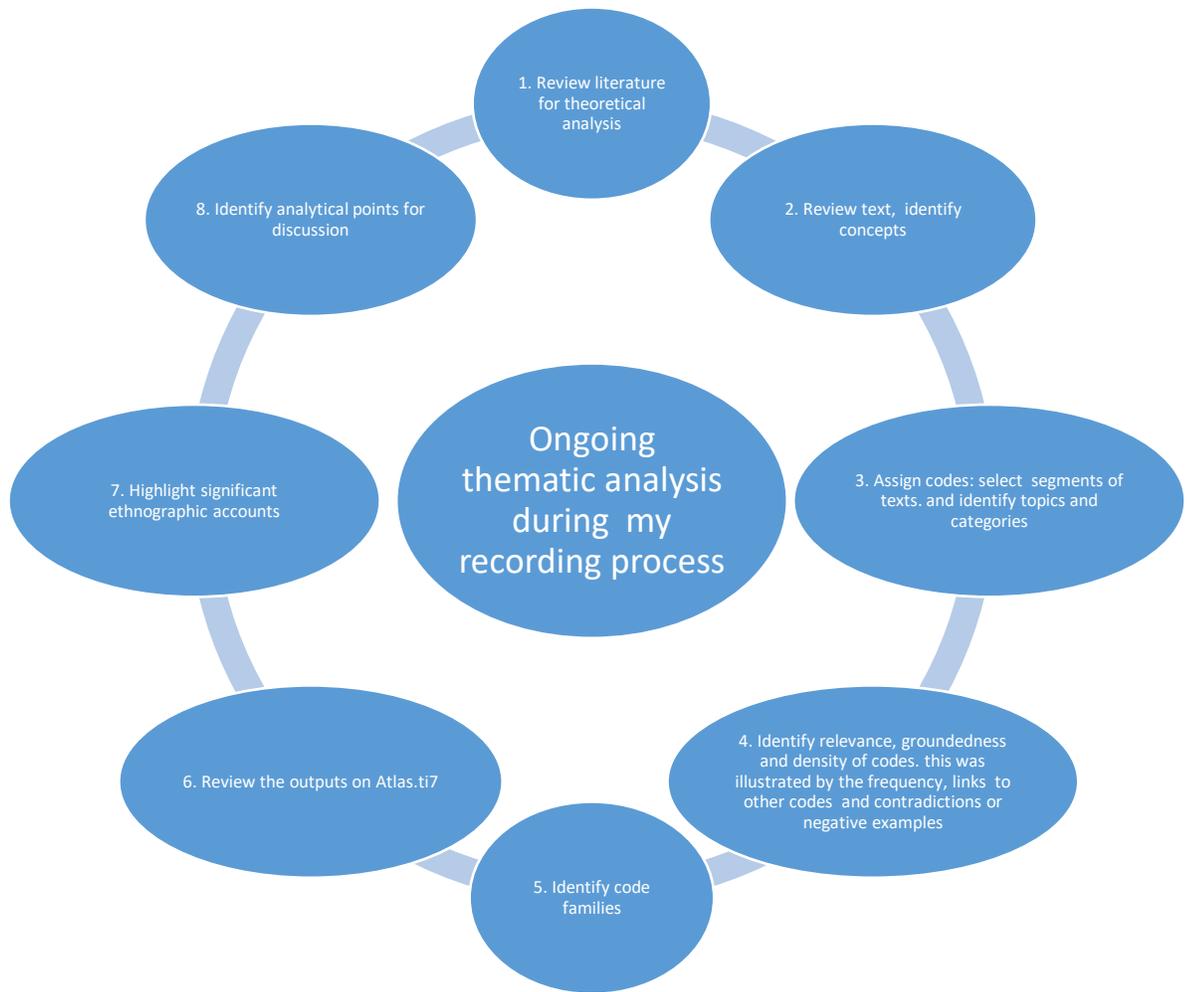
**Diagram III: My approach to data analysis and interpretation**

## 3.10: Limitations of the study method

The main limitation of the study method was that I was the sole person who coded the data and identified the themes. This limitation was however reduced as I discussed my findings with my supervisors and research participants, and presented preliminary findings at regional conferences. The research participants were limited by verbal ability and research expertise and child researchers were only exposed to small sections of my data.

Additionally, managing the data sources and representing them in categories was a challenge. The methods of data collection resulted in large volumes of data which had to be reduced to manageable proportions through careful selection. Being selective, I ran the risk of excluding important themes such as the impact of adults' relationship with children on adults' personal lives and further analysis of children's reasons for absconding from the Homes, which were perceived as their safe places, to return to abusive and neglectful spaces. However, I overcame this challenge of managing data by using a combination of manual coding and thematic analysis tables and the features which the Atlas.ti7 software programme provided. I would suggest this for future studies as the approach allowed for the data to be presented in an organised way and retained contextual data - for example, where data segments were retrieved and reviewed within the specific context of the data.

### 3.11: Summary

It is appreciated that a researcher brings to any study a certain level of bias and taken-for-granted assumptions and is expected to mitigate this through the exercise of ethical and professional responsibility (Collins & Gallinat, 2010; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Mills, 1959, 2000; Silverman, 2010). This particular study shares the limitations that arise from the inherent unpredictability of the social world and the consequent inability of even the best empirically based theories in the social sciences to make universal generalisations and predictions (MacIntyre, 1981, 1985), and is also constrained by its scope and depth. Nevertheless, the benefits of undertaking the study outweighed the limitations as useful insights were gained from

studying looked after children. It provides an overall view of the social reality of looked after children and how it might be examined. Although the findings cannot be generalised to all children's experiences regarding participation, knowledge about how to identify children's participation and its relational issues might be transferable. The findings of the study are presented in the following five chapters.

# Chapter 4: The complexity of caring relationships between children and adults in decision making

## 4.1: Introduction

The ways in which looked after children and the adults who work in the Homes influence each other in their interactions became very apparent in the study. Observations of their interaction were made during their everyday engagements such as completing chores, consultation sessions, disciplinary sessions, homework time, dinner time and also during Christmas and carnival celebrations, young leaders' meetings in H2, the eighteen and beyond programme in H1, church service, talent shows, extra-curricular activities and engagement with external service providers and volunteers. All the activities described had some element of decision making opportunity for the children and provided a good basis upon which to observe their interactions with the adults.

In this chapter, I discuss the interdependence of adult-child relationships in care and provide an analysis of the meaning of care as it relates to looked after children, using Mayeroff's (1971) and Noddings' (1984) theories of caring. I then demonstrate how the wider systems impact on these relationships and how adults respond to children's reality in care and their participation experiences. Emphasis will be placed on Noddings's work given the focus on the active role of the cared-for in shaping the care experience – that is, the ethics of care and interrelationships. Although Noddings's ideas come from education, they are relevant to the residential

child care setting because both involve situations where children need emotional support and the caring relationship is highly dependent on the adult. This is particularly so for boarding schools and residential child care settings where closer relationships between children and adults are formed. They vary, however, in the levels of intimacy and nature of interaction as well as the expected outcomes for the child and the conditions of caring. Also, caring is obligatory for residential child care workers and not for teachers in sustaining effective relationships. Virginia Held's (2006) work on the ethics of care as relational care, which advances the discourse beyond the private realm of family and friendship, will therefore be applied to the analysis of institutional care and children's participation. I will then proceed to highlight some issues which contribute to the complexity of power relations between children, adults and caregivers, and conclude with a discussion on the importance of children's participation in mediating the caring relationship. Key areas which are highlighted include: (1) the interdependence of adult-child relationships; (2) the 'affective state of attention in caring' (Noddings 1984; (3) the organisation of the wider systems impacting on child care and protection and caring relationships; and (4) adults' responsiveness to children's reality in care. These will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

## 4.2: The interdependence of adult-child relationships: The value children place on adults

Children generally participate within an adult frame of reference, at the invitation of adults. The children in the study had a high degree of dependence on

caregivers despite their familiarity with decision making concepts and processes. They required assistance with application of the concepts, as was evident in the leadership meeting where the children were given opportunities to make decisions about selecting young leaders (who would join them as peer mentors in the home), developing and facilitating sessions. An election process was in effect during the time of the study to determine which children in H2 would become the new young leaders. In preparation, the present young leaders were trained in leadership and team-building so that they received the necessary guidance for making decisions about their peers. Although the formal preparation had taken place, the children relied heavily on the adults to help them with the practical aspects of the process. I observed how the adults took the lead in the nomination process, influencing the children's decision on which of their peers should be chosen for the roles. The adults influenced the election process despite stating that they left the decision to the children to develop an alternative approach. When the time came for shortlisting nominees, the adults openly expressed their approval or disapproval, which influenced the children's final decision.  This may also be linked to their thoughts about adult expectations of them, which contributed to their self-doubt and discomfort with the decision making process. Such experiences also show how children's participation is vulnerable to replicating adult models of decision making, and subsequently fulfilling adult agendas (Percy-Smith, 1999 cited in Percy-Smith, 2010).

Another example is where a senior male resident was invited to a camp planning meeting after the chairperson was questioned by a junior caregiver about

the non-participation of the children in the planning process. Accounts of the interaction follow:

The JHSII invited one of the senior boys who was watching television to the discussion so that he could share his ideas about improving the 2012 Easter camp experience. Initially, I felt that he was trying to make a point that the young person would have had no new ideas and would not say anything as he indicated earlier, was usually the case when they were asked for their opinion. The female JHSI and I asked specific questions when the young person struggled to offer clarity and to show support for his efforts at thinking about the questions posed to him. Initially, he did not make any new contributions as he did not seem to think deeply about what was being asked…He indicated at one point that 'this should have been done earlier' (suggesting that he needed time to think and to get feedback from his peers). At this point, he was encouraged to go to his peers and discuss the planning with them and to report their feedback to the supervisors [at a subsequent time]. I observed that when he was prompted, when we showed patience and sought clarity from him, he articulated himself much better. (**Journal Extract, March 30th 2012**)

It is clear from this experience that the resident was not accustomed to engaging in such formal planning sessions and was not clear how he should contribute. It also highlights the importance of support from trusted adults in children's participation in the decision making process (Lansdown, 2010), which includes making children feel comfortable enough to contribute, being patient with them and allowing sufficient time for them to work out issues and consult their peers.

The interaction between caregivers and children was not always one of adults taking charge, as there was evidence of partnership and respect for adult guidance.  This was evidenced by the children in the focus groups. They made reference to the instances in which they felt adults' input was very valuable to them - for instance, in providing guidance on matters pertaining to their school work, relationships, extra-curricular activities and teaching them about life. They also seemed to enjoy activities when adults were engaging with them. The children had a special appreciation for adults who took the time to guide them. These points are illustrated in the excerpts below:

*She [the manager] encourage us to do the right things. Sister is so helpful. Sister, when we don't have nothing to do or we get in trouble she guide us'*

     **(Focus Group discussion**, **H2-2, Male resident, 14 years)**

Boy 4: Miss I could take out one staff, one staff I could take [make reference to one particular staff member].

     KWP: Could you tell me what you like about that one staff member that you want to take out?

     Boy 4: …He tells you the correct thing Miss, and he treats me.

     KWP: You say he treats you…help me to understand what you mean by he treats you…

     Boy 4: Sometimes you want to talk about God, you will ask him questions and he will tell you bout it.

     **(Focus Group discussion**, **H2-2, Male resident, 15 years)**

In the same way that the children see the value of adults in guiding them to make decisions, some adults acknowledge their role in facilitating meaningful child participation. This is illustrated below:

*'…As you lay the groundwork for them that is really the real work and people find that is hard and you cannot do it unless you do the groundwork, so you have to make up your mind to do the groundwork, prepare them, help them to understand what is decision making, how it affects them and you know, how it is about them, so they need to play a key part. If something is about me, I need to get involved.'*

     **(Social Worker, H2)**

This suggests the interdependence of adult-child relationships and its impact on children's decision making. When this is experienced in a positive way by children, they show genuine concern for adults whom they rely on. This became more apparent during the state of emergency, which was in effect from August 21st 2011 to December 8th 2011 (Trinidad Express Newspaper, 2011). The children showed great concern for the welfare of their caregivers who they felt were being affected by the restrictions placed on citizens and in particular how their work schedule was affected. They were anxious about the safety of their caregivers who had to return to their communities.

Crucial to understanding the relationships between children and adults in residential settings are the ways in which staff accounts influence children's experiences. The children in the study seemed to value what their caregivers said as a primary source of information about happenings in the world beyond the institution and as such readily accepted the adults' opinions and core values about issues. This is illustrated in the children's accounts of their safety concerns on the compound of H1, which they demonstrated in discussions and drawings. They shared stories of ghosts and witnessing supernatural events on the compound, which were similar to the stories shared by various adults at different times of my study. Common characteristics of the adults who shared these stories were that they were very religious, were long term employees, had strong belief in the supernatural and held conventional ideas about children and how they should be disciplined. These influences were evident in children's accounts of their experiences at the Home as seen below:

Boy 5: Miss it have a staff here who is a real Godly woman…She say she does see the demons in the night.
KWP: She sees them?
Boy 5: But she does real pray. She does pray and cast them away and they does come back.

Boy 5: Miss, it had a night…
Boy 3: They say this whole thing [the Home] build over a grave yard.
Boy 5: Yeah is a graveyard they build it over. And miss and the girls does be seeing things and the boys does be seeing…

Boy 5: *That white woman* [referring to the ghost of a nun who worked at the home in the 19th century when the home was opened] *try to influence a boy already. When he friends and them wasn't there it had a boy name (X)… So he went up in the back to throw the garbage. It didn't have no fence up dey [there] at the time. That was long time. That same white woman come and… He in the light and the lady in the dark and he seeing she glowing na… So she calling, she say, 'Aye boy!' And she looking real nice and thing 'cause you know all girls does look nice. But he didn't see she foot and thing na. She call him and thing….*
**(Focus Group discussion, H1-2, Male, 15 years old)**

This story is similar to a local folk tale of the 'Ladiablesse', a beautiful female who seduces young men and lures them into the forest at nights and kills them. Evidence of these stories was in the drawings, poems, songs and diaries of the children during various research activities (**see Appendix X**).

It may be reasonable to conclude that these stories may have been used as ways to control children's behaviour and earning their respect by instilling fear in them. Also, I was informed by caregivers that stories were told to the children in the past to prevent them from running away at night. However, there were staff members whom I spoke to who believed the stories to be true based on their own personal experiences at the Homes. Such stories by children and adults were common at both institutions but the reactions varied by group as children talked about them with fear and the adults spoke about them with amusement and saw the stories as evidence of the need for spiritual protection of children and staff.

### 4.3: The interdependence of adult-child relationships: The 'affective state of attention in caring' and the neediness of adults

The adults in the study were often concerned about what the outcomes would be for the children when they left care and their day-to-day actions were guided by their beliefs about these outcomes – for example, girls and boys were treated differently because of gendered perspectives on what was likely to happen to them. How this was done will be discussed later in the chapter.

Also, the formal hierarchy which determines the order of communication and management at the Homes determines the level of intimacy that children and

caregivers can share and further removes caregivers from the day-to-day care of the children. Caregivers in the study often mentioned how relieved they were when their shift ended and one way of detaching from their work was to turn off their cell phones or not think about anything related to their work or the children in the Home. They felt that their personal lives (self-care, family life) were affected if this approach was not taken and admitted to the difficulty of getting their minds off the children. This approach seemed to be one way of managing the emotional work with looked after children. Using Mayeroff's (1971) and Noddings' (1984) ideas about caring, such relationships would fail to qualify as truly caring relationships.

Furthermore, the adults such as managers and welfare officers, and sometimes board members and other policy makers who were privy to the children's personal information, were not strategically positioned in the lives of the children to demonstrate such personal care. So it would appear that the formal hierarchies in the system have created barriers to caring. However, the caregivers transcended these barriers as they appeared to go the extra mile with children despite their expressed wish to 'switch off' from work. On a few occasions I observed caregivers who were off duty stopping in at the Homes to attend to matters involving children or working on their off duty days to fill in for absent staff members, a few sometimes working a full 24 hour shift. They often said that they did it because the children needed to be taken care of and because of their own conscience. Although caregivers do not make themselves fully available to children, actions such as these are meaningful to the children who see them as an adequate gesture of caring. This has implications for

consistency and availability as related to residential child care as it suggests that caregivers may not necessarily need to make themselves available for 24 hours, seven days a week, but the idea that they are available to children is important. The extent to which emotional needs of children were met remains unknown, but the physical presence of caregivers did make a positive impression on the children. This is especially significant where children are aware of the schedule of their caregivers as was the case with the children in the study.

Caregivers also responded to children based on their own personal experiences, which were mixed with emotions of sympathy. A careful analysis of the observations, interviews and conversations with adults revealed the extent to which the adults working with children were influenced by their own personal values about children and how they should be cared for. The adult interviewees all mentioned their personal motivations for working with looked after children, which included their own experiences with child abuse, their inability to have children of their own or their experiences with being unfairly treated as children and adults, which they felt strongly about and which contributed to their sense of justice. Using Noddings' and Mayeroff's explanation of empathy, which entails 'feeling with' and 'being with' the other, it may be concluded that there was evidence of empathy towards the children, which needs to be understood as it was expressed within the residential child care context. Also, the feelings and receptivity aspects of caring cannot be discounted.  This was made clear, for instance, in the accounts of one male and two female caregivers.

'*Some of the children do not understand that some of us have experienced what they have but instead see us as their enemy trying to replace their parents when we really care about them.*'

**(Female caregiver, H1-6)**

*'I know what it is like to be abandoned and that is why I don't bother when they behave how they do sometimes. I know that is their way to deal with the hurt.'*
**(Female caregiver, H1-2)**

*I know what it is like to be a young male without much guidance. Before my life changed, I was just like them... reckless.'*
**(Male caregiver, H1-1)**

However, there were challenges in maintaining this level of caring. Because of this ability to identify with or empathise with the children at a deeper level, caregivers sometimes responded negatively to children who they felt were unable to reciprocate empathy, or were being impatient, disrespectful or unappreciative. Difficulty with reciprocating feelings stemmed from children's experiences of being abused by adults and their preference to be with their parents, and consequently they resisted the caregivers' role as their substitute parents. It might also be linked to their state of being in care, which causes feelings of uncertainty and shame (Scheff & Retzinger, 2001). The response by the caregivers to the children's perceived inability to reciprocate feelings is also linked to the gaps in the caregivers' knowledge and experience with institutionalised care, as they did not seem to adequately take into account the psychosocial issues of looked after children, such as the effects of abuse and neglect, their family and social circumstances, and their perception of caregivers as their leaders. Nevertheless, the staff maintained that a deeper level of caring could take place if they were aware of children's circumstances for being in care. A male

caregiver, in responding to a question about the kind of information that would be useful to enhance caring relationships, highlighted:

*CG: … at the end of the day if you empathise with your own personal situation and if a person have children, you don't want to know [referring to knowing the HIV status of a child]…. But, what I would say is this. There's always a way of dealing with it. I tell people, listen, you cannot tell me that in an institution with children… you're not dealing with hard criminals, you're dealing with children. … at the end of the day you have to tell yourself whatever strategy you have, you do it because of the needs of the child [he acknowledges that children's needs should be met using the limited strategies that are available and makes the assumption that adults would use information in the best interest of the child].*

*KWP: So, you're saying that the personal information about the child is important to the caregiver in making that extra effort?*

*CG: Yes, because if I know a boy is being abused physically… I mean yes the individual [child] needs to be empowered and have the skills to deal with certain things. And when you have an understanding of a certain situation, you are better in your response…….At times sometimes I remind myself of the department I am in…you need to loosen up. If you know what these children know [suggesting empathising with the children to make the work with them more realistic].*
***(Male Caregiver, H2-1)***

This account highlights the reciprocal nature of caring when staff are aware of children's issues. However, the request to know about children's personal situations may also be as a result of the caregivers' personal feelings about their competencies and comfort levels. The willingness of managers to meet the caregivers' requests for children's personal information is further complicated by their concern about the quality of staff selected by the personnel department of the Ministry. The staff according to managers barely have training in child care and protection issues, which is further evidenced by the minimal qualifications required for the job (three Ordinary level passes). One manager noted:

*'The staff does not understand institutionalised children and as a result do not know how to relate to them. They do not understand why the children behave how they do'.*
*(**Manager, H1-2**)*

The manager may be justified in his statement but the staff also attributed their approach to working with the children to the fact that they were not given

sufficient information about the children except for the general knowledge that they had about the reasons for all children being in care. All of the adults I interviewed and conversed with during the study shared that they would have been better able to relate to the children if they knew the specific circumstances leading to them being in care. However, based on my observations, the adults seemed to be concerned about the children despite not being privy to the information they thought was necessary. They demonstrated genuine care and concern about the children's welfare.

Again, this point emerges in the following statement by a caregiver and it highlights the depth of information that may be required to facilitate positive and meaningful interaction with children given the scope of the caregivers' role:

*'…And then again when parents come in the institution because of whatever issue transpired within their family life, why is it you [management] cannot inform the caregivers who work with them [of] this child's situation…. I find that they operate in a deficit. But if I have an understanding of a child…don't wait until I see a behaviour manifest, let us know what we are dealing with'.*
   **(Male Caregiver, H1-1)**

The caregiver notes the deficiency in the care system where they are required to work with children and parents but with very limited information. Also, with family reintegration as a primary goal for looked after children (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago 2012), the fact that caregivers are not given much information about the child's family circumstances seems unreasonable.

There remains a dilemma in terms of deciding what information to share, with whom and for what purposes, thus making empathetic responding to children's needs seem more illusory - and caring and empathy cannot be made a legal obligation. The agencies' policies on confidentiality and the structure of caring at the Homes

make it harder for caring relationships to develop. The work structure, which includes

a shift system, and the consequent staff rotation (which remains a universal concern

in residential care), the lack of training and the duty of managers to safeguard children

and children's right to privacy, all determine what caregivers are privy to. Managers

and welfare officers are therefore hesitant to share information with staff for fear of

compromising children's safety - for instance by disclosing information in insensitive

ways that expose children to harm or where staff could use the information to

retaliate against children. This has also become an issue given the limited alternatives

for disciplining children. This emerged in my research when children reported that

adults used their personal information to embarrass them, as illustrated below. These

processes influenced how staff related to children and highlight the complexities

involved in demonstrating empathy in the caring relationship. Children were also

aware of the dangers of disclosing their personal information with untrained staff.

Examples of this follow:

Boy 1: Like when you give information in here, and the child get you vex they [adults] does backfire the information in your face.

Boy 5: Miss, some of them telling you, 'Where is your mother?' (Referring to the vindictive nature of some caregivers who know that they have been neglected by their parents).

**(Focus Group, H2-2)**


Children were therefore hesitant to share their personal information with staff.

As such, they did not agree with the staff's view on the sharing of information.

The bureaucratic structure or formal hierarchies of the Homes shape the ways in which children and adults interact and the nature of their interaction (**See Appendix III**). The Homes in the study have a clearly defined bureaucratic structure and decision making is primarily influenced by policies of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development. The Statutory Authorities Service Commission (SASC) and the Board of Management of the Homes recruit staff and ensure staff accountability. The interaction between adults and children is further influenced by the general leadership approach adopted by managers who are influenced by external policies which are in turn influenced by global forces such as the United Nations. Lowest on the channel of communication is children, who seldom had a say in what they wanted to participate in or in what way, and their participation was dependent on the recommendations made by their caregivers, who sometimes used them to control children through punishment or rewards. The power to include children or exclude them rested with the caregivers, who would select children to attend functions, benefit from sponsorship, receive certain treats or even make visits to their birth families. They were mainly selected to participate in events outside of the Homes based on the managers' and caregivers' sensitivity to their interests, discipline or leadership qualities. The process for deciding on children's participation in activities or their personal care was mainly influenced by formal directives from management in the form of memos or verbal instruction to caregivers (see **Appendix XI**). There

were also instances where correspondence from private organisations or government departments was passed on to caregivers at the last minute and this is where adults used their decision making powers most directly due to the need for hasty action. I witnessed a few of these less formal communication processes in action one afternoon while sitting in the administration office of H1.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the manager received a follow up call from a private citizen as a reminder about an invitation for the children to participate in a function in the community. The manager hurriedly put together a list of names of the children to attend the function and handed it to the JHSII so that he could prepare the boys within three hours. By the time the list was shared with the boys, some of them were already participating in a session which was being conducted by me. They expressed their reluctance to attend the function but were told they had to attend, as a sign of appreciation and respect for the sponsor. This provides evidence of the level of regard for the children's input in participation and how the experience of institutional care can become burdensome for them, as a result of adults' perception of what is best for them and the dependence of the Homes on external support, which often comes with conditions such as taking pictures, attending functions and being subject to attention by and exposure to unfamiliar adults. As shown here, this resulted in children being selected hurriedly in several instances without having the opportunity to contribute to the decision making process – a situation which contributed to the children's negative responses to participating in some events.

A similar situation occured in H2 where the caregivers were given a memo by management informing them of the Carnival celebrations and their responsibilities, which involved preparing the children for a carnival function in two weeks. This led to hurried decisions about what the children would do and who would represent the houses. Each house had a two week period to organise (make costumes, prepare songs) and did not fully accommodate the meetings which were expected to take place as part of the planning process. Children were therefore selected by staff based on their knowledge of the children's abilities and talents with little consultation from children, which the senior boys protested against because they were being punished at the time by their House Mother, which meant that they had less access to management. This sense of urgency, which seemed to prevail at both Homes when it came to children's participation, did not do well in harnessing meaningful relationships between the children and caregivers. Where children did not initially have control in the design of programmes or in their decision to participate or not participate, they demonstrated their ability to influence the outcomes of their participation or non-participation, and this will be discussed in detail below. The accounts also indicate that adults were reactive to external events and pressures and did not plan well despite having knowledge of yearly routines, which provided evidence of their dependence on formal communication.

There was also evidence to suggest that the adults too felt powerless to a great extent, based on their experiences with social structures which were beyond their control. They were inclined to follow management and senior staff members'

directives, which fostered a feeling of powerlessness among them. This resulted in them aligning with the children and identifying with their needs and concerns. Generally, the adults seemed to be more empathetic towards the children as a result of this common experience. This was manifested in the ways caregivers and children collaborated to challenge management and to make decisions which served their own interests, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Much of what has been described is also not unique to residential child care experiences but is a common attribute of institutionalisation (Goffman, 1971), as revealed by work on prison life (Mathiesen, 1965; Sykes, 1958), hospitals (Goffman, 1961) and school life among working class children (Willis, 1981). The work by these researchers revealed common features including a sense of belongingness and collective identity - applied positively or negatively, bureaucratic organisation, routine activities and strained and complex relationships with authority figures. The accounts provided here therefore demonstrate the influence of institutional care.

## 4.5: Adults' responsiveness to children's reality: Issues of age, gender and individual difference

Another important finding linked to this theme is the children's sense of reality and the adults' lack of responsiveness to their reality. The children may not be able to fully appreciate the care and concern demonstrated by some caregivers because of their own distorted perceptions of caring, influenced by their experiences with abuse. The children interviewed shared their feelings about adults, whom they found difficult to trust because of past experiences with adults in their family or in

similar positions of authority as their caregivers. This was further exacerbated by situations where the children were unable to see the relevance of the activities they engaged in to their real life situations. They shared their feelings of not being genuinely cared for because of the adults' inability to design programmes for them which catered to their needs as young people preparing to leave care. This is demonstrated in an extract of a focus group discussion in H1 where the children talked about a transition programme they participated in:

> *KWP: So y'all are saying that the home could do more?*
> *Boys: yeah*
> *KWP: …to prepare you for…*
> *Boy 6: They could do more…*
> *KWP: Ent y'all are in the Eighteen and Beyond Programme, most of you here except four…So isn't that programme… Is it doing that?*
> *Boy 3: yeah something so…*
> *Boy 6: It does be boring sometimes.*
> *KWP: What is it about?*
> *Boy 1: It showing we how…. to cool down we anger and heat*
> *KWP: So you're saying it's more talk and you not really getting the experience to show you?*
> *Boy 5: We ain't getting the excitement*
> *Boy 3: They does tell we about the jobs and the future and we don't even have we ID (identification) card as yet….and the girls have them own.*

**(Focus Group H1 -1)**

Further to this, the boys compared themselves to the girls whom they saw as receiving more meaningful training and preferential treatment in their transition programme. They based this on their perception of girls having more opportunities to go off the compound, being the first to transition to a new building (which the children linked to the programme despite there being no connection), having their sessions at times that were least disruptive to their extra-curricular activities and being spared from punishment at times or receiving lesser penalties. However, based on my observations, these claims were not true as the programme was delivered in the same

way for both males and females. What was different was the level of concern the caregivers had for the different groups of children.  The reality of this situation is that what was being expressed was not necessarily favouritism towards the girls, as indicated by the boys, but rather greater concern by the caregivers about the outcomes for the girls, who were more dependent on others after leaving care and often returned to vulnerable situations on release from the Homes, or entered sexual relationships with partners who provided for them in return. This awareness influenced staff to take a different approach to caring for the children, which entailed being more protective and focused on the practicalities of leaving care and being more critical about life chances for the girls than for the boys. The fact that the girls also shared similar feelings about the older boys receiving favourable treatment such as being allowed to leave the compound without supervision was also interesting. This too did not prove to be true. What it does indicate, however, is that the children have a great sense of justice as related to age, gender and individual difference and may be expressing the desire to experience care *with* justice.

Another relevant finding came from observations about how adults related to children based on their age. The younger the children were, the more they were treated as a homogenous group by the adults and caregivers. The older they became the more the caregivers' concerns differed, and this seemed to be based on sex and age primarily. For example, the fears and concerns about the younger children included obedience, conformity and health care, with little concern for decision making opportunities, while for the older children added to the list were sex and

sexuality and preparation for leaving care, with decision making issues becoming more apparent among this group. Age and sex were treated as two distinct categories for this group of older children whereas for the younger children, sex was less of a concern when making decisions. Evidence of caregivers' gendered perspectives on caring was therefore more apparent with the older children. Two issues are therefore raised that relate to gender issues: how children's needs are taken into account and the stereotyping of gender differences (Chevannes, 2001; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Schneider, 2004).

## 4.6: Conclusion

This chapter provides empirical evidence of the ways in which power relations between looked after children and adults are multifaceted and need to be examined carefully within the context of caring. Useful data has been obtained about how adults' personal motivations influence their feelings about looked after children, which are linked to them meeting their own needs, and about levels of caring and the interdependence of adult-child relationships. How this is framed within a residential setting governed by a bureaucratic structure of formal hierarchies has been outlined.

The ethics of care has provided a philosophical framework in which to shed some light on the issue of caring for and about children and the levels of caring within wider ecological systems. It may also be concluded that in order for positive relationships to be developed between adults and children there should be a focus on ethical decision making rather than policies or procedures that dictate how one should care. Based on the findings of this study, how children effectively participate

in decision making processes is dependent on how adults respond to them and balance their emotional work with physical work, demonstrate trust and confidentiality, show mutual concern and are willing to be flexible. How children respond to adults within the institutionalised care structure will be the subject of the following chapter.

# Chapter 5: Participation, Paternalism, Resistance and Resilience

## 5.1: Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways in which adults apply the principles of children's participation in practice within a paternalistic structure and how children respond. It also looks at how successful children are at getting their views considered and acted upon by adults and how the institutions respond to children's capacity to influence decision making.  Looked after children were the last group to be involved in making decisions which affected them. This non-participation in decision making is usually based on the assumption that children are not competent enough to contribute to their life space and that adults are better qualified to make decisions in their best interests (Cockburn, 2013). Paternalism in practice in this sense is commonly seen as protecting the children from themselves, but this has been contested by Mill (1978) who saw such arguments for paternalism as being unjustified.

The underlying philosophy of paternalistic protection of the young, and how looked after children managed to develop their own creative ways of overcoming constraints to getting their views considered and acted upon by adults, will be outlined. I will begin by describing the relationship between paternalism and child protection in a child care setting. Paternalism as protection or control and the ways in which children negotiate power dynamics and resist paternalism through an emerging sub-culture will be presented, with evidence on the outcomes of paternalistic care and how children challenge paternalistic systems. The ways in which the

organisational structure of Homes influenced these relationships are central to these findings, thereby extending the arguments of the previous chapter. I will provide evidence of the generational conflict which pervades paternalistic structures such as the children's homes, where adults pursue what they see as the children's best interests. I will show how paternalism determines the nature of relationships between children and adults and describe the power imbalance between them. Emphasis is placed on child protection in response to the prevailing discourse on child abuse and neglect and the prevailing social disorder – findings which advance discussions about the inevitability of paternalism and its role in managing adult-child relationships. I will conclude this chapter by presenting findings which support the call for a reassessment of the assumptions held about adults as being more competent than children to make decisions for children.

### 5.2: The emergence of paternalism as a thematic issue

This theme emerged early in my study after I observed the limited opportunities for children to engage in formal decision making processes. Where opportunities existed, they were in areas which did not directly impact on governance and leadership at the Homes. It was apparent that adults' decisions took precedence over children's and excluded children from final decision making. There were limited opportunities for participation in the formal care review process or disciplinary process, for instance, and much of the decision making which included children took place in informal settings. There were, however, two specially designed programmes which were tailored to meet specific needs of the children - the eighteen and beyond

programme in H1 and the leadership programme in H2[10] – which formally encouraged their participation in decision making. However, these did not foster genuine participation as the children appeared to be performing their roles as expected by adults. Therefore, limited opportunities existed for me to observe formal decision making points as they did not appear in practice as prescribed in policy. For example, at H2 there were guidelines for care planning and assessment which included children's participation, and at H1 there were policies in place for children to make contributions to their case reviews but neither was generally practised. I was invited as a participant observer to witness the processes as the opportunities arose, but where this was not possible I observed informal processes. I benefited more from observing these informal interactions as I gained deeper insights into the realities of children's decision making experiences.

In my observations of adult-child interactions I witnessed how the children's non-participation was a choice and therefore a type of participation, and how participation in some instances was really non-participation. An explanation of this will be provided later in this section. The children's resistance to participation was their way of communicating discomfort, dissatisfaction and disapproval. Similarly, in some cases where they seemed to be actively participating, they did not contribute meaningfully or sincerely but were merely demonstrating obedience. This too will be illustrated in more detail in the chapter.

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[10]Both programmes are transition programmes for children leaving care: the 18 and beyond programme (H1) and the Leadership programme (H2)

The children had their own informal ways of influencing adult decision making despite constraints, which suggests the complexity and dynamism of interactions and relations of power, which need detailed observation and analysis if they are to be understood clearly. These informal approaches were evident in the following interactions I had with children and caregivers over a 24 month period and will provide the context for my discussion throughout this chapter:

- A specially designed programme for the senior boys (14-18) which enlightened them about responsible living, of which I was a participant observer for six sessions – H1

- An eighteen and beyond programme for senior boys and girls who were preparing to leave care – H1

- Leadership programme for senior boys and girls (H2)

- Off-site activities

- Cultural activities (H1 and H2) such as carnival events, Easter functions, mother's day celebrations

- Interviews with children and professionals such as social workers, welfare officers, counsellor (H1 and H2)

- The day to day experiences of children at particular times (HI and H2)

- Care planning meetings with staff and children (H1 and H2)

- Children's engagement with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

- Formal and informal disciplinary proceedings (court hearings, disciplinary meetings at the Homes and informal interactions with children and caregivers)

- Participation in education (H1 and H2)

- The leaving care process (H1 and H2)

How children were able to respond within formal hierarchies that were adult-dominated was interesting, as it emphasised their agency and challenged the traditional views adults held about children. Paternalism as an overarching concept for this analysis therefore emerged from the interaction between adults and children. It is said to exist 'when a public body makes a citizen unfree to perform an action, intending the prohibition to benefit the citizen in question' (Weale, 1977, p. xx). It therefore provides some groups with the right to act on behalf of some other group, which is perceived as lacking the capacity or competence to act on its own behalf or to make decisions. Paternalism in this context is specifically being applied to the private lives of children in public care. Its application to this study has to do with the power of traditional conceptions of adult-child relationships. It is arguably a universally applicable concept, since it is difficult to see how social work – not only in child care – can be justified without some conception of paternalism. It is therefore too limiting to see paternalism in a negative way. The study shows how it could include a commitment on the part of workers and policy-makers to increasing children's agency, which would require them to allow children to exercise their right to participate in decision making.

### 5.3: Paternalism, Protection and State Care: outcomes of paternalistic child care and protection

Children become primary targets for paternalism through traditional views of their lack of competence, and parents are the primary perpetrators of paternalism for their children (Fortin, 2009). For looked after children, caregivers and the public authority responsible for children replace parents. Instances where paternalism is positive include the case of children with medical conditions requiring special treatment at the Homes, and preventing them from interacting with family members who put them at risk. Paternalism becomes a negative experience where, for instance, adults prevent children from accessing information which could help them to determine dimensions of identity such as religion and sexuality. For looked after children, where the state or care givers take on the role of the parent (the doctrine of *in loco parentis*), as is the case in Trinidad and Tobago (Children Act 1925, Children Act 2012), there is increasing state intervention and children are committed as wards and left in the care of child welfare professionals and caregivers who make decisions in their best interests. Such state paternalism (Harding, 1997) is prevalent in child protection as family systems break down, making it difficult for parents to provide adequately for their children. State paternalism therefore assumes that the state has full responsibility for children and takes a protective stance towards them. Such a protective stance became more prevalent over the period in which this study was conducted, with notable increases in reports of child abuse (Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 2014). Certain questions are therefore raised: How are the roles of these adults and state authorities who make decisions in the best interests of children

justified? To what extent is paternalistic protection of looked after children denying them their rights to participate in decision making? Is it possible to conceive of a form of paternalism that recognises children's participation as an element of good child care practice?

### 5.3.1: Paternalism as protection or control: The Magistrates' court as an example of working in the best interests of the child

An example of a paternalistic institution is provided where under the current legislation, the magistrate makes the final legal decision on the outcomes for looked after children, which includes if and how they will be punished, where they reside or how they will be cared for and by whom. These decisions take the form of a fit person order or probation report request. The ways in which adults are encouraged to work on behalf of children are reflected in the legal system, for example in the referral process at the Probation Department, where any citizen can make an application on behalf of children deemed to be at risk (See **Appendix XII**). Police officers, Probation Officers and Welfare Officers all work along with magistrates as the final point of decision making regarding children's welfare. Decisions are made about children's welfare at the discretion of the magistrate on the advice of probation officers if the case has been referred to that department. Where disciplinary action is concerned, the court system is used as the primary instrument for regulating children's behaviour and the staff of Homes capitalise on this system, which provides them with support in promoting obedience among children. Here we see where the legal system and the informal, everyday relations of power between staff and children at the Homes work

together to control the children's behaviour. However, as a mechanism of control the threat of court action is ineffective where caregivers are unable to facilitate participation of children. Children who detect caregivers' vulnerability have become indifferent to the intervention of the court as a means of control. The caregivers' view of the role of the court in disciplining children is illustrated below:

*'In spite of all the differences you get in here, there is a redress where discipline is concerned… If a child goes overboard by way of his or her conduct, after a while [you tell] that child or children, male or female… …listen you need to understand what you are about. If that behaviour persists, um, you will go to Family Court whereby the magistrate will give you a warning and if it still persists, then the magistrate will have no choice but to send you up the road to YTC.'*

Male caregiver, H2-1

The caregiver implied that the children were given fair chances before the matter was referred to the magistrates' court, which the children's accounts do not reflect. Their interpretation of the role of the magistrate was demonstrated in a cooperative story-telling exercise at H1 where the boys were given a task to complete a story on forgiveness:

The story was a part of a participatory exercise on learning about forgiveness, which was a component of the 'Responsible Living' programme. Each boy in the group contributed to the story until the end. I observed that, although boys were encouraged to make their unique contributions, the group would have to sanction the contribution before the story continued. So there was this collective effort to ensure that the story represented realistic experiences.

*Once upon a time, there was a boy named (name omitted) and he was very poor and would eat from the bin. He murdered a guy and one day the police caught him while chatting [to] a young lady who was his girlfriend and they arrested him. While he was in jail, he was getting harassed. He then broke out of jail and they catch him back and he ended up being wanted by the police. He escaped again. While he was wanted, he lived under somebody's house (they caught him and he was sexually active. [my observation: at this time, the boys disapproved of contribution] and he stole someone's food and he went to the pastor to pray for him and the pastor told him he would pray for him and he asked for forgiveness and God forgave him. He changed his life and then he appeared in court and the magistrate said she would let him go. He then won his trial. The end.*

**(Journal Extract, 03rd December 2011)**

Ten boys collaborated on this story and two important issues were raised - the desire of the children to see greater leniency from magistrates when making decisions regarding children's conduct and the importance placed on spirituality as an alternative means of problem solving. At a deeper level, it demonstrated how the boys were able to demonstrate empathy for each other, securing group consensus in the development of the story.

The children in the Homes were not as afraid of going to court as the children in the YTC, which is an explicitly punitive institution. The children's behaviours reflected an attitude of indifference as they expected the manager/welfare officers, particularly at H2, to take even minor disciplinary matters to court. However, this was not the case for the children who were already placed at the YTC and faced the consequences of indiscipline. The intimidation tactics of the adults, such as threatening to give bad reports or 'getting them into trouble', had a different effect, which contributed to their silence and obedience. They seemed to have more 'fear of consequences' as they described it because they understood that the magistrate would make the final decision of whether or not they remained at the YTC.

When questioned about the protocols of the magistrates when working with looked after children, one informant in the court system indicated that the paramount consideration was the welfare of children, which was made the main consideration a

few years ago, with the establishment of the Family Court[11]. I observed court proceedings with children who were referred to the Magistrates' Courts for misconduct. Present at the session were the welfare officers of H2, a caregiver, the court transcriber, the police officer, three children and myself. The session was held at the Family Court, which adopted a different approach to cases with children and families than that of a criminal court. This court was more welfare-oriented than the regular courts which had a greater punitive orientation and less commitment to treating children differently. The family court was more child-friendly as seen in the seating arrangements inside and outside the court room, use of a play room, more support staff and a magistrate oriented towards children's issues. There were also greater provisions to take the child's views into account.

The Magistrate was a young woman who used a firm yet caring approach as she proceeded with the cases. She began her sessions by skimming the welfare officers' reports and focused specifically on their recommendations. She asked the children to discuss the incident they were involved in at the Home. She then asked the welfare officers to give accounts of the children's behaviour at the Homes and the incidents. This was followed by a question and answer discussion with each child and a lecture on discipline, the consequences of misbehaviour and alternative options for their care. All the children were given opportunities to explain the reasons for their conduct (their role, where they were wrong, how they were influenced). Each time

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[11] The Family Court of Trinidad and Tobago was established as a pilot in 2004 in Port of Spain to deal with family disputes. It is a system which adopts a holistic approach to resolving family disputes and embraces legal, psychological, social and, material issues (The Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013)

the magistrate demonstrated a very stern disposition, the children cried. They had difficulty articulating their opinions on the consequences. Despite genuine attempts to obtain the children's opinions, the court process did not fully accommodate children as decision makers and the magistrate and other adults had the final say. Although the magistrate attempted to take a child-centred approach, the context of her practice required a more authoritative stance, so she impressed upon children the need to be obedient, respectful and submissive to adults.

On several occasions, as mentioned above, adults in the Homes would threaten to send children to the magistrate when they misbehaved or when the managers felt that the Homes were not the best place for the children. The children in H1 were less likely to go to court than those in H2 but the use of threats as a disciplinary measure was similar in both Homes. The magistrate I interviewed shared her views when I asked her about the court being used as a means of disciplining looked after children:

*'That's interesting. I don't think that I have ever gotten the experience from them [the children]. Because most of them that come, I would listen to what the caretaker who comes with them has to say about their complaints or whatever it is. Then I would ask the child… you heard what the caregiver has said about you. What is your view? And I do not automatically agree with whatever the caregiver says. I have gone as far as if a child has made a complaint about a caregiver, then you have to come to court and you need to tell me what exactly has happened. And not because an adult makes a complaint against a child that I automatically believe the adult…. I did not consider that caregivers would tell them that they are going to bring them to court because of what you are doing. That's why I believe that there are many square pegs in round holes.'*

(Family Court Magistrate)

The magistrate's account of her approach to inquiry was consistent with my observations. She felt that Homes were generally misrepresenting the purpose of the Family Court. At both Homes, some children feared being sent to the court either

because of their past experiences or through vicariously learning about the court experience from their peers. Others, however, were less fearful as they saw it as an opportunity to inform the magistrate of their experiences at the Homes. These children felt that it was one way in which their voices could be heard and for them to be able to have a say in how they should be cared for. This finding provides more useful evidence that children are not passive in the care process but are able to demonstrate agency, sometimes in subversive ways that benefit them. The Magistrate's account above also verifies that some children saw court not as a threat but as a means to support them. This is developed further in the section on resistance in this chapter.

There was a different view among children on remand in the YTC (the magistrates' last resort for state protection). These 'lads', as they were called, acknowledged the magistrates' approach to making decisions, which sometimes involved one-on-one interviews with them. Although at times the judgment was not in their favour, the fact that the magistrate listened and took their views into account made a difference to them. They understood that at times, the magistrate had no other option but to send them to the youth facility. Overall, the Family Court was not necessarily perceived as punitive by the children, despite being used as a threat by the Home staff.

## 5.4: Challenges of acting 'in the best interests' of the child

### 5.4.1: Quality of care outputs versus Quantity of care outputs

Another aspect of the institutional structure which suggests that paternalism pervades decision making on the best interests of children is within the organisational structure of the Homes. As mentioned earlier, the Homes were statutory ones, run by the government and a Board of Management appointed by their respective church. These bodies were further influenced by international regulations which govern child care and protection (UNCRC, UN guidelines for looked after children). There were sometimes conflicting values between the managers and the policy makers concerning the management of the Homes as the lines between practice and policy making became blurred. As a result, some decisions were made which did not seem to adequately meet the needs of the children, or, because of the hierarchical structure of the Homes and the reliance on staff to carry them out, implementation was a challenge. One of the ways in which this was manifested was where policy makers focused on events and participation that could be quantified and not on processes which determined the quality of engagements. Denis Goulet (1995) in his theory on development ethics has argued that the main aim of development is to "provide all humans with the opportunity to live full human lives" (p. 7) and this can be threatened when a focus is placed on quantity of production and material well-being and not on the quality of human experience. This is applicable to the experiences of looked after children who seem to be the object of charity, alms giving and a cycle of yearly events, sometimes missing the element of a nurturing relationship. For example, for Universal

Children's Day 2011, the government and a non-governmental body hosted a programme for looked after children, which was geared towards celebrating their childhood. Part of this event included sharing information about children's rights and getting the children to share their experiences of living in residential care, which was to be used to inform the National Plan of Action for Children. The event, although well organised and engaging for the children, did not manage to meet the outcome of applying the children's information to the new National Plan. The event, however, was considered a success by most officials. As indicated by the policy expert who was present, the information shared by the children provided useful material for the part of the policy which dealt with children living in care. However, on my follow-up discussion a few months later, no further work had been completed and the children's efforts seemed to be futile. I was subsequently informed that the information was not regarded as relevant and that a new document focused on children's well-being was being prepared, which did not require the children's input.

Another example was where events scheduled at the Homes were heavily reliant on their government budget allocations. One clear example was at H1 where a talent show was hosted as a last minute management decision as the end of the fiscal year was approaching and money allocated to projects needed to be spent. Ways in which this affected the relationships in the Homes include rushed memos and inadequate time for planning, little or no consultation with children, and the consequent feelings of both children and staff that they had been disregarded. At the same time, it provided opportunities for demonstrating interpersonal skills, creativity,

flexibility and resourcefulness on the part of the adults and children. One caregiver in HI explained what it was like operating under such conditions as he worked to make the best out of the situation as he described 'in the best interest of the children'. My journal entry follows:

*Today I visited H1 and spoke with a JHS (male) junior boys. We spoke about his preparations for the last children's show and he highlighted some key issues as they related to the planning and delivery of the show. He mentioned that the key approach which he took was a child focused approach where he obtained children's opinions about how the show should be delivered to them. He also sought the advice from adults. The children made useful inputs in the areas such as the kinds of activities that they wanted to partake in. The adults provided input into who would participate, who would be the master of ceremonies, the layout of the room. He mentioned that a major obstacle to the process was the interactions among the adults, who carried personal vengeance for each other and shared negative relationships. He saw that he was able to negate some of this based on his relationship with most staff members, where he related well with them and was therefore able to be a sort of mediator. He however noted that some staff members would withhold their participation based on who he got involved. For him, taking a child friendly approach was asking the children their opinions in planning, getting a variety of children involved, including staff members' children, getting a master of ceremonies who knew the children well and was able to say something good about the children when they performed.*

**(Journal extract – 8 January 2012)**

The approach outlined is however dependent on how the adult relates to other adults and the children and their competence in applying management and organisation skills in a short period of time. As the above example highlights, there were several forces impeding the work, besides the late decision to release funds for the show, which the caregiver had to navigate skilfully.

### 5.4.2: How the absence of adequate resources impacts on children's participation and the caring relationship

A problem for participation in the Homes was the absence of social workers, psychologists and counsellors in their official structure. These persons were hired on contract or were volunteers or students of social work and psychology. At H2, a psychologist and social worker were hired on contract, as was a clinical social worker

at H1.  Practicum and research students also contributed to the work of the Homes according to their area of study, and the Homes capitalised on this to manage their shortage of staff and expertise.  The primary role of the Welfare Officer was to advocate for children, acting on behalf of the manager, to prepare quarterly reports to the minister, and to collaborate with the probation department where necessary, on critical injuries and critical incidents, on behalf of the court. The Welfare Officers saw themselves as being agents of the court system and the children too shared this view to the extent that they did not see them as representing their needs. In an exercise at both Homes, where children were asked to identify their relationships and expectations as looked after children and how they prioritised the adults in their lives, the Welfare Officers were last on the list. Interestingly, at both Homes, the children first omitted the Welfare Officers from the list until I enquired about them, so they appeared as an afterthought. On seeking clarification from the children and caregivers, it was shared that this perception was a result of the disciplinary function performed by Welfare Officers. They are hardly likely to be seen as children's advocates, which is one of their functions.  Another factor that compounds this issue is the limited training of Welfare Officers, who possess minimum qualifications of five ordinary level passes[12] and are not required to have experience or training in child welfare. The journal extracts below show how children ranked adults' importance at the Homes:

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[12] Ordinary Level Passes are awarded by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). Students between 15-18 years old in secondary schools sit this examination before going on to Advanced Level or pre university courses.

*The adults included caregivers, JHSII, homework tutors, music teacher, supervisors, administrative staff, store room staff, washers, cooks, librarians, teachers, security guards, principal, sport teachers.*

(H1: Senior boys/Transition programme.  Journal extract – October 29th 2011)

*Manager, assistant manager, prioress/nurse, Dominican sisters, staff, house mothers, shalom staff {staff at the leadership centre on the compound who are either permanent staff or volunteers], maintenance, priest, security, baker, seamstress, stores, sports manager, life skills, Alternative Education Programme staff, Spanish teacher, tutor, missionary, volunteers, past residents, sponsors, social welfare.*

(H1 Leadership Meeting (3 males, 3 females). Journal extract - November 02nd 2011)

Note that in H1, the Welfare Officers were omitted and in H2 they were placed last (following prompting).

The resources allocated to the Homes also determined the extent to which children's best interests were paramount in the residential setting. For instance, H2 was located in the city of Port of Spain where most children and family services are centralised. The Family Court is located a few kilometres away from H2 (approximately seven minutes away by car) and this seemed to be another factor which contributed to the adults using the court system more regularly for discipline than in H1, which relied on the regular magistrates' courts, which were also a few kilometres away from the Home (an average of fifteen minutes away by car). Counselling services, the more popular schools and associated services were also within easier reach for H2, although H1 was located nearer to the children's hospital, which provided counselling services. However, access to the counselling services was problematic for both Homes and as a result, they relied heavily on private counselling services which they paid for, or volunteer services, which were mostly inconsistent. This suggests that although the adults may seek the best interests of the children, the

unavailability or inadequacy of resources hinders their decisions. Also, it becomes harder to respect children's rights to self-determination about how they can benefit from therapeutic services.

The notion of acting in the best interests of the child further complicates the interaction between children and adults as adults seem to believe that they are expected to make the decisions on behalf of children. This again is linked to presumptions about children's incapacities (Lansdown, 2010) and failure to acknowledge that children have agency and capacity to make meaningful contributions to decision making (Oswell, 2013). Such exclusion of children from decision making further contributes to children developing dependency on adults to do what is best for them. When this relationship between the adult and the child is not positive, there is further resistance, which sometimes places children in more vulnerable positions as they engage in risky and/or defiant behaviours. This was demonstrated when children were prevented from leaving the compound and found ways of absconding. Two brothers who were placed at the youth facility for absconding about one year prior to my study described their reasons for doing so. They indicated that the only caregiver they had a good relationship with at H1 left and they needed to see their ailing mother, so they took the risk. Other boys at H1 gave accounts of the times they contrived to jump over the walls so that they could go to the nearby arcade to play video games, or went to the nearby river. They did this at the risk of being injured by barbed wires, which they attempted to alter days before

the plan was fully executed, or at the risk of being harmed by someone by the river, where there was a history of robberies and assaults.

## 5.5: Children's power and resilience: the sophistication of children's responses to formal hierarchies

The study also revealed the extent to which looked after children were able to influence decision making in informal ways beyond the bureaucratic structure of the residential setting. These interactions included informal channels of communication and casual ways of relating to adults; the creation of a subculture and subgroups; and using an informal complaints system, through researchers and volunteers, to get their voices heard and to influence decisions. These acts demonstrate the resilience of children as they transcend convention and prosper in the face of challenges (Garmezy, 1996).

Children in general typically negotiate power in various situations whenever they deem this to be necessary (Oswell, 2013; Smith, *et al,* 2013*,* Thomas, 2007). Among themselves they negotiate power, which is based on a hierarchical structure dependent on age, size, sex, experience, perceived intelligence and so on. For looked after children, the length of time in care, affiliation to other siblings in care and leadership roles ascribed to them by adults will be among the variables which qualify one child to have more power than another. Although similar to the sibling rivalry and other family dynamics which take place in a birth family, the situation for looked after children tends to vary in terms of privacy and the nature of relationships (Thomas 2002), thus making the power dynamics and resistance to authority more intense and

organised. The experience of care also provides an explanation for how the informal decision making structures are organised and implemented among children.

In my study children showed their disapproval of decisions imposed upon them in the most subtle yet obvious ways, which will be discussed below. How the children responded to situations depended heavily on how they defined the context and how they perceived adults' approach to them. For instance, the boys at both Homes were sensitive to their treatment by adults and used this to classify the setting as either a home or an institution. Depending on the meanings which they ascribed to their experiences, they either showed acceptance or rejection of adults. This was very clear at the beginning of my study when I referred to the Homes as institutions and the children took offence at the label while I read the adolescent assent form to them. One boy said: *'Miss, this is not an institution. It is a home. I hate it when people call here an institution'*. This raised my awareness of how they viewed their living space and how they viewed me as a researcher having my own preconceived notions about them. This point was further emphasised when I interviewed the boys at the youth training facility who had experienced of living in two different types of Homes – for abused children and for young offenders. They were able to distinguish between a home and an institution clearly, declaring that the adults in the Homes were more caring than those in the institutions and they were able to interact with the opposite sex (peers and adults) in the Homes but not in the institutions. Another way in which the boys were able to make a distinction was in the opportunities afforded to them to have individual experiences and be recognised for individual efforts. They felt that

the institutions did not facilitate this sense of individual accomplishment because of the large number of children being cared for at the same time. The children did not view the children's homes as institutions because of the family-like atmosphere which provided them with a sense of security and care. However, I accepted the term institutional care for the purposes of my study.

The outcomes of informal interactions were also important and resulted in greater satisfaction for the children as they demonstrated their agency. This was apparent in the way they were able to influence the resignation of the transition programme facilitator by showing their resistance to participation and making informal complaints about the programme delivery to their supervisors and the managers. They also influenced their interaction with adults by demonstrating their preference for applying modern technology to the learning and interaction process, and they collaborated informally to make collective decisions when they anticipated that adults would not support their wishes. Examples of this were when the children would meet informally prior to meetings to discuss issues and make decisions before the formal meeting started. Whatever position they took at their informal meetings usually remained consistent, but this was truer for the boys than the girls, who were more often swayed by the adults during deliberations, and changed their nominees for leadership positions in the Home when the facilitators questioned their suitability during an election process. The boys maintained their position and justified their selection of prospective young leaders despite the facilitators' reservations. Such

occurrences are evident in the following journal excerpt after observing the boys in

H1 prepare for a field trip and in H2 at a young leaders' meeting:

*They [the boys] were most preoccupied about bathing at the site and constantly asked me if they would be able to bathe in the nearby river. I referred them to the JHSII. Their dissatisfaction with the adults' response led them to initiate a plot. They talked about what they would do if they would not be able to bathe in the river. One boy said that he might make a 'mistake' and fall into the water and some planned to push each other into the water. They also packed bath clothes and changing clothes with the hope that they would be permitted to bathe. The supervisor did not confirm if they would be allowed to bathe at this point but did indicate that they would be able to at least go near to the water if they behaved well.*

*(*Journal Extract, November 05 2011)

*The boys did not change their positions much and maintained their list of nominees. The girls changed a couple [of] names which were questioned by the adults. The girls, who the facilitators were opposed to at the last session, were not voted in by the leaders. The girls were more influenced by this than the boys who were firm in their position that their peers needed a fair chance. For the boys, their concern was about fairness and justice.*

(Journal Extract, February 29th 2012 (Accessing specialist services)

One informal and naturally occurring experience was the way in which

children's interest in computers and other ICTs influenced adults to adapt. At both

Homes, adults were seeking new ways to incorporate technology into the sessions

with children as they recognised that this was an effective way of reaching them. This

is further discussed in Chapter Six. Adults in the study also highlighted the different

responses they received from children when interactions were not too structured as

this facilitated a more comfortable and open relationship with adults. One male

caregiver noted that the boys he worked with responded better when they knew that

the caregivers were engaging them of their own free will and not because of a

directive from management:

*'Say alright let we go to a movie nah, chill out. There are things you could do … You know take them out… and you do it in an informal way. It's not as though ok you go with them because you are told to. … These are the things that foster better outcomes.'-*

(Male caregiver, H1-4)

The caregiver made reference to situations where children could benefit from informal arrangements with staff. I too experienced the benefits of an informal interaction with the children as described in my journal after observing interactions on a field trip in H1:

*I also had the opportunity to interact with the boys in an informal setting and to see how they functioned in a more natural environment. One boy used the opportunity to talk to me about his personal problems over the week, others who were usually quiet in the session, engaged with me in a couple activities like photographing scenes and people of interest, making jokes and asking more questions.*

**(Observation session (Accessing specialist services). Journal extract, 05ᵗʰ November 2011:H1)**

The children in H1 influenced the decisions about their transition programme in a very informal way, as mentioned earlier. The review of the 18 and beyond programme in H1 was delayed for several reasons and therefore it had never been evaluated at the Home since its inception in the 1990s. However, the children's response to the programme influenced its future delivery. The counsellor assigned to the programme, a retired school principal, was mindful of the fact that special competencies were required to work with the children. This included a participatory, group work approach and not the conventional classroom guidance approach she adopted due to her self-confessed inability to use participatory methods.  There was a discussion by the management of the Home about the required competencies of facilitators for the programme, but there was no final decision and the children in the

end influenced what happened through passive resistance during the programme. They arrived late, were disruptive in class in subtle ways and constantly made comparisons to other more engaging programmes they were exposed to, such as online programmes and another life skills programme. The journal extract below provides a list of behaviours observed during one of the sessions. In the end, the counsellor resigned her post, having acknowledged the deficiencies in the programme and her own competency to work with children whom she described as 'difficult with complex needs'. This outcome not only reflects the counsellor's inability to work with looked after children but the decision making capacities of the board of management. They clearly selected her on the basis of their assumptions about the kind of intervention the children needed, which evidently focused on discipline more than treatment.

*Resistance by the boys was demonstrated by beating on the desk, calling out to passers-by, not following instructions intentionally (this was usually accompanied by mischievous laughter and silent plotting among them), making inappropriate comments which they knew would offend the counsellor, like making reference to 'garlic sauce', which was the title of a derogatory calypso that was popular for the carnival season (also used to agitate the nuns at H2); they were also teasing each other about their mothers/parents; asking the counsellor about when the programme would end; derailing from the main topic and making jokes. A couple of the boys showed enthusiasm to talk about the negative activities that they should avoid but the counsellor did not explore the issues. One boy remained quiet throughout the session and indicated that he could not write because of an injury to his hand that he got in cricket practice. He also refused to give verbal contributions. Despite their resistance however, they completed the task.*

(Journal extract, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2012*)*

Other ways in which the children managed to influence decisions affecting them were through informal processes such as making impromptu decisions about extra-curricular activities. Children's involvement in activities at both Homes was often determined by their level of discipline or by exercising their right to participate in informal ways, for example, through the active use of ICTs. Also, they had their

informal ways of settling disputes among themselves, which were sometimes beyond

the comprehension of adults.  For example, they would trade duties among

themselves or impose their own sanctions on each other.

The children were also able to make their input during cultural events such as

Carnival and Christmas concerts, through calypso, poetry and dance. In this too, there

was evidence of partnership between them and their caregivers, who seemed to use

the opportunity to voice their concerns to management through the children. A good

example can be seen in a satirical calypso entitled 'Too much cooks in the kitchen',

which was written by a staff member and endorsed by a child who agreed to perform

it at a carnival show:

*Too much ah cooks in d kitchen*
*Better sister and dem order Kentucky Fried Chicken*
*Ah really don't know who cooking in d kitchen. Better the manager order Kentucky Fried Chicken*
*One say: I is de real cook*
*The other say I have d look*
*One say I could cook curry*
*The other say I could cook in ah hurry*
*Sister, sister, call Ms. St. Rose D Minister [former Minister responsible for homes]*

*One say I cooking rice and peas*
*The other say: That could cook? Oh please*
*One say: I did not come here for bacchanal* [confusion]
*The other say I see sister and dem in army fete for carnival* [Army fete is a popular annual party hosted by the military]
*One say: Press Pause*
*The other one say: bring d garlic sauce* ['Garlic sauce' was also the title of a popular calypso during this time. It is also a favourite condiment for several dishes among locals]
*'It is alleged'* [a phrase used by a popular television host] *one from Toco*
*D other one from Tobago*
*Who go pressure we longer [who would give us more stress]*
*Who obeah stronger [Obeah is a form of African witchcraft believed by locals to have the power to influence and control people]*

Extract: (Title: "Too much cooks in the Kitchen": H2)

The calypso highlights the many instructions given by adults in their various roles, and how they seemed to be uncoordinated in their efforts and often in disagreement about what was best for the children. It points to management and staff conflict, the lack of cohesion in making decisions and the influence of higher authorities in mediating or having the final decision. The fact that both children and junior staff members could relate to the song suggests that these relationships impact on them in similar ways and further illustrates how they were able to empathise with each other. Through the song, the children were able to get the attention of management and staff, but the extent to which they were able to influence the policy decisions addressed in their presentations remains uncertain.

### 5.5.1: How children manoeuvred around institutional processes

Children also demonstrated the ability to adjust to the management and care styles of adults and in some cases were able to successfully negotiate their spaces. They adjusted to institutionalised care and learnt how to get their way around staff members, as seen in a disciplinary process which will now be outlined. Two senior male residents at H1 were involved in an altercation and were reprimanded by the senior supervisors who thought that the issue needed to be seriously addressed to set an example for other children. On interviewing one of the perpetrators about the incident, he described for me, in steps, the disciplinary procedures and outcomes for him as he saw it. He explained how different staff members would respond to his actions, and turned out to be right about this. He explained that upon being sent to the office, he would be required to write an official report and the senior supervisor

would threaten to call the police and his case would be sent to the welfare officer who does not work on Saturdays, and would therefore be delayed. He said that the welfare officer would call him to talk for the most part and might not follow the issue up because of the time that had elapsed. He added that an apology would eventually suffice. He seemed more confident in the process he described than a senior staff member I interviewed about the incident. She was confident about a specific course of action which never materialised because of the tedious procedures she had to follow and the number of other issues which diverted her attention. Therefore, the efforts to intimidate and discipline the children by calling the police were futile in this particular case and presumably in many previous cases, considering the child's accurate prediction of the outcome. This provides a good example of the kinds of hindrance caregivers face when seeking to use the courts as an option for disciplining children. The two children eventually resolved the conflict between themselves, as I saw them talking casually in the dormitory while the adults in the office were working out the disciplinary actions to be taken. The victim explained that he did not want his peer to get into trouble and that they sorted out their differences. It is possible that the perpetrator had instilled fear in the other child to get him to drop the issue. In this scenario it was evident that the adults focused on formalising and institutionalising children's behaviours rather than negotiating with children to address the issues. Adults are therefore not working effectively within the dynamics of formalised child care and instead choose to invoke external authority, a procedure which is complex, time consuming and unresponsive, and may result in more harm than good for the

children, as they adapt to an unresponsive system and lose respect for authority. The perpetrator in fact thought that the senior supervisor was only 'bumping gum' [giving lip service] in her claims, which means that he did not take her threats seriously. The two interpretations of the disciplinary measures revealed the limitations of the disciplinary system, which was inflexible and uncoordinated, leaving room for the child to predict outcomes and resort to informal means of seeking justice. Punishment or threats of it were no longer a real deterrent for them. Similar findings to those in Sykes's (1958) study of prisoners are found here, where punishment becomes an ineffective means of control as the children cannot see their situation getting any worse. As such the disciplinary procedures do not serve as a deterrent to poor decision making. The children in H2 who were more familiar with the court system as a disciplinary option were far more desensitised than the children in H1. This was also noted by the magistrate I interviewed. She indicated that some cases should be addressed internally at the Homes and did not need to come to court.

### 5.5.2: Children's awareness of their rights

The children were aware of their caregivers' responsibility to them, the vulnerability of caregivers, and their own rights. They used this awareness to their advantage in making complaints about caregivers. They were allowed to write letters to the government minister responsible for their Homes, for instance, although there was no evidence that they actually explored this avenue in practice. They also held high expectations of staff to seek their best interests. Evidence of one child's

knowledge of children's rights and how he perceived their application is highlighted

in this exchange:

*Boy 1: When they tell you they want you do thing and I tell them I don't want to do it…*
*KWP: They hit you? You get hit?*
*Boy 1: I pull out child rights…* [show that they knew what their rights as children were]
*KWP: You pull out child rights?*

(Focus Group, H2-2, 14 year old male)

Evidence that the children refer to their rights frequently and the association

of this with what staff perceive as indiscipline comes from a junior male caregiver who

noted that:

*'Since they know about child rights, they feel that they could do what they want to do.*
*When they were less aware, they were more conforming.'*
(Male Caregiver, H1-5)

This was a common adult theme - that children's rights equate to indiscipline.

This is an indicator that children are being empowered and that adults may not be

receptive to this and may begin to redefine their relationships with children

accordingly. In some cases, what adults referred to as indiscipline or disrespect was

merely an attempt by children to express their concerns about issues affecting them,

for example, where children showed a preference for certain meals or activities or

where they made complaints about staff members who they felt were being unfair to

them. This evidence indicates that the children were aware of some of their rights and

developed ways of exercising them. They were familiar with their rights because of

their exposure to rights programmes at school and the Ministry. Therefore, it would

appear that the children operated from a perspective of rights while the adults

worked within a paternalistic one. This may have created conflict between the two groups as children felt that they were being disrespected and adults felt that children were being empowered to disrespect them, thus creating tension. However, the two perspectives are not incompatible and attempts should be made to integrate them to foster better relations between the adults and children. This matter will be discussed more deeply in Chapter Nine.

## 5.6: Children's resistance to paternalism through an emerging sub-culture

An emerging sub-culture existed within the Homes, as a form of resistance (Hall, 1977) to the patriarchal systems and dominant traditional values. During my fieldwork policy makers tried to reassert these values as a response to a perceived increase in social disorder. The boys were mainly targeted as they were the ones who were deemed to be in need of greater control and monitoring as reinforced during the State of Emergency in 2011.

There needs to be a clear understanding of what is meant by resistance and rebellion in relation to young people. In this context, rebellion is more overt and involves a form of uprising and direct opposition towards authority with outright refusal of obedience, whereas resistance may be less antagonistic, more indirect and covert, sometimes even involving superficial compliance (Raby, 2005). Rebellion can therefore be defined in terms of aggression and violence, and resistance as more passive, with a notable gender difference as found in the study, where boys were more rebellious than girls. Both rebellion and resistance seek to oppose authority

although it has been argued that not all oppositional behaviour is in response to domination (Giroux, 1983). As argued by some theorists, children and young people who seek independence have a tendency to resist any form of control or acts that perpetuate dependence, which may be referred to as rebellion (Raby, 2002).

Although there was evidence of rebellion in the study, especially among the boys, there was generally more resistance among them. Passive or active resistance was usually acted out in groups rather than individually. Unfortunately, the children were perceived by some adults as being rebellious when they could be construed as experiencing ordinary developmental milestones such as seeking autonomy and peer influence (Erickson, 1963). However, due to their circumstances, they faced additional challenges during this developmental period, and their social situation magnified their behaviour as a result of being under surveillance. This was noted particularly where the young people's sexuality was concerned. The adults viewed the boys' interest in interacting with the girls as being deviant when they converged near the girls' dormitory or made requests to include girls in activities. Also, there were situations where the children avoided participating in activities and were considered rebellious for doing so. For example, there was a boy who refused to participate in any kind of extra-curricular activities following his brother's discharge from care, and became disruptive. It was clear that his behaviour was associated with the separation but the absence of a professional evaluation made adults resort to their common-sense interpretations of his behaviour. Other children responded negatively to adults following family visits as they desired to return to their birth families. Behaviours

reported by caregivers included children being withdrawn and uncooperative, becoming aggressive and crying. Where the children's developmental milestones were noted by adults, there was a tendency to trivialise their behaviour as irrational and irresponsible, thus affording them limited opportunities to participate in meaningful decision making. These findings may be linked to the fact that the adults lack relevant training and information about the children's social circumstances.

### 5.6.1: Manifestations of active and passive resistance

There was an instance where the boys at H2 were assisting a caregiver with the cooking and they left her half way through the chore because she had prevented them from going outside after school. Another example of active resistance was when the children who participated in group sessions organised by staff were not prepared for them and as a result resisted or avoided participation. They were seen walking slowly to the venue so that time would pass and some would refuse to contribute to discussions. One boy at a session I attended said: "*the less we talk, the less we write and the sooner we leave here*". This was also the case when I began my pilot study at both Homes and the children were not adequately briefed by management about the purpose of the focus group session which I facilitated to introduce them to the study and to gather information from them – despite negotiating with the manager and the welfare officer beforehand. This led to much contention among the children, who complained, talked excessively, did not cooperate and distracted each other, similar to how children sometimes respond to new teachers. They seemed to anticipate my reaction to them. This influenced my decisions about how I would

proceed with subsequent interviews and observations. They demonstrated well how non-participation was in fact participation - but with another agenda, one that was determined by them.

The children also had a sense of justice and were familiar with the chain of command at their institutions, which they used to lodge complaints about what they perceived to be unjust practices. This was evident where they were reported to go to the senior supervisors or the managers to complain about staff, sometimes using the process as a threat to staff when they felt that they were being unfairly treated. They used the opportunities when they went to court to complain to the magistrates, or when they met with the managers and senior Juvenile Home Supervisors.

The prevalent passive way in which they resisted the system of care was by superficial compliance, whereby they did not genuinely engage in some activities and made little effort to maximise outcomes. They would simply "go along with the flow" of things to pacify adults, according to them. For instance, in making presentations to the staff, other children and the public, at times there was evident lethargy and lack of enthusiasm. Another passive way they resisted was through redistributing gifts they received during Christmas time to other children living in birth families who they thought would better appreciate them. It was a response to their feeling of being overcompensated during Christmas time. A senior caregiver indicated that it was the children's original idea to organise the distribution

Other areas where the children exercised power and showed resistance to adult decisions included how they responded to programmes which they felt did not

meet their interests or needs, such as the leadership programme at H2 and the eighteen and beyond programme in H1. In the latter programme, both boys and girls resisted attending the sessions by showing up late or irregularly, not cooperating, distracting members, with the boys using indirect methods such as humour, singing out loud and making inappropriate comments on topics, and the girls being more direct and making negative remarks to the facilitator. The failure of the programme to engage the children meaningfully and capture their interest resulted in a reassessment of the facilitator's approach, and a restructuring of the programme. This included suggestions to change its name to a more realistic title as the children who participated were not eighteen years old or were not leaving care soon. For this reason, at a preparation meeting for the graduates of the programme, one boy suggested that the name of the programme be changed to "promotion".

Another area where the children were able to show their disapproval and dissatisfaction was by participating as research subjects and mentees. They used the opportunities to share their experiences with volunteers and researchers and made recommendations to them, as they perceived them as advocates for their cause. One boy said to me:

*'Miss, I will tell you everything that happens here cause you are a social worker and you could let them know what we [are] going through. '*

(Male, H2, 16 years)

Passive resistance seemed to be the norm for some children who chose to go through the motions of being polite and grateful recipients of care and of charity on

the part of benefactors. This was most evident when there were official ceremonies and cultural activities which required mandatory participation. My discussions with the children during and after the events revealed that they were mostly overwhelmed by the attention they received. An example of this was during the Christmas season where the children would be visited several times by Santa Claus on Christmas day, as members of the community did their voluntary work for the children. It was fascinating how the children prepared themselves for the visits and how they responded to what I identified as the four seasons of care – Carnival, Easter, summer vacation and Christmas time. There was a cycle they became accustomed to and as such, they mentally and physically prepared themselves to respond to the organisation's care structures put in place for them during these seasons. Indirectly, they resisted the authority of managers, funders, and policy makers. They appeared to be desensitised to the reactions of adults, demoralised as they became objects of sympathy during these seasons and more sensitive to the absence of family care and concern as adults seemed to compensate for this deficiency by providing the children with tangible items such as toys, personal items and treats.

The leadership programme at H2 provides another example of how children resisted passively. There were cases where the young leaders would appear to be in agreement with some group decisions but in the absence of adults, made their own decisions on the same issue. This was most evident during the voting exercise where the leaders were required to select new leaders after being given criteria by the adult facilitators. The children resisted the old method of selection and preferred that the

nominees were consulted and prepared for the leadership role. This was an indicator of their own feelings towards the selection process. I observed that on several occasions the children would make their decisions in pre-meeting sessions, which was the cause of the process being delayed for several weeks. I managed to understand this process by observing the young leaders in their meetings and having informal discussions with them over an extensive period. The general consensus among them was that the leadership group was imposed on them to control their behaviour and did not really fulfill their need to talk about issues affecting them daily as children. One young leader shared that the group sessions failed to address the conflict and tension among the young leaders, which created a major problem among the senior children. He attributed this to favouritism on the part of the adult facilitators and to the adults simply not being in touch with the reality of what was happening in the Houses.

It was evident that participation for children goes beyond having a voice in decision making (Lansdown, 2010; Percy-Smith, 2006; Tisdall & Davis, 2004). The children avoided, misbehaved and conspired as forms of resistance. They demonstrated the various ways in which they could contribute to their life space whether through participation or non-participation, actively or passively. In the form of active resistance, the children openly avoided completing tasks, misbehaved in public and on the compound and conspired to subvert staff intentions. They withheld information when asked, fabricated stories and used humour, made their own contingency plans when they assumed that adults would not facilitate their desires,

such as when they were going on field trips and anticipated restrictions from enjoyable activities. In addition to avoiding tasks, they also did chores poorly, pretended to not understand instructions and created their own coded language which adults did not understand, so that they could have their own way. For example, they used colour codes as a sign of camaraderie and expressions from popular songs and artistes to communicate feelings and ideas in the presence of adults.

## 5.7: Conclusions

The findings presented in this chapter show how looked-after children demonstrate agency in response to formal hierarchies or paternalism. They are influenced by and influence the adults and systems which are designed to protect them. Evidence from the study suggested that adults may need to re-visit their commonly held assumptions that they know what is best for children. This point calls into question the "caretaker thesis" (Archard, 1993) that children should not be autonomous and adults should make decisions for them. As seen in this study, the children were able to exercise their own power and agency, decide on whether or not what adults thought was important was indeed important to them, and respond accordingly; they adapted to their environment and created informal ways of resisting paternalism, in the same way as adults themselves.

The complexity of children's participation and paternalism is a reality in a society that holds traditional values about children and at the same time is attempting to promote children's rights. Adults should acknowledge that seeking the best

interests of children is a complex and multi-dimensional issue which may lead to the same children they seek to protect and care for resisting the care and protection that is intended to help them. From the feedback from the children in the study and reports from some adults, it is important that in seeking the best interests of children, adults take into account the views and experiences of children. This will require creativity and innovation, enhancing the caring relationship and developing a willingness and ability to interpret and modify power dynamics.

One must bear in mind that there are instances when paternalism is inevitable and contributes to positive outcomes for children. The children in the study did not deny adults' guidance. They were mainly concerned about how adults regarded them in the caring relationship, and how they were able to influence decisions being made about them. In essence, they wanted to demonstrate their agency. A good balance is therefore required, as the argument is not simply a matter of whether or not paternalism should facilitate children's participation, but how much is needed to allow children's views and experiences to be considered in decision making and to facilitate healthy development. In addition to this, paternalism or authoritative caring is needed for children's own well-being. These issues related to paternalistic caring lead one to question the practicality of balancing paternalism, protection and participation, which will be the subject of Chapter Eight, which focuses on how participation and partnership can contribute to positive residential practice. For now, I will turn to Information and Communication Technologies and how they impact on children's participation in caring relationships.

# Chapter 6: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a new site of conflict for children's participation

## 6.1: Introduction

The issue of children's use of ICTs emerged naturally in the course of my fieldwork. I did not expect it to be as salient an issue as it turned out to be – one that demonstrated how children influence and are influenced by modern ICTs in their decision making. ICTs are used by children to communicate with peers and adults outside of the Homes, to keep in touch with relatives or find relatives, to complete school assignments and to liaise with teachers and volunteers, as well as to make and broadcast musical productions, contribute to political forums and share information on web communities of interest. The traditional notion of children in care is that they live in an environment that excludes them from the realities of the world but children's use of ICTs disrupts the notion that children in residential care are separated from the outside world. The major themes which emerged from the study included: (1) the impact of ICTs on caring relationships, (2) the complexities of children's ICT use, (3) ICT use and children's responses to paternalism and (4) the ways in which ICTs influence children's decision making. How children and staff used ICTs, how ICTs bring freedom to children in particular, and adults' role in buffering the harmful effects of ICT use are also discussed. The findings provide useful revelations about children's agency, particularly that of looked-after children, who are often seen as passive recipients of care, with very little or no involvement in decision making about their welfare.

Focusing on this area in the thesis provides useful insights into the ways in which ICTs were used by children to manoeuvre their way in a paternalistic system and to demonstrate agency. They creatively used the technologies to share their views, expand their network of friends and contacts beyond the boundaries of the Homes and benefit from situations in which they could teach caregivers, which stimulated new ways of interacting. By demonstrating their agency through ICT use, children were also able to influence policies and practices at the Homes. For example, where purchasing decisions were concerned, Homes invested, though sparingly, in digital games (H2) and an improved internet service (both Homes). Adults also recognised the skills of children, which influenced how they related to them, for example in the training and leadership programmes where the children used technology such as videos in the teaching. It may therefore be argued that the children's engagement with ICTs has indirectly influenced the decision making processes of adults at the Homes. In my study adults used computers primarily for preparing reports with word processing programmes, to play games or listen to music, which excluded interaction with children. However, there was adequate evidence to show the potential that ICT use has for improving interaction and therapeutic and supportive work. This point will be developed later in the chapter.

The chapter therefore explores the ways in which children in residential care use ICTs such as digital entertainment, digital cameras, laptops and desktop computers, and how they are influenced by them and in turn use them to influence decision making. Their ICT use includes tools such as Skype, Twitter, Face book, You

Tube, e-mails and online discussion boards used to interact with the world beyond the walls of the institution. At both Homes in the study children were prohibited from using cellular phones[13], so this aspect of communication is not included in the discussion except where adults used it.

I will illustrate how ICTs present a new site for the paternalism-autonomy conflict by examining how children are non-passive recipients of technology as they actively engage in decision making by using ICTs, and how adults contend with the use of these ICTs in their relationships with children. The available literature on ICT use and young people, although not focusing on looked-after children, was useful in helping me to apply the findings to the 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) debate and examine its relevance to looked after-children. I will demonstrate how traditional assumptions about children and childhood could pose some challenges to children's rights to participation in a digital world and how adults' perceptions may be slowly changing despite their reservations.

## 6.2: Overview of ICT policy related to children in Trinidad and Tobago

As stated earlier, at both Homes in the study the effects of ICT use became apparent as several of the children were beneficiaries of the government's e-Connect and Learn Programme. Each child entering the secondary school system in Trinidad and Tobago since September 2010 among the 141 government-approved schools was awarded a personal laptop for being successful at the SEA (eCAL, 2010). As of

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[13] Cell phones were viewed by management as a threat to children's safety and a distraction to children

September 2013, a total of 70,000 had been distributed to year one students (Ministry of Planning and the Economy, 2013). The looked after children are likely to have had their first exposure to ICTs at school. During the time of the study, approximately eighteen children at each Home who were in their first and second years in secondary school had their personal laptops. The other children depended on computers which were either located in the dormitories and youth centre in H2 or in computer labs and dormitories in the case of H1. The Ministry of Education has placed emphasis on developing competencies in ICT use for full participation in the global economy (Ministry of Education, 2010) and focus has therefore been placed on enhancing the learning environment through computer-assisted instruction, e-learning and media literacy. This mandate was consistent with the relevant legislation meant to ensure that children had adequate means of expression and opportunity for development and participation as outlined in the Education Act of 1966 Section 4(2a).

In compliance with the ICT policy of the Ministry of Education, the managers of Homes act as the 'responsible parent', as defined in the children's legislation, to ensure that ICTs are used properly and safely. This means, for example, monitoring the use of computers, assisting with online assignments, and ensuring the safety of the computers. This is discussed later in the chapter. In comparing the status of Trinidad and Tobago with other countries in relation to digital technology readiness, according to the Networked Readiness Index of the Global Information Technology Report 2012 (Dutta & Bilbao-Osorio, 2012), the country ranked 60 out of 142 high, middle and low income countries with a score of 3.98 out of 7, the third highest in the

Caribbean region after Barbados and Puerto Rico. This report suggests that where digital technology is concerned, for a developing country Trinidad and Tobago is in a relatively good position, which further suggests that an opportunity exists for looked-after children to engage with ICTs and use them to contribute to decision making. Their position in care also put them at an advantage in accessing reliable laptops with good internet access, but they had less access to mobile devices such as 3G phones and tablets than children not in residential care.

## 6.3: The impact of ICTs on caring relationships

ICTs impacted on caring relationships at the Homes in two significant ways: (1) there was an increased role in surveillance of children's activities by staff who took a more protective and paternalistic stance; and (2) the staff acknowledged the competence of children in using ICTs and showed willingness to learn from children, although with some suspicion and concern. The surveillance included random checking when children were using the computers, checking their laptops with the aid of an ICT expert for inappropriate programmes, securing laptops and setting scheduled times for computer use. In addition, the use of ICTs in the Homes had a significant impact on the ways in which children engaged with people outside of the Homes, making them more accessible to outsiders and at the same time making staff in the Homes more vigilant and concerned about how they spent their time on the internet (See **Appendix XIII**). Caregivers became concerned when children said that other children or adults outside of the Homes gave them their contact numbers while

interacting with them face to face or online. One caregiver told me specifically that he saw it as his responsibility to investigate an adult who shared his number with one of the children in his care, with the aim of determining the motive for maintaining such personal contact. He repeatedly warned the children about the dangers of making friends on the internet.

### 6.3.1: The 'Digital Natives' Debate

The use of ICTs allowed looked after children to show generally greater autonomy and freedom of expression. The children were more ICT-competent than adults and because of this, staff were worried about children's motives and engagements. Finding the balance between protection and participation therefore becomes an important issue. Marc Prensky, an internationally acclaimed speaker and innovator in the field of education and learning, has written extensively on the future of young people in the digital age. Technology is continually developing and will continue to influence our everyday existence (Prensky, 2001), despite earlier and to some degree still present resistance and doubts over using ICTs. The 'digital natives' as defined by Prensky are the children born in the 1980s and later who have distinct ways of accessing and processing information when compared to the 'digital immigrants', born prior to this period. The young people are said to be better able to multi-task and problem-solve, and are more competent at ICT use. Such apparently deterministic views of ICT use and young people (Livingstone & Bober, 2005), and simplistic ideas which ignore the diversity of young people and their ability to shape

technology to meet their needs (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992; Lee, 2005), have been criticised heavily, and Prensky's work is no exception.

Prensky's stance on the distinctiveness of the 'digital natives' and the need to revolutionise education has come under much scrutiny due to its lack of empirical and theoretical foundation (Bennett *et al*, 2008; Selwyn, 2009). However, it presents a useful basis for discussion. Prensky advocated a change in approaches to educating young people who have become disengaged in the education system. He specifically mentioned the need for adults to communicate in the new language of the digital natives to facilitate better relationships and understanding of materials, and the need to combine traditional approaches to teaching with digital technology. I will now consider the relevance of these ideas to the situation of looked after children.

### 6.3.2: Looked after children as 'digital natives'

As to whether the 'digital natives' debate applies to looked after children, children in the study were unable to sustain involvement in discussion forums or make a consistent effort to find relatives as their access was limited to completing school assignments or engaging in online recreational activities. Therefore, follow up on discussion forums or even finding relatives was limited. How seriously their online participation was taken by adults or themselves is questionable as adults and sometimes their peers complained about the types of activities they engaged in. An example is of a boy who visited the Ministry of Social Development website and Facebook page to participate in discussions. When asked about the feedback he received, he indicated that there was no reply to his post by the Ministry. However,

he felt good that he could vent his feelings at the time. It seemed as though the children were willing to engage seriously with issues that affected them but that opportunities to do so were restricted and as a consequence their experiences were reduced to simply letting off steam. The experience was similar when they attempted to search for relatives online: they met with limited success, with the exception of one boy in H2 who said that he met a cousin on Facebook. What is important, though, is that looked-after children are experimenting with new ways of demonstrating their agency using ICTs. With more opportunities and support from adults, they may be able to engage in more critical thinking and meaningful activities.

Young people apply decision making processes to technology and therefore have agency to decide how to respond to certain media influences (Jones & Healing, 2010). This however relies on the young people's ability to overcome restraints in their environment such as control by adults and institutional policies that limit their participation. At the Homes, the policies were developed in an ad hoc, reactive way as the staff attempted to understand the new technologies. At no point did staff sit with children to discuss ICTs and produce a collaborative strategy for dealing with them. The Ministry of Education's eCAL policy was therefore implemented by the staff in the best way that they could, which included increased surveillance. In the meantime children found creative ways to circumvent these forms of paternalistic monitoring.

The children developed strategies for transferring data among themselves when they were offline by using Bluetooth and memory cards, participating in online

forums, making videos with them acting, singing or making music and publishing them to represent their experiences in care, etc. So even in a highly regulated environment, the children were inventive, to the alarm of staff. Other examples include the ways children would find to access 'hot spots' (areas where Wi-Fi was accessible) on the compound from open networks in the community. Additionally, although cell phone use was not allowed in the Homes, children found creative ways of communicating with their peers using Facebook and MSN messaging services. These examples show how children negotiated their spaces and gained freedom to control aspects of their lives as related to ICT use, because of the knowledge they had of it, which surpassed adults' in most cases.

The creativity by children in their ICT use increased adults' concern about monitoring and controlling children's internet and computer usage. One caregiver mentioned that with the use of computers in particular, the structure of management had changed to a large degree as it had added another dimension to the supervision of the children. Some adults shared the concern that they were confused about their role in monitoring children's computer and online use and did not see this as their primary duty or area of competence. They felt they were being deskilled. As stated by the managers of the Homes during interviews and further in a consultation meeting, the adults restricted their involvement with the children's laptops to monitoring children's homework because they felt incompetent to do more in this area. The monitoring was defined as simply glancing at the children while they used the

computers and not necessarily focusing attention on how the children were being engaged.

The adults in the study admitted that they were not as technologically adept as the children in their care, especially when it came to online activities. This may have also been due to the fact that there was no internet service connected to the computers in the dormitories and to the caregivers' limited knowledge of how to access available Wi-Fi locations on the compound. The children showed willingness and enthusiasm to teach adults about using the technologies. The children in H2 expressed their disappointment at not being able to share their experiences with technology with caregivers who hardly interacted with them while they were using it, with the exception of the Information Technology Instructor[14]. Children acknowledged it as an area that could improve relationships between them and staff, for example in doing homework. The limitations of the adults had some bearing on the interaction between them and the children as there was a clear gap between adults' and children's knowledge of internet usage and computer usage in general. There may have been missed opportunities for learning and bonding between adults and children because of adults' shortcomings in using the new digital language of the children.

All staff I interacted with about ICT use expressed a willingness to learn, as they had seen how it impacted on the children and how it could be useful to them in

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[14] The Information Technology Instructor was a computer technician, responsible for servicing and upgrading computer software and guiding children on their computer use.

their work. One male caregiver at H2 admitted that he learnt about useful websites from watching the children engage with their laptops. Some staff members admitted to benefitting from children 'teaching certain tricks with the computers', which they appreciated. A senior caregiver at H1, in reviewing the ways I incorporated technology into sessions with the boys, also shared his satisfaction with being exposed to new ways of interacting with the children where they felt comfortable. He eventually became an advocate for applying technology to training sessions, recreational events and assisting children with homework. Two male caregivers at H1 admitted to learning about accessing open Wi-Fi networks and downloading files from the children.

One evening, I participated in a meeting to review the eighteen and beyond programme with the facilitator and boys' senior caregiver and heard him outline the benefits of using digital images, interactive games and videos to stimulate the children. It was evidence that he had seen the different ways in which children responded and the opportunities ICT afforded for improving adult-child interaction. One caregiver stated:

Observing children engage with the technologies helps us to see them in a different way, as skilled, knowledgeable and modern individuals.

Male caregiver, HI-4

This new perspective seemed to make caregivers reflect on their own positions as adults in a technologically advanced world.

## 6.4: The complexities of children's ICT use

The opportunity to engage in new relationships, albeit digitally, appears to be a strong motivator for ICT use. The study revealed that children participated

differently: some were restricted from use and some exercised their choice not to use ICTs. As such, even with this population care should be taken to avoid treating children's ICT use as a homogeneous experience. Although the looked after children may fall within the category of digital natives according to Prensky (2001) still there are subsets within this category which must be considered.

### 6.4.1: ICT use: A liberating or alienating force in adult-child relationships?

The children are engaged with ICTs in different ways that challenge adults' thinking about active participation and social relations. They are increasingly participating in a virtual world, which they create for themselves and in which they determine who and what is important to them – thus demonstrating their capacity for self-determination. They may be creating their own blueprint for the future where they may be less active in the physical world and more active in their virtual worlds, which raises concerns for professionals about ICTs liberating or alienating young people. This phenomenon also exacerbates the feelings of isolation and disengagement of looked after children given the effect of digital technologies in contributing to 'disengagement, disenchantment and alienation of young people in formal settings' (Selwyn, 2009, p. 368). Again, this was evident where the children resisted attending formal sessions and expressed their preference for participating in online forums, interactive video games and other social media. There were however mixed views about this among the children. A 17 year old senior girl shared her fears about ICT use negatively affecting communication between adults and children because of the distraction it could pose. She saw the internet and other ICTs such as

cell phone texting as presenting a hindrance rather than a benefit to meaningful adult-child interaction because of the amount of time that needed to be invested. These reasons also influenced her choice not to use ICTs at the Home as often as her peers. Although this may be a general issue, it may have more adverse effects for looked after children who have more tenuous relationships with adults than children in birth families and therefore relationships may be more likely to be eroded by ICT use.

Another situation which I observed was that some children were being labelled 'lazy' as a result of non-participation in physical activities such as exercise, sports or educational activities such as school assignments. In fact, the same children were actively engaged at other levels, using digital technologies such as interactive video games, for example Wii Sports and Kinect dance, and educational programmes that required exerting physical energy and mental effort. They may be isolating themselves from their offline peers, however, as they deprive themselves of real life interaction. An alternative view of this phenomenon is that the children may in fact be integrating their online or virtual worlds into their offline or real world as a way of coping with what they perceived as an un-engaging space, as suggested by Valentine and Holloway (2002). Adults should be aware of the ways in which ICTs may contribute to the alienation of children and the role that they can play as adults in preventing this from happening. Alternatively, they should also understand the ways that ICTs can liberate children, not necessarily from adults as may be suggested, but from feelings of alienation and inadequacy.

### 6.4.2: ICT use: adults' fears and children's vulnerabilities

The regulations for child care and protection are common to children generally regardless of status. However, the use of ICTs in the process of child care demands greater focus and attention. I elicited the views of several managers of Homes about the standards of care for looked after children at a consultation meeting held by the Children's Authority where I was a participant observer and lead facilitator. They said that ICT use was a new concern for them. Although mention was made of children's access to the internet and the use of technology, not much attention was paid to the issue in terms of setting specific standards. There was a sense of hesitation and uncertainty among the managers when the issue of ICT use was raised and they chose to focus on security concerns. The dominant approach which was taken by the managers at the time to address internet security issues was to block web sites so that children would not have access to them or to minimise computer usage. The short time spent on the topic also confirmed the adults' limited knowledge, discomfort or incompetence in the area, which they felt needed expert opinions. It also provided evidence of how adults resorted to paternalistic measures when they were uncertain about the possibility of a participative approach.

Some adults consequently failed to take a critical approach to interpreting the risk factors associated with children and ICT use. They were mainly concerned about children's misuse of the internet, children's vulnerability and children's safety being compromised. They therefore adopted a risk-averse approach which remained within the confines of managerial duties and the law and resulted in rigid control and

punishment as opposed to developing innovative strategies for working with children and technology, such as incorporating YouTube postings into lessons, using educational programmes, recording children's activities for reflective work so that they can receive feedback and engage in self-analysis, using credible websites for conducting assessments (personal, academic), or having video conferences with other children. This approach to ICTs with children hinders explorative learning. Opportunities for the children to contribute to early self-regulating measures are therefore minimised and this may lead to risky exploration by children as they seek to safeguard their freedom and opportunities for new engagement. It may be argued that children in residential care who are already at a disadvantage thus experience another form of exclusion, but this is debatable as children in birth families' internet usage is also controlled by their parents, and it could lead to a public outcry if it became known that looked after children are less controlled.

If looked after children are not afforded equal opportunities to their peers living in birth families, they may be placed at greater risk of exploitation, misinformation or outdated information and cyber abuse, which would put them at a greater disadvantage. These claims are supported by the study where one fifteen year old male in H2 commented on children's vulnerability to exploitation when peers at school interacted with them about internet use. He reported that looked after children were seen as naïve by their peers who felt they were not knowledgeable and lured them into viewing pornography by using cyber-language they did not understand. This has become a greater cause for concern among males given the

increasing tendency of programmers to attach pornography hits (links) on gaming sites, which the children in the study visited when they had the opportunity.

It was also significant how the issue of ICT use became the subject of an Easter sermon at one of the Homes, where a parish priest shared his fears and concerns about the ways in which children used cellular phones, the internet and social media, putting them in the category of one of the 'sinful acts' to give up for the Lenten season. This provided another example of how some adults reject the new realities of children and highlight only the negative aspects of social and cultural change. The children who lived with their birth families who were at the church service seemed to relate better to what the priest was saying, especially when he made reference to the distractions caused by cellular phones, given that the looked after children did not use this form of communication.  There was a chorus of laughter from the children in care when he talked about it as if to suggest that he was being impractical. At this point I saw the practical effect of excluding looked after children from certain experiences with technologies as they seemed bewildered by some of the comments about being controlled by cellular phones.

### 6.4.3: On-line engagement and the authenticity of relationships

The internet provides opportunities for young people to interact in public spaces and a new form of motivation is created which contributes to engagement in cyber activities as a result of being part of a virtual group (Takahasi, 2011). Through blogging, tweeting and using online diaries, young people are sharing their

experiences and receiving feedback from followers and peers, which influences their self-perceptions. There is also a new form of peer pressure which forces young persons to remain connected with peers and to make online contributions on topics of interest for fear of being alone. This was observed among the children in the Home who often stated that they were being left out of activities relevant to them when they were not allowed to go online. They felt that they had a closer connection with their peers, teachers and volunteers when they participated in online activities and were being put at a disadvantage when engagement at this level was restricted. This raises questions about the authenticity of relationships, identities and communication as young people use the technology to protect their true image by creating virtual images, as suggested by Hill (2011) and earlier researchers (McLaughlin *et al,* 1995).

The children in the study admitted to changing their identities when they visited certain web sites or when they just did not want to be identified by their peers who were on similar websites. They also spoke about 'cheating age' on the internet, mainly Facebook, where they used false ages to get into forums. This might suggest that beyond positive identity development, young people may be learning new ways of developing their self-image to align with the demands of engaging with the technology and online users, and that this sometimes involves fear and suspicion. Or, as put forward by earlier theorists, young people are constantly responding to their changing material circumstances by using new forms of expression (Hall & Jefferson, 1979; Willis, 1990). This also provides evidence of the ways in which young people are able to interact with technology and at the same time co-construct it by making it

more relevant to their needs, which is evidence against essentialist views of the relationship between young people and technology.

As we have seen, the internet has provided opportunities for young people to develop virtual worlds where they create content, shape their identities for the public domain and interact with others in a public space. Apart from exploring personal identity, this engagement contributes to social development as young people interact with others (Beals, 2011). In the current study, this was also the experience of the children who created avatars to disguise their identities and created a 'safe' world where they could be treated as 'normal' [sic] children. The boys claimed that the games helped them to develop social skills which improved how they related to staff as they participated in simulated situations in the online world, and gained positive reinforcements for positive interactions. Adults however thought otherwise and did not see the children applying ICTs in this positive way. It may be concluded, nevertheless, that technology is being integrated into the experiences associated with this development period, which includes peer pressure, identity crisis and identity development. This in turn creates another dimension of child development: children now have to manage their virtual or on-line and real or off-line world experiences, given that they are not mutually exclusive.

Although adults seemed to think that the two worlds were very different, the children saw the similarities and constantly tried to make connections by integrating experiences.  A useful example was where the children experienced a transfer of conflicts stemming from school into their online world. The children in the study

indicated that their peers who had conflicts at school would often make derogatory postings on Facebook or You Tube, where the conflicts became extended. This is also supported by recent research on bullying and cyber bullying, where it was found that there is a positive relationship between cyber bullying and involvement in traditional bullying among children: cyber bullying is simply an extension of what takes place in regular social interaction (Casas *et al*, 2013). That is, peers who bully in traditional peer contexts are more likely to bully online – evidence that children are merely expanding their regular experiences to other sites and that their online behaviours replicate their offline behaviours.

The ways in which ICTs were used by children to express themselves can also be viewed as an extension of cultural norms, which promote the masking of identity and the unmasking of self in various roles (Goffman, 1959) as a form of resistance (Scott, 1990). This masking further influences the authenticity of their relationships with peers and adults. How looked-after children used ICTs may be influenced by cultural norms around expressions related to dominant ideologies and colonial experiences - it is embedded in our culture to 'wear a mask' in order to express opposing views (Liverpool, 2001). This may be literally a mask or a fictitious name or public character, which is protected by acceptable cultural practices of resistance and rebellion as seen during the Carnival season. Based on this analysis, it may not necessarily be a new experience for looked-after children to disguise themselves when engaging online but an extension of what already exists in the offline world, as seen in their Carnival performances. This raises the issue of how similar the online and

offline realities are for children who seek to adjust, manipulate and integrate the two worlds. ICTs are therefore used as an extension of themselves and their identities and provide opportunities for expression that might otherwise be difficult. However, as seen in the offline world, the extent to which this amounts to effective participation still remains uncertain as it does not seem to effect change in a bureaucratic system where formal lines of communication are more readily accepted than in an online world. However, accepted or rejected, through ICT use the real identities and desires of looked-after children may be coming to the fore.

## 6.5: ICT use and children's response to paternalism

Digital technology has long been seen as a major contributor to the shift in traditional hierarchies of knowledge and power (Tapscott, 1998). For this reason, modern technology is often rejected in traditional settings where the boundaries between children and adults seem to be threatened. This was seen in the current study, for example at the board level in H1 where board members shared their reservations with management about investing in modern technologies. In turn, children resisted participating in certain activities which they felt were 'boring' or non-stimulating and where they had no choice, or would engage in disruptive behaviours when they felt coerced to participate. At both Homes, the children resisted activities where they felt adults used traditional methods of instruction that did not engage them. At H1, the children showed little interest in their English and Math lessons at one point because they said that the teachers did not use any technology to stimulate

their interest. This became even more of a concern when the classes continued during the holiday season when they felt that they should be engaging in more enjoyable activities.  The volunteer teacher did not seem to be too skilled at using ICTs and therefore failed to attract the interest of the children, despite the availability of many mathematics and English computer programmes on the market to aid teaching.

The children created a new form of communication among themselves and other children living in similar circumstances. They shared experiences through social media and using a language that was familiar among themselves, and which adults only partially understood. These had derived meanings which were common among the children such as the term 'cheats' (a method that makes winning a game easier). This was according to two male residents at H1. The experience also provides evidence that young people are constantly trying to make sense of social media and want to make it relevant to their context and at the same time have some control over its use. This is similar to the ways children demonstrated resistance by creating their own coded language, as described in Chapter Five. Another example where children sought relevance was where they demonstrated knowledge of the different ways of preparing foods based on the Food Network television programme 'The Iron Chef'. One day after having lunch with the boys, one of them asked me if I liked the food and began to talk about the quality of the food, making comparisons with 'Iron Chef', which was viewed online. He asked me my opinion about the food and how I would rate it on a scale of one to ten. After some hesitation from me, he asked me to put myself in the position of the Iron Chef judge and rate the taste, consistency and quality

of the food. He appeared to be an avid follower of this television programme. Another boy who was eating joined in and started to judge the food after he completed his meal. Based on the feedback received from the boys, it was clear that they were knowledgeable about food preparation and healthy foods. They used this knowledge to contribute to decisions about their meals at the Home and to inform the caregivers about their preferences. One 15 year old boy commented during a focus group session at H1: *'I don't like when they put too much oil in the food'*, suggesting that he was aware of the dangers of oily foods. However, the extent to which their views were considered was limited as it seemed to be a common response by adults that they would not be able to contribute to decisions about meals had they been living with their birth families. This was a response that further demonstrated how adults' decisions about child care were based on how they perceived children's previous circumstances. And this can affect the quality of care that children receive as they are seen by adults as being in a 'privileged' situation rather than exercising their rights to receive quality care or to contribute to decision making. Such attitudes prevent children from contributing to decision making even if children know better.

Another example from the fieldwork where children seemed to use ICTs to challenge paternalism was through social media during the state of emergency in 2011. The children used Facebook, instant messaging, YouTube and e-mails to share their views with the public about crime, the curfews, the government and how it affected their caregivers, and made analogies between being locked up in care and what the regular citizens were experiencing. Yet another example is drawn from the

experience of children in H1 making their own video production to highlight their experiences in the eighteen and beyond programme, as discussed earlier. They saw the technology as a useful medium to influence adults' evaluation of the programme and recreated their experiences on video so that viewers could relate to their experiences.  At H2 a similar thing occurred where a research student utilised digital technologies and social media to help children have a voice. As part of her final project, she produced a video entitled 'Helping children find their voice in institutional care', where the children shared their experiences of being in care. This was subsequently posted on YouTube with the children's and manager's permission. These experiences indicated that the children wanted people to understand their experiences so as to facilitate better responses to their needs. This raises some concerns about the extent to which looked-after children can realistically have their voices heard, given their circumstances and the guidelines around protecting them, which have been given added force by the advent of social media. How confidentiality and vulnerability take on new dimensions as related to looked after children is also highlighted in the example.

As new avenues are presented for children's voices to be heard and for them to participate, they can become more vulnerable (Tregeagle & Darcy, 2008). The children in the study were eager to share information with their peers on the web, having learnt that it was a way of getting recognition. They believed that adults did not recognise their good efforts and therefore sought validation elsewhere, thus jeopardising confidentiality. As one boy in the focus group indicated early in the study,

he wanted his name to be known as a participant so that the world would know that he contributed. He made this comment in response to my explanation of anonymity in children's research. The experience of being exposed to the information age has brought a new perspective to confidentiality for both children and adults who advocate for children's participation. This was again evident on a field trip with the H1 boys when I shared my camera with them and they took pictures of themselves which they said they wanted to tag on Facebook for their contacts to see. Adults also run the risk of revealing children's identities and personal information as with the video recording at H2. Nevertheless, it was one creative way of children using ICTs to reach policy makers and other persons in authority, who were invited to the launch of the video. It may also be considered that the children are capable of managing how much information and what information about themselves goes into the public domain. The adults who are using the technology as an advocacy strategy should be mindful of this when working with looked after children to get their voices heard. They should be included at other levels, such as editing and reviewing. This became obvious with the children in the study, who were very sensitive about their appearance and what information was being shared with other residents and the public. Therefore, to manage the content, they participated in reviewing and editing their video for the 18 and beyond graduation presentation. I observed them in action especially when they were given opportunities to use the cameras to record and take pictures. They identified which pictures and video shots they wanted to re-take or have removed altogether, thus taking advantage of the instant playback function of the devices.

## 6.6: Enhancing decision making opportunities, emerging relationships and looked after children's ICT use

Based on the findings, the following is a summary of the ways in which looked-after children can influence decision making and how adults can support positive participation. In particular, they exercised their agency by expanding their network of peers and adult support in choosing web communities of interest. They also used the internet to locate family members and educate themselves about issues as well as to participate in discussions so that their views could be expressed, and by engaging with education - completing school assignments and other research projects as well as interacting with teachers, volunteers and students. They preferred to be fashionable and participate in what they considered to be youth activities, having been influenced by television programmes and popular online websites.

The children would like to share information about themselves in a non-threatening environment, where they can control what is said about them or how they are represented. Therefore, self-representation and anonymity were both important to them despite apparently being mutually conflicting. It appears that confidentiality may not be as important to looked after children as it is for adults, as children believe that they can control certain aspects of the information that is revealed about them. They work to find a balance in being recognised for their efforts while protecting specific information about themselves. An example of this was where the boys posted the music they created on YouTube but would not indicate that they lived in a children's home. Another was where they would use symbols and hand gestures to identify themselves when taking digital pictures but did not reveal their

faces. Identifying their names was also important to them in some instances as long as they were not affiliated to the Homes. Additionally, the children want time to think about issues affecting them before responding, which online discussions afford. Their willingness and ability to use this medium for participation in decision making should be explored and encouraged by adults providing guidance on how to practise safe internet habits and acknowledging and responding to children's concerns.

All of the areas presented will have an impact on resource allocation (human and physical) and on budgeting, if institutions are to respond to children's wishes and their right to participate in decision making. Management will need to be selective about sponsors, which may reduce some of the assistance they receive if sponsors' goals are not aligned to the Homes'. Modern technology develops at a fast pace and keeping up with it can be costly. Additionally, training for staff and children to maximise the use of modern ICTs will bear a cost, as will creating the necessary infrastructure to accommodate it.

New forms of interaction between children, their peers and adults are emerging. As applied to this research, modern ICTs are creating new social interactions in 'public spaces' (open, virtual worlds) between the children, their peers and adults. Children have readier access to information and advice that facilitate their empowerment and agency, opportunities to share experiences, engage with the outside world, challenge authority and be creative. As a researcher I was influenced by the children to apply different approaches to engage them in the study. Having been informed about their interest in digital technology and ICTs, I incorporated

computer games, interactive web sessions and video and audio recordings into the activities so that they became more stimulating for the children. The children responded positively when I used Power Point presentations, digital images, the Nintendo Wii and YouTube videos to facilitate sessions as a participant observer. When I used the ICTs, the children contributed more enthusiastically, demonstrated creativity, remained focused for longer periods of times and expressed themselves more clearly. The activities were not limited to mental tasks as they were also able to complete physical tasks with the Nintendo Wii fit game console, which allowed them to actively engage in sports such as golf, bowling, lawn tennis and driving, through simulated movements. Such activities were also used by the facilitators at the youth centre in H2, where adults were sometimes seen playing games or surfing the internet with the children. They created opportunities for informal interaction between the adults and children where useful discussions could take place.

Children also benefitted in therapeutic and supportive ways as I recorded them as they completed activities and had them review the recordings so that they received immediate feedback. This was useful in helping children to develop confidence in themselves and improve on areas they were not pleased with, and for some it was the first time that they saw themselves on video. I observed how their initial discomfort turned into comfort and healthy self-criticism or self-assessment as well as how they became competent at using the technologies and how they found creative ways of expressing themselves once they learnt the basic principles. They also received feedback from their peers and important lessons, such as the importance of

planning, practising, receiving feedback, self-reflection, responsible use of ICTs and social media, were taught. They also benefitted from guided group sessions where lessons from YouTube and other websites which shared inspirational lessons were used. More about how technology was incorporated into participatory work with the children will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

## 6.7: Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I attempted to illustrate how children's homes as institutions of care do not exist on their own as locations for children's participation in decision making, but rather exist in very complex interrelationships with other social and techno-cultural sites such as schools and media representations. I have demonstrated how child participation agendas are negotiated in contemporary society among looked after children, and have provided evidence that the ways in which looked after children are communicating have changed and continue to change with the advent of modern ICTs.

The findings of the study suggest that looked after children are more empowered relative to adults than their predecessors of recent years due to their engagement with ICTs. As seen in the study, they accessed information more readily, engaged in virtual experiences which enlightened them about life outside the boundaries of the Homes, used opportunities to engage with adults where they were the 'experts', and compared themselves with children living in birth families (even if sometimes impractically), which increased their sensitivity to their rights as children.

In keeping with the 'digital natives' argument, there is an obvious need to adopt an alternative approach when working with children whose lives have been significantly influenced by modern ICTs but this should perhaps not be to the extent suggested in earlier discussions which have tended towards a deterministic view. Such an assumption about children's vulnerability to become totally consumed by technology should be made with caution, as it undervalues the ability of children to influence their outcomes. Children are certainly being influenced by ICTs, which will affect how they engage with their environment, and the adults working with them need to understand the new language that has developed as a result of this; but this does not entail a loss of agency on the children's part.

The impact of ICTs on children is more complex than originally thought and an understanding of it needs to take into account the paternalistic structures which influence what they use and how they use it, as well as how the children respond to such control and levels of authority. It appears, however, that when the adults are not confident about their own competence in using technology they resort to traditional assumptions about children, which contributes to them becoming over-controlling of children.

Implicit in most of the arguments put forward is the present uncertainty of the outcomes of digital technology and the need to proceed with caution where children are concerned. Even in highlighting children's competence with ICTs, discourse continues about their levels of engagement, the benefits and dangers to children and the role of institutional and legislative structures in supporting, controlling and

monitoring use of ICTs (Tregeagle & Darcy, 2008). Again, this shows the need for paternalistic structures when working with looked after children in a digital world where there is distrust in and uncertainty about modern technology and increasing reports of cybercrimes and exposure of children to adult and child predators. This is reflected in recent debates in the UK about the 'pornification' of childhood and the impact of hyper-sexualisation and commercialisation of children (BBC News, UK Politics, 2013).

There is an ideal opportunity for staff in children's homes and, by extension, other child focused institutions, to re-evaluate their positions of authority and their relationships with children. Developing insights into ICT use and social media in particular as they relate to children in residential care can provide greater understanding of the relational and contextual issues which exist between them and their care givers. It can illuminate how relationships between children and adults are affected and mediated with the use of ICTs, while simultaneously providing solutions for regulating ICT use among children in residential care.

In putting forward arguments about the socially constructed nature of technology, Law (1987) and Hughes (1986) have long maintained that technology and the social are interactive and require both social and technical expertise and choices. In essence, society is being designed by those, such as children, who consume technology and it is therefore not a one-way street. And there remains a role for adults to guide and protect children. Having acknowledged the sustained role of adults in the lives of children even in the area of ICT use (Bennett, *et al*, 2008), it is

therefore important that children in residential care benefit from opportunities to develop their competence in ICT use with the support and guidance of caregivers. The virtual or on-line world of children may not be a replacement for their real or off-line world but rather an aspect that complements their existence and which can increase the chances for adults and children to engage in healthy relationships. This also suggests that the adult caregivers have a significant role to play and should also be competent at using the technology.

Institutions should be equipped to engage the children in ways that will prepare them for the 21st century, which requires complex thinking, creativity, participation, and dynamism (World Bank, 2005). Children should be provided with opportunities to engage with the technologies that help them to master the skills needed for their own survival. In the absence of these opportunities, looked after children may be placed at greater risk and become vulnerable to various degrees of harm in and out of care. As adults attempt to mediate the prevailing perception of children and ICT use, they begin to see children as vulnerable but digitally proficient. There appears to be a significant shift in adults' thinking about children's ICT use as a result of the ways children are engaging with ICTs. Evidence of how technology may, by extension, be influencing a shift in social relations between children and adults is therefore apparent.

There are opportunities to use ICTs with looked after children to improve their agency, increase participatory approaches and academic performance and develop more responsive institutions and relationships with adults, but we must first

acknowledge the complexities of this phenomenon and the need for flexible thinking and decisive action by adults to equip themselves with adequate ICT knowledge. ICT use has been commended for strengthening children's agency within bureaucratic structures where they have been able to develop creative ways of overcoming personal and institutional challenges (Jones & Healing, 2010), and adults can capitalise on this. Children therefore have an active role to play in policy development and this should be acknowledged in areas of ICT usage and elsewhere, as explored in the following chapter.

# Chapter 7: Children's Participation in Policy Development: Possibilities and Tensions

## 7.1: Introduction

This chapter focuses on some of the decision making issues in policy development for looked after children and the adult-child relationships which emerge as a result. It highlights the difficulties that adults working at the policy level may experience when encouraging participation among children. Some important aspects of practice which present limitations to operationalising children's participation as well as opportunities for children's engagement at the policy level are highlighted.

The broader policy issues and how the everyday interactions between adults and children in the Homes impact upon policies and practice, are not dichotomous. They are interrelated and cyclical, each influencing the other in synergistic ways. This analysis will therefore highlight the role that traditional beliefs held by adults about children play in adult-child relationships and show how adults fall short of the participatory ideal in their relations with children, hindering their rights to participate at this macro level. I will draw on examples from work by the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, which promotes child protection policy initiatives in Trinidad and Tobago, the National Plan of Action consultation process and a mentorship programme by a non-governmental organisation which targeted looked after children in H1 and H2 and where I participated as a facilitator. These data were selected as they provided useful examples of how the experiences enriched children's participation and our understanding of how the day to day business of participation

is linked to policy learning at a strategic level. These areas were selected when I purposefully became involved in them as part of my PhD experience, which gave me the benefit of gaining access to information (for more on my involvement see the Methodology section in Chapter Three). They are therefore useful examples for demonstrating how children's experiences with participation are linked to broader issues of citizenship, as posited by authors such as Hart (2007), Oswell (2013) and Thomas and Percy-Smith (2012).

I will conclude with a discussion of the importance of children, policy makers and front line workers such as caregivers seeking common goals for child care within a child rights framework. A more positive, balanced and consistent approach to working with looked after children and promoting child rights is therefore suggested, along with the need to recognise the dynamic nature of child care and the need to be flexible to meet the diverse needs of looked after children. This chapter re-emphasises the value of caring adults with positive attitudes towards children and children's participation to buffer the negative effects of adult hegemony and bureaucracy.

## 7.2: Consulting children on National Policies and Programmes

There were experiences where adults worked with a very narrow idea of children's participation that focused on content and hearing children's voices but not on form or process. In 2012, the looked after children were consulted on the three year strategic plan for the Children's Authority and on developing residential child care standards in Trinidad and Tobago. They were also consulted on developing the

National Plan of Action for Children in 2011 and developing a mentorship programme for looked-after children in 2012.  Despite the fact that policy makers such as a UNICEF policy analyst, a National Plan of Action specialist, Children's Authority policy makers and other decision makers acknowledged the benefits of listening to children and using their information to inform policy development, the process of enabling participation was problematic. An honest statement from one foreign-based policy analyst substantiates this point - *'including children's input into policy in Trinidad and Tobago is a difficult task'* (UNICEF Policy Analyst, 2012).  He attributed this to dominant cultural beliefs about children, which held that they were incompetent and unable to contribute to decision making. In addition, resource limitations also restricted participation by children.

To illustrate this point, the looked after children were consulted on the new National Plan of Action for Children[15] in October 2011 during a Universal Children's Day event hosted by the relevant department of the Ministry responsible for children and the Coterie of Social Workers. The event included youth workers and social workers who worked with children in their various age groups to elicit from them their views about living in care and what they thought needed to be done to improve their experiences. The intention was to use the feedback to inform the National Plan of Action, particularly where it addressed the needs of children living in care.  The session lasted for about ninety minutes and various strategies were used, including small

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[15] The National Plan of Action for Children is a five year plan for safeguarding children in Trinidad and Tobago. It stems from the World Fit For Children.

group discussions with the older children and play and art for the younger children. I observed the entire process as a participant observer and found that the children provided useful feedback about their living conditions and their relationships with caregivers, and made comparisons with living with their birth families in their original communities. However, according to the coordinator, the data was never used despite a report being submitted to the Permanent Secretary for review. The reason given was that the National Plan of Action for Children did not need revision. Additionally, a National Strategic Plan for Child Development (2012-2016) was developed. Although it presents as a good tentative plan to address child-related issues, it omitted children's views as key stakeholders in the development process: no mention of children was made in the methodology (National Strategic Plan for Child Development 2012-2016). Efforts to include children in the policy decision making process were dismissed despite recommendations by the coordinator to include a methodology that would elicit their views.

An essential part of the philosophy and approach at the Children's Authority is *'consulting with children and incorporating their views into policy, standards, programme planning and implementation'* (Correspondence with Manager, 2013). In January 2012, the consultation session on the strategic plan for the Children's Authority was conducted with a focus group of ten children from various children's homes. The aim of this session was to obtain children's views on child rights, their expectations of the Children's Authority and the measures they wanted to see in place to benefit them. Children were engaged using theatre arts and interactive games. A

review of the report on the consultation process revealed that the children were aware of their rights and when they were being violated. This was determined by the outcomes of their participation where they interpreted hypothetical situations presented to them of children's rights being violated by adults, which the children said made them feel uncomfortable (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Consulting with Children, 2012). Further analysis of this might suggest that the children may not have been knowledgeable about their rights as such but were sensitive to unfair treatment in general, given their experiences with abuse.

The interactive game of 'Whacky Relay', in which participants were divided into two competing groups and required to complete the sentence "The Children's Authority should …" using words from A to Z, was used to get children's views of the role of the Authority. The children used words such as care for, educate, help and ensure the safety and well-being of looked after children. They also identified how the roles should be carried out, with kindness, love, respect and zeal. Some of the children indicated that the Children's Authority should ensure that children grow up in environments of happiness, love and understanding. Other children indicated that the Children's Authority should bear responsibility for protecting children from all forms of abuse and should ensure that children are allowed to enjoy being children. It was also noted that the children's main concerns were to improve the complaints procedures and their relationships with staff at the Homes.

The children's expectations were reflected in the vision statement of the agency: 'The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago will champion the well-being

of all children, protect the vulnerable and restore childhood' (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago Strategic Plan, 2012-2014). Their views have also influenced the philosophy, assessment function, core values, placement options and mission of the Children's Authority (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, correspondence from Director, 2013). An activity I conducted with the children at both Homes to determine what would contribute to a better care experience for them revealed similar findings to the consultation sessions (See Diagram IV below which I developed as an outcome of the consultation).

**Diagram IV: Common characteristics of children and adults that are needed for harmonious relationships as viewed by children in H2**

**Children's Roles at H2**

**Adult's Roles at H2**

Alter Servers
Choir
Guitar Club/String Stars
water Polo team
Real Madrid Football Team
Junior Music band

**Responsibility
Caring
Empathy
Respect
Discipline
Honesty**

Managers, Asst. Manager, Piroress/Nurse
Dominican Sisters, Staff, House Mothers
Shalom Centre staff, Maintenance workers
Priest, Security guards
Baker, Seamstress, Stores Manager
Sports Manager, Life Skills tutor
Alternative Education Programme teacher,
Spanish Teacher, Tutor, Missionary
Past residents, Volunteers
Social Welfare Officers

I discussed the consultation experience with the children in Homes 1 and 2 who participated in the exercise. They indicated that they enjoyed the activities and felt comfortable sharing their views about child rights and their experiences living in care. The children also thought that they were able to give useful information and felt that their views about child rights were valued by the authorities. Interestingly, they did not mention the role they played in influencing the Children's Authority's role in their lives, which made me think about the effort that was made to obtain children's views on this area, which was already defined by legislation. This experience also showed that there was little that the children could have said to influence policy. The Children's Authority Act of 2000 (Amended) mandated the Authority to:

- Provide immediate protection for all children;

- Maintain Reception Centres for the intake of children in need of care and protection;

- Regulate the operations of community residences, foster homes and nurseries;

- Implement and maintain the foster care system;

- Manage the adoption system; and

- Provide assistance to the Counter Trafficking Unit.

In developing the standards of care in Trinidad and Tobago under the Children's Authority, similar challenges were encountered which hindered children's participation. These included time constraints, failure to engage children at an earlier stage and inadequate analysis. In fact, the engagement of children in developing care standards seemed to be an afterthought which followed questions I posed including some about children's input. My inquiry was based on my knowledge of the previous

children's consultation session where they discussed their expectations of the Authority. Prior to my inquiry, there was little attempt to include children's contributions at this juncture. Despite my suggestions about improving children's participation in the policy planning process, my contribution was responded to in a dismissive way rather than by trying to put measures in place for meaningful children's participation. The care standards consultation with children was hastily done, bypassing a more adequate selection process for child representatives, lacking preparation for the children and excluding some children who might have provided useful information.

Additionally, the adults at the Children's Authority selected three broad categories from the twenty standards of care, which included 'complaints procedure', 'safeguarding the children' and 'relationships and behaviour' - on which children were invited to comment. When I inquired about the procedures for selecting the chosen standards, it was explained that 'we viewed the standards through the lens of a child and sought to determine which of these standards would have a direct influence on a child and which ones he or she may wish to speak up on. The areas we believed were important to the child were the safety, health and well-being' (Correspondence with Manager, 2013). While adults were given two months and a total of fifteen contact hours to discuss the draft standards at separate meetings, children were given three contact hours, with no preparation.   The limited time frame and the timing of the children's input, which was at the last phase, were counterproductive to children's participation. These limitations were also attributed to shortage of staff and lack of

expertise in the area, which prevented the Authority from fulfilling its mandate of children's participation.  Some examples of the children's contributions are provided below. They represent the children's views after adult editing.

Although it was reported by the foreign consultants and the manager responsible for the task that the children's contributions were incorporated into the final document, on reviewing the document, it was difficult to determine where this had been done. It was also explained that the children's contributions were very similar to those of the adults who were consulted. The children paid particular attention to having family type settings to replace institutional settings; they wanted more connection with friends and family outside of the Homes, desired to be part of the rule-making processes for the Homes and wanted their views to be taken more seriously. The adults focused primarily on children being more responsible, suitable care provision, staff recruitment and children's safety. The draft regional standards of care and international standards for residential and alternative care also reflect views similar to the children's (Regional Minimum Standards for Children's Residential Services, 2011; UN Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children, 2010).

<u>Extracts of the summary of children's contributions to care standards</u>

**Making complaints:**
- There should be a private place and full-time person within the home where and to whom children can discuss complaints.

- The child should be given undivided attention when making a complaint and not be treated as a nuisance.

- Staff should be trained to handle complaints and not be dismissive toward children.

**Creating a positive environment**
- Children should be encouraged to be part of teams with their caregivers.

- There should be someone who[m] the child trusts and feels comfortable talking to.

- There should be no corporal/physical punishment as this is sometimes the reason children were removed from their home.

   **How to make a place safe for children:**
- Social visits should be allowed with appropriate checks.

- The home should not be a jail.

- Children should be part of the discipline process and should be able to contribute to the determination of types of punishments.

- Children should have an input in rule-setting at the home.

**Initial assessment of community residences and the children in residential care Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago presentation, 30th November 2012**

### 7.2.1: The consultation process

A group called Arts-in-Action, a theatre in education group out of the University of The West Indies, St. Augustine, delivered an interactive workshop to elicit the views of children on the three year strategic plan for the Children's Authority and for the Standards of residential child care. Their strategy was to use theatre skills and techniques with the children to facilitate the decision making process for the residential care standards whereby children were able to make their contributions. Scenarios were presented in a child-friendly manner based on child rights and care standards to stimulate ideas and elicit feedback from the children. Feedback was recorded on flip charts and presented for analysis to the managers in charge of the workshop, who then fitted them into the care standards. The children's contributions were placed into themes and presented to policy makers and managers of the various homes. The children's responses reflected their everyday experiences and provided very specific suggestions for improving their care experiences within a child rights context. However, most of the quotes listed above do not reflect the direct

statements from the children as they were edited to reflect policy language. Findings were presented at the final consultation meeting for developing care standards. There were some objections by managers at the meeting to some of the comments made by the children, but the children were not present to defend or clarify their positions. Had the children been invited to the final meeting to articulate their concerns, it would have perhaps been more difficult to dismiss their views. Unlike adult participants, they were thus denied the opportunity to contribute to the meeting that concluded the consultation process. An example of how the Arts-in-Education group engaged the children is provided below:

**A Sculpting Exercise**:- The participants were presented (by Arts-in-Action facilitators) with three tableaux, each representing a crucial issue addressed by some of the standards under focus:

- A child trying to tell an adult something but is ignored.
- A child about to enter a hazardous/unsafe situation.
- A child being physically abused by an adult.

Participants were asked to comment on and change each tableau (negative to positive) by moving around the components of the image as if reassembling mounds of clay.

My final example of participation relates to a mentorship programme hosted by a local non-governmental agency in Trinidad which provides services to looked-after children. Unlike the previous examples, children were actively involved in planning how the programme should be developed, more specifically they looked at the criteria for volunteers, the kinds of activities they wanted to engage in and how to set parameters for the relationship between the volunteers and the homes or caregivers. A one day workshop was held in 2012 with 42 looked-after children, which was part of a long term intervention, and included children from H1. Participatory activities such as drawing, dramatisation, poster presentations and group discussions

were used to engage children. The workshop facilitated children in sharing their expectations of the programme, their roles and those of adults, and provided recommendations for enhancing interpersonal relationships with adults. The feedback was used to develop a training module for the mentors. Findings were also used to inform policy guidelines for the agency and to develop the overall mentorship programme, which was still being used up to the time of writing this thesis. Some specific influences of children included: emphasis on the personal qualities of mentors, of which actively listening to children was key; activities for the workshop and for their time with their mentors; and the planning process for the workshops. The children's workshop also informed policy outcomes to guide the adults' interaction with children. The selection process for mentors and caseworkers was guided by the process, as were agency protocols related to interaction with children's homes. The adults responded positively to the children's information and were delighted to learn of children's expectations of them. The process that was used for developing the training programme also served as a model in itself to indicate to adults the benefits of children's participation. Another major action step was the 'mentors' oath to mentees'. This included adults' promise to commit to ongoing personal and skills development, to engage in meaningful mentorship activities and to set boundaries in their relationships with children and adhere to agency protocols. The aim of the programme was to expose looked after children to positive relationships with adults other than their caregivers so that they would benefit from additional support. Children were therefore being re-oriented to new forms of

interaction to facilitate their personal and social development. A major benefit to them was that they would receive individual attention from their mentors and develop self-awareness to overcome life challenges (Taylor & Bressler, 2000).

Despite the positive beginnings to the programme, some difficulties were encountered. Some relate to the mentors and others relate to the children's experiences. The major problem in achieving positive adult-child interactions was that mentors were not consistent in keeping their commitment to the children; mentors sometimes did not get the support of the caregivers, who made it difficult to meet with the children at the homes; and some adults became emotionally exhausted as a result of having to face the realities of working with abused children. Also, children seemed to be more prepared than adults, given their experience with volunteers, but their resilience sometimes worked against them, as some children were left disappointed when they were not paired with an adult because they were seen as less urgent cases. It should also be noted that the agency records a higher intake of children than of adults, which made it difficult to pair children with suitable mentors. The relationships between the children and mentors were therefore negatively affected, leading the caseworkers either to end the mentoring or to replace mentors, thereby adding to the instability of looked-after children's experience, which is a major concern for this population (Jackson, 2002). Although having the input of children in making these decisions is viewed as important by the caseworkers, the reality of having few mentors dictates that the adults remain in control and therefore have the final say.

In addition to the barriers to children's participation which were outlined earlier in the thesis, there were other bureaucratic blocks that hindered positive relationships between children and adults and may contribute to children having a negative perception of adult-led participation activities. Obstacles related to legislation and governance contributed to the challenges of achieving meaningful children's participation, as seen in the development of the National Plan of Action for Children and the care standards. Children were consulted about their perceptions of the role of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago in the early stages and one of their key expectations was that 'children's rights advocacy should be an essential part of the Authority's strategy' (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, press release November, 2012), but due to legislative delays which prevented the Children's Authority from becoming fully operational, this has not been realised. In particular, the Children Act of 2012 and the Children's Authority Act of 2008, which form the basis for other major children's legislation, have not been proclaimed. As a result of the lack of legislative support to guide practice, the board of management of the Children's Authority takes a cautious approach for fear of the legal implications associated with working outside the boundaries of the law. This inability to act at the policy level was sometimes perceived by children and adults as inaction and lack of care and concern by the Children's Authority. This was reflected in the very popular question asked by adults and children in H1 and H2 throughout my study: *'So what is the Authority doing for us?'* or the statement: *'The Children's Authority is like a dog*

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*without teeth'* [The Authority has no power to manage children's affairs as it is designed to].

Common throughout the experiences described in this chapter is the underlying assumption that adults know what is best for children, which was manifested by the ways in which policy makers had the final say even when children were included in decision making. The experiences also illustrate further issues for children's participation as even in the way in which they framed their experiences and expectations, adults decided what was best or better. Adults making the final decisions about how children should participate, who should participate, what should be published, how it should be published and what are the more important issues, are just a few examples of how adults demonstrated their power and control over children within a participatory framework. It is more than likely that if adults fail to understand and appreciate the importance of children's rights, particularly their right to participate in decisions affecting them, looked-after children and children in general will continue to be marginalised.

The challenges of operationalising children's participation by policy makers and practitioners who should be more knowledgeable about children's rights further emphasise the difficulties faced by less experienced persons such as the caregivers in the study. Taking a child rights approach to child care was a relatively new concept to many staff, who often resisted the idea of children having rights. When children misbehaved, their awareness of their rights was usually cited as a major reason for their indiscipline as adults associated children's rights with disrespecting adults. One

caregiver at H1 made this point very clearly while speaking to a senior caregiver one evening in support of the police presence on the compound: *'Since they [the children] know about child rights, they feel that they could do what they want to do'*. The children on the other hand thought that staff felt they were being disrespectful whenever they gave their opinion about something and saw this as the reason some adults prevented them from sharing their views. Although none of the children in the focus groups were fully aware of their rights, some claimed to use rights-based talk to defend their positions. For example, one boy stated: *'If somebody [referring to staff] lash [hit] me I just tell them the book of child rights and I just read it to them'* (Male, 15 years, H2, focus group session) – indicating that he was aware that staff were not supposed to administer corporal punishment. The children saw child rights as one means of protection against unfair treatment by adults. Staff members felt that the children were being given too much power through child rights while they, the staff, were simultaneously losing power and control through increasing use of risk-averse, highly regulated approaches by management and the government. These measures also resulted in some staff members feeling that there was an imbalance in the approaches, which contributed to their resistance and demotivation to work more effectively with children.

Developing a common understanding of children's participation is critical (Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2012). Lack of a common understanding has negatively impacted on the relationships between children and adults in the Homes. This also extends to other adults such as volunteers and administrative workers who seemed

to adopt a cautious approach when interacting with looked after children. An observation was made at the mentorship workshop where the adult participants began questioning the facilitators about their boundaries of interaction and the potential risks when working with looked-after children. For example, they were concerned about how much historical information they should have about the children and how much information they could share on social media about their experiences with the children. An analysis of the workshop evaluation also revealed that the information on children's legislation and child rights was extensive but discouraging. Some of the adult participants felt that they (the adult participants) did not consider the sensitive nature of work with the looked-after children who needed special care and as such they needed more support to work with them. A few participants were never paired with children for this and other reasons suggested earlier.

These accounts give a clear indication of the effort that is needed to promote child rights and more specifically child participation. It was clear that adults and children had different expectations of a child-rights approach. Accordingly, there should be heightened awareness among policy makers, caregivers and children about how the culture and bureaucracy can present obstacles to the process of engaging children in decision making. Approaches to working with children which take into account their social, cultural, political and economic needs (indigenous practice) will also be critical to the process. Such indigenous practice should however not be premised on traditional ideas about children as being incompetent or irresponsible.

(This is addressed in Chapter Nine.) Therefore, clarifying expectations and setting common goals that will be responsive to the diverse needs of the children will support better adult-child relationships.

Despite the challenges in forging positive adult-child relationships, it is possible for meaningful and non-tokenistic children's participation to become a reality. However, for Trinidad and Tobago, it has a long way to go. My brief visit to Durham County Council's Investing in Children agency and a review of their institutional documents provided evidence of what is required to make children's participation work. The 'Natural Allies' programme is aimed at supporting children and young people with disabilities and additional needs to participate in decision making. Children choose their own advocate or ally who will assist them in decision making to get their voices heard. Critical to their approach was the active and positive role that the adults played in fostering children's participation through spending time with children, understanding their thoughts, ideas and feelings (Investing in Children Annual Report, 2012). There are also 'Agenda Days' where children and young people hold meetings to discuss issues that are important to them in an adult-free environment. However, the adults ensure that all necessary supports are available to the children for their meetings to be successful. Thus adults continue to have active roles in participation work, which requires them to be willing to relinquish some power to children and young people and focus on the strengths that the young people possess.

The approach taken by Investing in Children thus assumes that adults cannot vacate the field and leave children's participation solely up to the children and that adults should develop an understanding of when they are needed and how to manage their involvement so as to allow children to lead. The organisation also adopts the position that 'adults don't always know best' (Investing in Children handout, 2012) – rather adults know *better* because of their experiences which children have not been exposed to. Implicit in this approach is the interdependence of adults and children, who learn from each other. This balancing of the relationship between adults and children is what can make the difference for looked after children but as seen in the model used by Investing in Children, it requires a shift in adult views about children to one that sees children as competent, trustworthy, responsible and powerful. The conversation about children's participation must necessarily accommodate adult-child partnerships in a natural progression where the dependence of children upon adults for support is already established. Therefore in the development of policy that seeks to accommodate meaningfully the daily experiences of children's lives, these relationships must be fostered.

In order for the Investing in Children model to be a useful approach in Trinidad and Tobago, systems which support children's participation are needed. Additionally, this system should include a cadre of adults who have genuine interest in children's participation in decision making. Such systems should also be supported by legislation and policies which send messages that children's participation is taken seriously and acted upon. Flexibility and responsiveness to children's work pace, along with support

for adults who work with children and an embedded, robust planning, implementation and evaluation system that promotes adequate assessments, feedback and monitoring, are also required. These will facilitate ongoing improvement - whether in policy or the everyday experiences of children.

## 7.4: Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter provide insights into the ways in which a combination of deep-seated cultural values about children and rigid bureaucratic procedures can complicate children's participation. The challenges faced in making children's participation a reality in residential care are presented with emphasis on the role that adult-child relationships can play in transferring knowledge, positive attitudes and values and skills to children to increase their resilience and reduce their vulnerability. The examples presented in this chapter provide evidence of the need for more work to be done in promoting participation with looked-after children as it is hindered at the micro and macro levels, making it difficult for them to contribute to policy development. This suggests that a closer examination of Caribbean practices related to child rights is needed – one that takes into account adults' roles. As one male caregiver indicated in an informal discussion, *'there needs to be a Caribbean model for working with looked after children, taking into account the UNCRC'*, (Senior JHS, H1). He meant that there was the need to integrate more Caribbean experiences into the customary North American and colonial ideals about child care, which he felt failed to acknowledge cultural differences. He believed that this new model should be

more supportive of adults in their role as caregivers and should emphasise an adult-child partnership. This sentiment was also expressed by other caregivers at both Homes. Caregivers often shared that *'these children are not as mature as foreign children to make decisions on their own'*. These sentiments however were linked to adults' views about children as being incompetent and irresponsible, thus needing adults' control.

Such claims are not unique to Caribbean experiences and share similarities to our North American and European counterparts. As such, the potential significance of a continuous call for a Caribbean child rights model by caregivers remains obscure, although it raises important issues. The statements made by the caregivers may be a reflection of their lack of understanding of the UN convention with regard to child rights. In this regard, there is no compulsion on the part of caregivers to inform themselves or their practice with children with the tenets of the convention related to children's participation. Could the criticism of the UNCRC by caregivers as lacking cultural relevance be an excuse for non-compliance? Could knowledge of the UNCRC be a catalyst for interpreting cultural nuances for seeking the best interest of looked after children? Or is there a genuine need to reduce its vagueness by helping caregivers to understand how it applies to them in their interaction with looked after children?

An approach to support caregivers in understanding a new caregiving experience that recognises children's capacities could include developing guidelines and training. This is further elaborated in Chapter Ten. These concerns also have

implications for development ethics, given the influence of adults' decision making

values about children and how these values determine the outcomes for children as

young and eventually adult citizens. An important lesson to be derived from this

finding is that there is the need for a common interpretation of child rights and

Caribbean childhood experiences which can inform practice. As related to this study,

there is the need for greater understanding and acceptance of children's participation

by caregivers in a Caribbean context based on some of the indigenous experiences in

care.

Children were to be commended for their resilience as demonstrated in the

ways they grasped opportunities and used their creativity to influence decisions.

However, the relational dynamics between adults, children and institutions presented

challenges for them to fully express themselves. A closer analysis of the children's

experiences further reveals the need for greater emphasis to be placed on

strengthening caring relationships with children as alternatives to harsh bureaucratic

measures which focus on outcomes and risk-averse approaches. Because there

appears to be a long way to go before children can truly become active decision

makers in Trinidad and Tobago, it may be reasonable to conclude that adults will

continue to play a major role in decision making even where children are involved.

What is further required therefore, is that adults be competent at translating

the language of children when they are participating at the policy level so that they

can communicate effectively with them and represent children's views as well as

possible. Also critical is that legislation and policies support children's participation in

decision making and that agencies which work on children's behalf such as the Children's Authority and other NGOs are supported in fulfilling their mandate. In other words, children's participation in decision making at the broader policy level requires an entire network of systems and strategies to make it work successfully. The following chapter on participatory approaches highlights information about working with looked after children which may be applied at the policy making level.

# Chapter 8: Positive Residential Child Care Practice: Exploring participatory approaches

## 8.1: Introduction

This chapter provides evidence regarding the participatory approaches which were applied to work with looked-after children and highlights the positive aspects of care. Evidence is provided to suggest how children valued participation and how genuine participation can be achieved by them, even where there is adult control. A closer examination of specific participatory approaches will be made with the aim of generating greater understanding of how adult-child interactions may be mediated within a paternalistic system, in order to provide better outcomes for children. The chapter presents an alternative perspective on residential child care in a time when the global agenda seems to be de-institutionalisation. However, for Trinidad and Tobago what presently exists is far from what is being recommended. Children's homes, or community residences as they are now being called, continue to be seen as a solution to child protection and investment is being made through monitoring, regulation and support mechanisms by the government (Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012). These factors made this theme even more interesting given the issues related to children's participation, traditional beliefs about children and the context of care. A way of balancing the negative effects of institutionalisation and building positive adult-child relations is thus presented.

There remains a significant role for adults, who are welcomed by children for their guidance (see Chapters Four and Five). The present chapter draws on examples

from the study where participatory practices were observed and applied, and lessons are drawn from these examples. Evidence is provided of the significance of adults in children's decision making and the need to create spaces for participatory work to take place. The chapter will present the claims of adults and children as they view participation and will provide a deeper analysis of what is said by them and what is actually done in practice, as seen in several activities which were designed to engage children. It will provide empirical evidence of what may work in residential child care in order that paternalism and participation may be balanced.

I will begin by giving accounts of what worked for me during the research process. I also draw on my observations of participatory work being applied by other adults to highlight what I thought were excellent possibilities for positive practice with children in care. I will provide evidence which contributes to the discourse on the need to support child care workers through training and its relationship to developing healthy relationships with children (Smith, 2011). This will be followed by an analysis of findings on children's participation and the level of risk children are willing to take in the absence of opportunities to participate in decision making.

### 8.2: Making participation happen: Participatory approaches to working with children

Participation is growing in popularity in research through participatory action research, which provides for methods sensitive to children's competencies and interests and enables children to be more comfortable engaging with researchers (Punch, 2000; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998; Clark & Moss, 2005; Wessells & Kostelny, 2013). The instances in which I applied participatory approaches or observed them in

the work of other professionals at both Homes included my participation in a transition programme for males preparing to leave care, a home-wide transition programme preparing children and caregivers for a new living arrangement – a family-style setting - and my participation in the eighteen and beyond programme at H1. I draw on experiences at H2 from the leadership group, the assessment process for determining the extent to which children were engaging in sexualised behaviours and two participatory projects which were conducted by an international student intern and an international volunteer. These experiences allowed me to observe the interactions between volunteers and children, caregivers and children and children and children and to form impressions of what was effective, useful and challenging.

My thoughts on children's participation in decision making were also greatly influenced by adults' views of it and what they actually did in practice. What adults sometimes agreed on was not manifested in their approach when working with children, in both positive and negative ways. This might have been a result of lack of knowledge and skill in genuinely engaging children in decision making. On the other hand, although there were limits to children's autonomy in adult settings, there were positive, genuine, engaging activities for children which were imaginative, cooperative, going beyond routine and enjoyed by children. These experiences demonstrated what mattered most to the children and how they were most comfortable engaging with each other and adults, and will now be discussed further.

Participatory strategies served as useful ways of engaging children in decision making and finding out who and what mattered the most to them, as well as illuminating important aspects of their experience in care. They revealed how adults and children prioritised issues differently and the kinds of solutions they focused on. Participatory methods such as drawings, storyboards, map making, drama and photography have been used in Hart's (2007) environmental work and have proven to be effective ways of getting children's viewpoints. They have their limitations, as much of the interpretation of them is dependent on adults (Hart, 2007), and therefore adults using participatory methods need to be mindful of the risks of imposing adult interpretations of the children's experiences. Other researchers such as Christensen & James, (2000), Kirby et al (2003) and Mayall (2000) have also found similar approaches to be effective in mediating adult-child interactions and obtaining meaningful contributions from children. Recently, participatory work has been recognised for its usefulness in responding to humanitarian crises where child friendly spaces were needed to help reduce traumatic experiences for children and to promote meaningful responses (Wessells & Kostelny, 2013). This was done through participatory child protection assessments, planning, data collection and analysis, active engagement, prioritisation of child protection issues and responsiveness to the socio-cultural context.

The range of participatory activities which were used with looked after children will now be discussed. These include journal writing, cooperative storytelling,

video games, structured role play, videography, artwork and photography. I shall focus on the use of artwork and photography in some depth. I chose to expand on these two areas because of the interest the children showed in them. Using art stimulated the children's thinking and encouraged discussion around sensitive issues the children felt were important to them. Photography helped me to see what mattered most to children. Children were allowed to decide what pictures to take during events, thus giving genuine accounts of their experiences. In both approaches, it was more the processes than the outcomes which were valuable as opportunities were presented to observe children's reactions, how children arrived at decisions and how adults and children interacted. They were most valuable in terms of the children's learning and development.

## Journal Writing

At the beginning of the study, the boys at both Homes were introduced to the idea of journal writing. I provided them with books in which to log their thoughts and feelings during the course of a week. They shared their experiences with the group members when we met for the second focus group session. This strategy was used more in H1 than H2 as the boys in H2 did not agree to keep journals. This was also the more defiant group at the beginning of the study. The boys who completed the exercise over the course of the week in H1 reported that it was a useful way of sharing with others what their experiences in care were like, apart from being an opportunity to demonstrate their artistic talents. The boys also used this activity to initiate conversations with me when I visited during the week for observation. For example,

they shared what a typical week was like for them at the Home, their relationships with some of their peers and caregivers and how they felt about being in care. This initial information was useful in helping me to frame my study, taking into account the best times to visit for observations, the focus on adult-child interactions and sensitive areas which I needed to consider.

## Cooperative story telling

Storytelling proved to be a very creative strategy for understanding how the children viewed authority. A cooperative storytelling exercise which required them to recite a popular children's story 'Goldilocks and the three bears' in their own words, turned out to be a story about dishonesty, evading authority, punishment and eventually forgiveness. They made the story applicable to their context and in a unique way, the story revealed their personal experiences with the authorities and what they saw as a more amicable solution to stealing, which was determined by religious teachings. It was also useful in helping me to identify common experiences and showed how children influenced each other's decision making and verified their experiences when an input was made that seemed too far from their reality, that is, outlandish and extravagant. This was also a disadvantage as the strategy did not seem to be appropriate for sharing experiences or concerns of which the group members may not have approved. An example of an outlandish contribution that was rejected by the group was the attempt by one boy to include a point about the boy in the story being sexually active. He attempted to derail the story with his preoccupation with sexual thoughts, which the other boys did not tolerate. Given the experiences of the

boys at the Home regarding allegations of sexual misconduct, it might have been an authentic contribution that he personally wanted to include but could not because of the collective decision of the group.

Video games

Some of the boys visited arcades and paid to play games in addition to being allowed to play games on their computers. Used in a more constructive way, the games were applied by other adults and myself in educational programmes such as the 'Responsible Living' programme in H1 and at the youth centre in H2. Using a Wii Fit sport game with the boys in H1 was useful for imparting knowledge and values about good sportsmanship. The children were divided into teams to play some simulated sports such as tennis and boxing. At the end of the games, they were allowed to debrief and share their experiences and what they learnt. Some learning points included the benefits of honesty, the importance of following rules, team work and dealing with losses. The caregivers who were present also participated in the games and contributed to the discussions, reinforcing the children's learning. The strategy seemed to be an effective and creative way of teaching a lesson on sportsmanship where there were limited resources and no suitable outdoor facilities. The application of the games at H2 was less structured but was useful for creating a friendly and comfortable atmosphere for staff and children who either talked casually or played together. It also provided opportunities for children to teach staff how to play the games and for children to contribute to decisions about teamwork. The digital games allowed the adults to interact with the children in a more egalitarian,

participatory way.  As the coordinator of the youth programme in H2 put it: '*It makes a difference when you interact with children in unstructured settings and the personality and motivations of the adults also make a difference.*'

## Structured Role Play and Videography

During the study, this strategy proved to be useful in several ways, one of which was in helping the children to share their views on Children's Rights, as applied by UNICEF, Trinidad and The National Plan of Action for Children. The children of several homes across the country, including some from the two in the study, created role plays, which were recorded, of situations where they felt that their rights needed to be acknowledged or where they were being violated. The coordinator of the NPA indicated that the strategy was useful in demonstrating to policy makers how children's rights were being violated on a daily basis and how sensitive the children were about it. At H1 improvised drama was used as an evaluation tool for the eighteen and beyond programme in 2012, and was produced as a video. The children, although given an initial script by the facilitator, decided to revise it so that it represented their experiences more fully and they emerged with a presentation about their feelings about the programme and how they thought it benefitted them. The senior boys and girls worked together on the exercise, which was presented at the graduation ceremony. The script given by the counsellor was rewritten by the children to reflect their own experiences. Whereas the counsellor wanted to highlight sportsmen and women as role models in the presentation, which was aligned to Olympics preparations, the children felt that this was not important. They wanted to stick to

themes which reflected their experiences with the programme. In the adult's case, she wanted to use an indirect approach with the children, to convey lessons about discipline and perseverance, by using successful adults' stories. One adult's story she wanted to use was of Brian Charles Lara, a former world renowned cricketer. The children on the other hand wanted to use a more straightforward approach for giving their feedback about the programme, using their own stories. A final video was produced after being edited but I got to observe the rehearsals, which allowed for a better understanding of how the children felt about the programme and why they did not take it too seriously, as well as how adults managed to censor children's views. Although a senior boy participated in the editing it was not surprising that a caregiver had the final say and edited out most of the negative comments. On being asked about it, the caregiver indicated that he did not want the children to appear to be disrespectful and wanted to protect the feelings of the facilitator. This was further evidence of how children's autonomy can be exercised but is limited by adults' need to set boundaries.

Using improvised drama provided another avenue for the children to demonstrate their skills and talents. I appreciated their resourcefulness, creativity and ability to organise themselves with minimal adult input as long as the initial parameters were set. I used this method in sessions with children where they needed to share information that they felt would be better explained using drama. At H2, this was also a useful way for children to get the attention of adults. As discussed in some detail in Chapter Five, during the carnival celebrations, dramatic presentations were

put on by children who highlighted concerns about their diet, the need for specialist services, being marginalised and excluded and how crime affected them and their caregivers.

## Creating and Viewing Artwork

The children's drawings and paintings provided great insights into their feelings about situations and people at a particular point in time. They helped me to understand how they felt about being in care, what they thought about adults' views of them, how adults influenced them and their ideas about what made an ideal caregiver/mentor. This activity in particular also helped the children to become relaxed as I heard them engage in discussions while they painted, which gave me a more genuine sense of how they related to each other and their peers and what their experience of being in care was like. It was also used effectively by the US social work intern in her project aimed at giving voices to looked after children. The children created several drawings and paintings and exhibited them to policy makers, caregivers and other adults. These were also complemented by a video presentation.

At a workshop which targeted children who were being prepared for a mentorship programme, drawings and puzzles were used to help the children express their thoughts and feelings about their ideal adult mentor. They were provided with opportunities to draw their present living spaces, highlighting the positive aspects, and also to build a puzzle having identified the key components of the whole person (see picture 1). The children in all groups highlighted similar elements and this activity was shared with their mentors who learnt from the children what they expected of

them, what they found challenging and their general experiences in care. One drawing from a female child indicated her experience of having mixed emotions as a result of living in care (See picture 2). She highlighted the range of activities that she was happy to be engaged in and the experience of loss where she was separated from her family and placed into care. She also shared that at the same time she felt like a princess, based on how she was being treated at the home she was placed in. It is important that children be given the opportunities to explain their work and that adults show genuine interest in their productions and to internalise the experiences of the children so that the caregiving process is informed.



**Picture I**

**Picture 2**

Another way in which art was useful for facilitating children's expression was during a visit to an art gallery where the children interacted with the artist and shared their views about his paintings and sculpture. Below are some of their reflective statements about the artwork:

**'Big fish in small pond'**



I was thinking like hidden treasure... Say like somebody has plenty talent in here and we don't do enough to fulfil our talent. See how the fish big and the pond small, it does not have enough room to swim about. So maybe we can get enough support, we can expose our talent to other people. It can have many doctors, lawyers, many this, many that in here. They need to show that extra interest like if they can send a list in the dormitory and find out who wants to be this or that, get into contact with people to be open to it so they can be that. - **March 26th 2012, 16 year old Male Resident, H1**

**'Only a matter of time':**
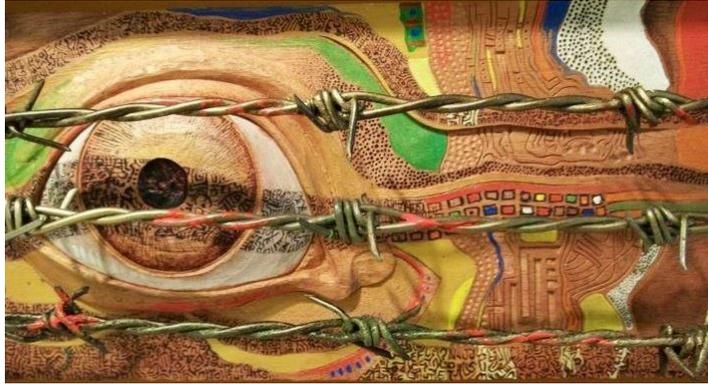


The art work shows a lot of negative that could happen to you and people will try to pull you down and if I stay strong and I keep believing in myself, those things will just pass me like wind. It will just be a matter of time, like things to look back on like if I make sense in life, I can look back on those things, like what happened to me in (H1 mentioned), it is only for a period of time. When it is over, I will reflect on it - **H1, Male resident, 16 years old**

**'The crucifix'**



It reminds me of when Jesus died for us on the cross. It makes me look back on the past and to change my life cause Jesus died for us - **H1, Male resident, 15 years old**

I was thinking that I can crucify myself, I can cause harm and destruction to myself... If I go to school and I study to play the fool and aint study to do nothing, at the end of the day if I leave school with no passes and stuff and I become delinquent and things bad happening to me, I have nobody to crucify me but myself because when I was in school I had the opportunity to learn something to make a living but on the other half I decided to play the fool and end up with nothing.

**H1, Male resident, 16 years old**

The paintings were figurative but not naturalistic, a style which children may be particularly responsive to (Rubin, 2005). My observation was that the fact that the titles were known to the children influenced their expression of their responses to the paintings. However, viewing art as a participatory activity proved to be useful in helping the children to be reflective about their life experiences and how they might improve their circumstances. They demonstrated the ability to think about their past and their future and how their decisions affected them. It also seemed to motivate some of the boys who were pursuing art courses at school as they showed great interest in the artist's techniques. What was especially important to note in this experience was the fact that the boys talked to the artist about his work and shared their ideas with him. It might not have been as powerful if they just visited the gallery and did not have the opportunity to exchange ideas with the artist. Again, the importance of the quality of adult interaction is highlighted as a key aspect of engaging children in the interpretation of art. This interaction supports the process of caregiving and decision making, where children are able to share aspirations, fears, anxieties, relationships and past experiences and adults are able to listen and make decisions in the best interests of children using children's information.

Photography:

Photography was used particularly for gathering children's views on engaging in external events. Photographs have been found to be useful for 'creating a platform of communication between adults and young children' (Clark, 2005 p. 494). In addition to the actual photographs, the process was very informative as it provided

evaluative feedback and stimulated discussion on topics of interest to the children. Photographs were taken by children and adults of H1 while visiting an organic farm and when there were special events at both Homes. I explored children's feelings and thoughts about participating in activities at and away from their Home, based on what they photographed. Photographs provided a good basis for discussions on several issues as children and caregivers commented on them and children were given opportunities to explain what they had done. They used their photographs to tell stories about their preferences, relationships with each other and feelings about the activities. The children also seemed to be fascinated by the idea of capturing images of themselves in different poses and performing antics with the intention of sharing them with their peers online. The process in itself stimulated the children's creativity. It facilitated the children in the demonstration of their skills with digital technology, sometimes teaching adults a few tricks in the art of its use. I noticed how the children responded favourably when given the responsibility to manage the equipment and to take photographs. It was a key message from adults that they were trusted and that adults were willing to get their story.

Questions were also developed based on the children's explanation of their photographs, thus allowing the children to guide the research and my interpretation of their experiences. For example, I obtained useful information concerning the gender relations at the Homes based on the children's interest in taking pictures of children of the opposite sex. When I gave the children my camera to take photographs during events at the Homes, there were similar experiences to those on the field trip.

The explanation was that it was very seldom that the boys and girls would engage in activities together and so they capitalised on opportunities to take pictures with the opposite sex when they arose. Beyond the use of the camera, the children's engagement with the environment and what they saw among the trees and wildlife should inform caregivers about what children appreciate and how they relate to others. Also noteworthy was that they took photographs of adults with whom they interacted well.

Photography was also used by a Canadian volunteer at H2 who delivered a two-day programme on developing social skills by using digital images of nature. He reported that the children were very shy and seemed intimidated in expressing their views when he first met them. He eventually noticed a difference in their expression when they took pictures of their natural surroundings (birds, plants, trees) to represent their experiences. The young leaders who participated in the programme stated the following benefits: '*It was interactive, fun*'; '*we were able to use imagination not only for aesthetics but for survival*'; '*we got surprised*'; '*were able to think outside the box*'; '*we learnt how to make good from bad and how to communicate with others*'. A very important outcome of this approach was that it built trust between the children and adults as they felt that adults trusted them with expensive equipment.

As far as decision making is concerned, the experience of engaging with photography can help shy children to express themselves and encourage caregivers to engage in ideas described by the children. This exercise was also useful in

demonstrating the relational aspect of power as children decided what was important to them and their interpretations of this. However, in order for photography to be useful in helping children to share their views, it is important that there is support for them to explain their pictures as some things may not be self-evident (Einarsdottir, 2005). For example, when one child explained why he preferred to take pictures of the forest rather than focus on what was taking place in his immediate environment, he explained that he liked to imagine what was in the forest as things are not always what they seem from a distance: when you look closer at the forest, you see the trees and animals.

There is a connection between participatory work with children and care ethics. Participatory activities promote good relationships, which is characteristic of care ethics (Slote, 2007). As the examples illustrate, children and adults are able to negotiate their space and work collaboratively and creatively. The activities with the children revealed what children enjoyed and found to be most genuine and meaningful. The use of participatory activities throughout the study also highlights the sustained role for adults in guiding children and creating space and parameters for collaborative work. More importantly, it provides evidence of how children benefit from participatory work, making contributions to their space. The adults noted better cooperation and more effective behaviour management among children. Some adults also understood the implications for them as staff members, although with some hesitation, which included facilitating children taking some control and exercising their agency. Training adults in using the approaches so that they can

capitalise on the lessons to be learnt from children and maximise the use of activities to engage children meaningfully is critical, and will be discussed further in section 8.5.

Using participatory methods in residential child care is therefore supportive of care ethics and presents a useful approach to working with looked after children. Participatory work promotes caring *with,* where children and adults can work collaboratively to improve care situations through greater attentiveness and mutual understanding. Thus, it takes us beyond the realm of caring for or caring about (Noddings, 2002). Participatory practice in residential care is consistent with the arguments of critical social work theories as children become active participants in shaping their lives through decision making activities. Thus, transformation becomes possible in residential child care, taking into account the organisational context (Healy, 2005).

## 8.4: The ambiguity of power in participatory work with looked after children

Participatory work provides fertile ground for witnessing the power dynamics between children and adults. Children want to exercise power to influence decisions about their lives but at the same time depend on adults for support. This complicates the interaction between children and adults when adults fail to buy in to this concept of children having agency. Some adults do not seem ready to acknowledge that children have power in their own right. At H2, the manager and social worker indicated a major challenge of the transition process to relationship building between adults and children as being adults' level of comfort with the idea of controlling

children. Adults in the study seemed to associate collaboration with children as a threat to their authority, as indicated in their claims about child rights promoting indiscipline. Children on the other hand are saying – *"We are not trying to threaten your power as adults….. We are trying to participate in issues that affect us, not only in our future, but now."* (Female resident, 17 years – Consultation session, Children's Authority). The notion of children's capacity to exercise power and having the right to do so therefore remains elusive to some adults.

What children regard as important in their everyday lives can inform policy decisions. In other words, looked after children felt that they had some of the answers to their problems. Looked after children want to contribute to their life space in meaningful ways, where they can see the outcomes of their efforts, gain the recognition of their caregivers and peers and be respected. Participation for them is therefore important in their development and should be seen as a continuous process ranging from everyday life in the Homes to policy development at the government level.

When children are in healthy relationships with adults, they develop effective communication (Petrie, 2011). When adults and children work together with mutual respect there is a healthy exchange between them which promotes better interaction and adults can relate better to the realities of the children. For example, one male caregiver spoke about how he adjusted his approach with the children after listening to them engage in a discussion one day. He realised that the children did not know how to cook or what ingredients were in the food they ate and felt that they were not

prepared for independent living although some of them were due to leave care. The caregiver's decision was influenced by the children. He began taking them to the supermarket and allowed them to cook their own food when he had the opportunity and witnessed a positive change in their attitudes. His participatory approach to preparing the children for one aspect of independent living demonstrates how power is relational and constantly shifting between adults and children. One solution to reduce the complications associated with power and participatory work is understanding which caregivers are willing and able to embrace the approach, which is the subject of the next section.

## 8.5: Considering the training and qualifications of caregivers

The qualifications required to work with looked after children have remained the same over the last 70 years in Trinidad and Tobago. During the time of the study, a job advertisement was placed in the national newspapers which outlined the minimum requirements for the various posts in children's homes (See A**ppendix XIV**). This might suggest that there is little importance placed on securing highly trained child care workers and that conventional ideas that this work does not require skilled workers remain.

An emphasis on staff training and relevant qualifications in residential child care has been a focus of concern for many years in countries such as the UK (Crimmens, 2000). A common response to the challenges in a child care system is the call for more qualified staff. However, there has not been much evidence to suggest

that this is a full solution (Crimmens, 2000).  In fact, it has been suggested in earlier studies that in order for the training to be meaningful in improving the quality of child care there needs to be a holistic approach to care among staff groups in residential settings which have explicit objectives for the children (Utting Report, 1997). It was very rare for a caregiver at either of the Homes to be qualified in child care and in respect of those who received training or were in the process of becoming qualified, there was inadequate evidence to suggest that they were applying their knowledge and skills. There was also exemplary performance by many who showed genuine concern for the children in their care but were unqualified or untrained. They resorted to their basic experiences as mothers or fathers - and in some cases experience of abuse - or to their genuine interest in working with the children (as discussed in Chapter Four).  As such, it was difficult to tell by observation who were the qualified or qualifying workers and who were not, and where it was possible, it was not in a positive way. The over-emphasis that is placed on qualifications was further highlighted by a Magistrate I interviewed when she highlighted how her maternal qualities influenced her decisions about how children should participate in decision-making separately from her knowledge and expertise of child rights. In response to the question on how she applied her knowledge of child rights in her decision making she stated:

*'It is really my own approach because of how I was raised… Children must be seen and not heard… and I try to listen to my own children and other children. Cause I believe they have something to say.'*
          (Family Court Magistrate)

The Magistrate's response demonstrates how personal experiences and motives influence how adults engage with children, and how this transcends being qualified in the field. The unwillingness or inability of some trained caregivers to transfer their knowledge and skills to the job suggests the complexity of the issue of the need for qualifications and training in child care. The managers at both Homes also noted that staff members who became qualified rarely stayed in the position because of the unfavourable compensation. A past resident of H1 who lived there for fifteen years was interviewed and commented on the emphasis being placed on qualifying staff as a main priority at children's homes. He indicated: *'Qualifications do not represent competence when dealing with certain social problems.'* He recommended that people who have gone through certain life experiences be integrated into programmes or be consulted so that the issues involving children could be more adequately addressed. He shared that during his time at the Home, it was the personal qualities of the caregivers that made the difference for him.

There was therefore no evidence that increased staff qualifications alone improved service delivery as the situation proved to require more complex solutions. Although it is important to be trained and qualified in participatory work and child care in general, it may not be the main solution for effective adult-child partnerships. It is also important to separate the components of values, skills and knowledge and to determine how they are balanced (Crimmens & Pitts, 2000). My observations, such as those of the past resident of H1, suggest that the personal traits and values of adults are just as important – positive practice comes from adults who are

empowered, confident, have a positive attitude towards children, are creative, able to empathise, have a positive self-esteem and are willing to share power with children. Looked after children tend to be sensitive to and relate well to these qualities and special attention should be paid to giving them priority and harnessing them in practice. It is then that developing and applying the relevant skills and knowledge can be effective with children who need to be encouraged to participate in decision making and deal with their interpersonal and intrapersonal issues at the same time. The care experience is highly dependent on the individual caregivers and the quality of interpersonal relationships influences the outcome of treatment as there is greater commitment by the cared for to the intervention process when carers are seen as having positive qualities (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Interpersonal skills such as effective communication skills are therefore crucial (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977; Petrie, 2011). Despite what standards or codes are put in place by the authorities, it is important that appropriate systems are put in place to employ caregivers with suitable qualities and the capacity to develop the necessary skills and competencies.

The following example shows that the process of effectively applying skills and knowledge to practice is complex. As a result of increased public suspicion about residential child care, spurred on by allegations of abuse by both staff and children at H1 in 2010 (See Chapter One), staff members became more cautious in their approach to working with children, which hindered their interaction. This was more evident in the earlier part of the study and may have been due to their heightened awareness and uncertainty about what constituted acceptable care standards, none officially

being available but being the focus of discussion at the time. As time progressed and efforts were made by management to address the issues, there was some improvement, which provided evidence of staff commitment amidst adversity and the importance of strengthening management-staff relationships. There was heightened media attention and intervention from government officials concerning the treatment of children in residential care, which created an uncomfortable atmosphere, particularly in the statutory homes. This is not good for participatory work, which requires close contact with children, and confident and empowered adults who believe that they have the ability to effect change through caring relationships. Although the situation occurred in H1, it did impact on H2, where workers often made reference to the experience when talking about their roles. The managers at both Homes also indicated that staff became more tentative when working with children, which had an initial negative impact on the relationships. The manager of H1 indicated that staff expressed feelings of being demoralised and devalued since the negative publicity and therefore resorted to self-protection. The Assistant Manager of H1 shared his observations concerning how male staff related to female residents. They were more reluctant to intervene when the girls became aggressive, for fear of being accused of touching the girls inappropriately. As a result the manager, who was also male, had the responsibility of intervening when male force was needed and often remained on the compound long after his shift ended until situations were brought under control.

Another example of how interactions with children were affected was at a house meeting in H1 where children met to discuss their rules. The meeting was filled with tension as the supervisor focused on the impact of the negative publicity and the legal implications for the boys if they broke the rules. The supervisor indicated that he needed to adjust his approach to reinforce the importance of the rules, which the children seemed to trivialise.

During the time that H1 received the negative publicity, management focused its attention on rebuilding staff confidence and morale as well as working to restore children's confidence in their Home. An entire vacation camp with the theme 'One Family' was devoted to fostering a sense of unity and the feeling that 'I am my brother's keeper' among the children. In fact, this period helped to reveal the strong bonds among children and adults at the Home and, if not managed carefully, could have reinforced a culture of maintaining unhealthy 'family secrets'. I think that it was managed carefully as several staff members spoke about its usefulness in helping them to regain some sense of confidence. Additionally, I noted that some staff members reverted to being committed to their children despite some dissatisfaction by union representatives and other staff members. The children showed sympathy for each other and their caregivers and expressed their disappointment in the volunteer who made the report to the media. One child indicated: *'She cannot come back to our Home after what she did'.*

The transitioning to family type living spaces in H1 was also timely as it helped staff to regain some confidence in their work with the children and to start anew.

However, there were still some reservations by staff who were concerned about how they could integrate children's rights with their own duty to protect. A useful example again was where I was invited to deliver sessions to the children to assist with their transitioning to their new houses. I arrived late one evening and although I had left the session outline with staff, they were unable to deliver the session in a participatory way and therefore resorted to their traditional ways of delivering sessions to the children. The children were seated in classroom style, listening to the caregiver tell them about rules. A few of the caregivers present gave the impression that the session as I planned it was not necessary, as the outcomes were achieved. However, the session outline I prepared required children to be in small groups in circles engaging in activities with adults. This was to stimulate their thinking about rule-making and to be part of the decision making process. So although the outcomes were achieved, the objective of having children participate in the process was not. These examples show what is required, other than simply qualifying staff members, to improve the quality of child care; there is no guarantee that learning will be transferred to their job.

Participation can promote the protection of children. Allowing children to have opportunities to participate in decision making activities can reduce the risks they take because they will be aware of the various avenues for addressing their grievances. They are also equipped with skills to promote better decision making and therefore increase their resilience when faced with adversity. This is a point supported by child rights advocates who argue that the best protection for children is self-

protection or protagonism, as opposed to the traditional approaches to child protection (Hart 2007 p. 15).

*8.7: Conclusion*

Participatory approaches are useful to children and how they co-construct and make meaning of their world. They offer sensitive ways of engaging children in matters which affect them. The findings reveal the benefits of such approaches and show the need for greater interaction between children and adults so that adults can be more responsive to their needs. The response of institutions to children in need of care and protection needs to be improved through empirical approaches which enhance adult-child relationships, promoting democracy and strengthening decision making opportunities, and developing paternalistic structures that are more responsive to children's needs. Combining paternalism and rights-based approaches which include participatory work with children can facilitate increasing children's agency. It can help to dispel the fears and concerns of adults who believe that children do not regard their guidance as important and help them to see that children do want their guidance.

The traditional idea that children are not capable of making decisions or are unable to express themselves sufficiently has been challenged by the findings of this study, as seen in the account of different methods of engaging them. What is noted also is that adults need to listen attentively and use the correct tools to tune in to children's thoughts and feelings. This is despite the fact that adults in the study do

acknowledge the benefits of partnering with children and receiving the necessary supports to ensure that they are able to effectively engage with them. It was evident that the paternalistic structures which exist to guide adults create some difficulty in promoting participatory practice and by extension, the relationships with children are affected and remain less positive than they could be.

It remains debatable whether or not the presence of more qualified staff would lead to improved services for looked after children (Crimmens & Pitts, 2000). Emphasis may need to be placed on the personal traits and values of adults working with children as well as the organisational policies, given the lack of evidence related to the outcomes for increased training and appropriate qualifications on quality of care. It is acknowledged that increased knowledge and skills in child care in areas such as participatory strategies can improve interactions with children (Rose, 2010; Petrie, 2011), but a similar focus must be placed on the characteristics of adults and the context of their work, which will determine their willingness and ability to transfer the knowledge and skills. Staff are also more likely to work in a caring, committed way if they feel that they will be valued and supported for trying to do a good job (Smith, 2011).

In conclusion, it is the attitude of adults towards children, the willingness and readiness of children to contribute to decisions affecting their lives, a better understanding of children's participation and the supportive structures for participatory work that can help create a balanced and transformative residential child care arena. Through participatory work with children, a robust partnership will

be created – one that will promote healthier adult-child relationships that acknowledge child rights, responsibilities and adults' guiding role in the child care process. Traditional beliefs about children are challenged when using participatory approaches, which helps to reinforce positive attitudes about children's rights and competencies.

# Chapter 9: Discussion

## 9.1: Introduction

This exploratory study sought to investigate the participation experiences of children in two residential child care settings in Trinidad and Tobago in respect of their relationships with their caregivers and other adults. The main questions addressed are:

1. How do children experience being in residential care and what is the quality of relationships they experience?

2. To what extent do children in residential care experience participation in decision making?

3. How do adults and looked after children give meaning to participation?

4. What does children's participation mean to the various social actors in the care system?

5. How could 'participation' in care be improved for children?

The study was informed by an interest in how children's participation can practically be shifted from being a transactional experience to a transformational experience (Long, 2001; Watkins & Shulman, 2010). The transactional approach to participation is instrumental and sees it as a means to an end; it focuses on exchanges between children and adults, whereas the transformational approach to participation sees it as an end in itself (Long, 2001), which promotes autonomy, self-development, reflection and motivation among those involved (Mason & Hood, 2010). Transformational models of participation such as participatory action research view

children's participation in research as an emergent process which is dependent on positive relationships with adults (Nolas, 2011). The dichotomy of transactional versus transformational participation has been adapted from management studies (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 1992) where it has been used in efforts to understand organisational leadership. Both approaches are acknowledged as useful and seen as interrelated concepts in the management literature and are adapted here to see how they relate to residential child care.

The chapter will highlight a summary of the key findings, which were derived from the research questions that guided the study. The discussion will be developed around the following themes: (1) the meaning of increasing children's agency in residential care; (2) the interdependence of adults and children and (3) children's participation as an indigenous experience. Although not discussed earlier it is worth noting as a fourth theme – looked-after children's capacity to engage in collective decision making.

## 9.2: Summary of findings

A central argument of this thesis is that adults have an active and positive role to play in fostering children's participation, as children depend on their guidance and support. Although children are able to demonstrate agency, increasing their agency is not possible unless certain provisions are made. Adults need to work *with* children and not only *for* them, which highlights the argument for their interdependence in care. Appropriate systems and structures in which children's agency can be facilitated

need to be in place. Additionally, a power imbalance in the relationship between children and adults is inevitable but the way this is expressed is complex and needs reconstructing. This reconstruction includes changes in policies, institutional arrangements, and governance in the Homes, such that adults and children better understand their power relations and need for partnership and interdependence. These conclusions are informed by the following key findings on children's participation in residential care:

a) how the complexities involved in the caring relationships between children and adults are manifested;

b) how children used sophisticated ways to resist formal hierarchies and demonstrate their resilience;

c) how looked after children demonstrate new ways of claiming their participation rights through ICT use;

d) how children experience participation at the broader policy level and

e) how the positive aspects of residential practice are revealed and relate to adult-child relationships.

Participation and non-participation are both important facets of children's agency that must be examined where they occur within the same context. The same is true for the involvement of adults or lack thereof in the promotion of children's participation. Similarly, in the discourse on seeking children's best interests, it is important to determine whether paternalism is being promoted or relegated. Thus,

the study brings useful insights into the co-existence of such experiences and how they are mediated in residential child care.

The study corroborates other research in finding that children do not want full autonomy to control decision making but are awaiting the guidance of adults so they can make meaningful contributions to the process (Cashmore, 2002; Cockburn, 1998; Jans, 2004; Mannion, 2007). The study recognises the interdependence of children and adults and the responsibility that is placed on adults to create spaces for children to actively participate, as found in other studies in education (Fielding, 2006) and childhood studies (Oswell, 2013). It does not imply, however, that looked after children are solely dependent on adults to provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their agency, as the children in the study demonstrated their independence and autonomy through their actions. Evidence is provided that adults need the appropriate structures to support their work with looked after children, but what the children seek is sometimes beyond the domain of the institution. For example, the children desire caring adults who possess positive personal qualities that enhance the children's care experiences, qualities which are difficult to institutionalise, even when they are recognised as valuable by policy makers.

Children in the study require caring, compassionate, engaging adults who will contribute positively to their care experiences and prepare them for independent living. The study provides a useful way of interpreting how paternalistic child care systems can be mediated by caring and interdependent adult-child relationships. This emotional aspect of caring is also linked to the organisational structure of the Homes

and a balance between the caring role and the social structures in which it is expressed must be established.  For example, the study revealed the extent to which looked after children were treated as a collective body, as the system did not cater well for individual children to participate in decision making in such areas as discipline, care planning, programme planning, leadership planning and rule making. These were all addressed in groups both formally and informally.

One of the most interesting findings was that despite the prevailing bureaucratic structure, adults and children shared informal interactions which facilitated caring relationships. Although they appeared to be powerless, the children managed to develop sophisticated ways to influence their space. By applying informal decision making processes, they were able to plan among themselves and devised strategies when adult decisions seemed unfavourable to them. They familiarised themselves with established disciplinary procedures so they could circumvent them and used modern technologies which they felt adults did not understand fully. A major benefit to using Information and communication technologies (ICTs) was the opportunity they created for children to participate in activities they felt were important to them. This was as a result of the co-occurrence of the absence of adequate decision making systems and the increasing use of ICTs by the children. Their creative use of ICTs was heightened by the erosion of communication boundaries within and between the Homes, as well as in the world beyond. The children's interest in ICTs revealed another important point - they desired meaningful interaction both with adults and their peers, which social media seemed to provide.

This study demonstrated how both adults and children held preconceived ideas about each other that either promoted or hindered positive relationships between them. So in addition to adults' perceptions about children's incompetence and vulnerability, children held beliefs about adults being distrustful, uncaring, unmotivated, incompetent and out of touch with the modern world. These perceptions played a major role in shaping children's participatory experiences as they struggled to make sense of adults' roles and expectations. The children's difficulties were reflected in their expressions of uncertainty and the cautious and dispirited posture they sometimes adopted when participating in activities. Such perceptual differences were, however, mediated by the common experiences shared by adults and children, such as their feelings of powerlessness. The older children were more sensitive to what adults perceived as injustices related to their work. Through their interaction with them, older children adopted similar positions about unfairness and powerlessness to those expressed by adults. They aligned with staff members with whom they identified positively and challenged authority, sometimes in staff members' defence (see Chapter Four). This finding further illustrates the complexities of adult-child relationships in care and of children's participation.

Based on the present study's findings, it can be concluded that children's experiences with participation and adults' interpretation of it are dependent on the systems and structures within which they work. As the chapter on positive residential practice revealed, appropriate structures and systems are needed for the Homes to improve ways of engaging children by using participatory approaches. This idea of

strengthening institutions through better support structures and systems is also consistent with Thomas and Percy-Smith's (2012) study on looked after children Councils in London. They found that despite provisions being made for representing looked after children, more effort needed to be placed on providing organisational structure and supports and promoting healthier relationships not only among children but among staff.

As previously mentioned, one unanticipated finding was the way in which ICTs managed to alter the power relations between children and adults. Children were better informed about the technologies, which gave them an advantage over adults in respect of ICTs. They seemed to be experiencing what Goulet (1995) called a new form of freedom from conventional social patterns. It can therefore be suggested that the space which looked after children occupy is not static, as they respond to technological advances and these influence the ways in which they participate. This also has implications for adults engaging with the children: they will need to respond to the changes by keeping abreast with the ICTs that are influencing social relations. The findings support Oswell's (2013) idea that children are demonstrating agency in new ways as a result of modern ICTs and new forms of globalisation. However, in relation to internet usage, there seems to be more concern at the moment over how to restrict their agency, in the interests of their safety.

This study provides useful evidence of how the ethic of care mediates paternalism and can therefore serve to improve the experience of looked after children. Although the focus of the adults seemed to vary between justice and care,

the looked after children were very clear about what they needed – justice and care combined. They did not seem to separate the concepts as adults did; they saw justice, rights and care as interwoven ideas which contributed to their quality of life. They equated fairness and justice with caring. Furthermore, the practice setting influenced the nature of caring. The position of the Homes within statutory bodies, the job title of workers, the policies guiding practice, workers' affiliation to trade unions and staff-management relationships all influenced how adults engaged with children. For instance, where a worker held the job title of Juvenile Home Supervisor (JHS), as outlined in his/her job description, he/she was expected to adopt a custodial care approach. There was resistance from some caregivers to reach out to children in a more empathic way as they remained within the boundaries of institutional structures. The caregivers' resistance to empathic caring could be exacerbated by the relationships the adults had with each other and the general political climate of the public service, as was seen when staff became more inflexible about their roles and responsibilities when the public servants were denied a satisfactory increase in wages and salaries during the time of the study.

New ways of thinking about participation by looked after children have emerged from this study. It contributes to knowledge about contextualising participation experiences with children and provides empirical evidence of how cultural influences, such as the impact of colonialism on the family and institutions, shape adults' attitudes towards child participation. Explanations are provided that

could increase acceptance of children's participation and that demonstrate the challenges of practically applying children's participation in a Caribbean context.

The study provides evidence to support a view of power as relational, which places less emphasis on children 'possessing' power (Oswell, 2013). It considers the diversity of children and their evolving capacities, seeing them as able to make contributions according to their developmental stage, and as beings (James *et al*, 1998) and not 'becomings' (Durkheim, 1979). An analysis of children's agency allows for the consideration of cultural and structural elements which impact on our views of children (Oswell, 2013). From the findings, it can be concluded that my intention to find answers to my research questions was fulfilled, and new ways of thinking about children's participation were highlighted. How children's participation is operationalised has important implications for child care work and social work as a profession. I will now turn to a discussion of the specific themes emerging from the data analysis. My argument develops around the complexities of increasing children's agency and what is required to make it possible.

### 9.3: The meaning of increasing children's agency in residential care

The concept of children's agency has been widely used to describe children's 'capacity to do things where the doing may be physical, cognitive emotional or other' (Oswell, 2013 p. 42). Children's agency therefore suggests that children are actively engaged in decision making processes which affect their lives (Alway, 1995). Although the choices for the children in the study may have been restricted, their perception of

their participation experiences was important to them and can help us to understand how they made sense of their world. Their agency was manifested in diverse ways as they interpreted, evaluated and reconstructed their experiences. There is, however, increasing criticism about this conceptualisation of children's agency, on the ground that it does not adequately acknowledge the socio-cultural context of children's experiences. Similar criticisms are made of approaches to working with looked after children which historically have focused on character development and neglected other social, political and cultural factors that impact on children's development (Smith *et al,* 2013). I found that looked after children attempted to integrate their worlds with the adults' world so that they could negotiate their space and give greater meaning to their experiences. Relationships with adults and the structure of the Homes are therefore important aspects of their participation experiences. I argue therefore that if adults develop an understanding of how children negotiate meaning and influence their care experiences, they will be able to enhance children's agency.

### 9.3.1: Ways of seeing looked after children

The concepts of children and childhood have continued to evolve since the work of Aries (1962) (see for example Archard, 1993; Corsaro, 2011; James, et al, 1998). Originally, views about children and childhood tended to be deterministic. Because of their perceived vulnerability and negative experiences, research on looked after children tended to be psychological, to the exclusion of other disciplines. Such deterministic views have been the focus of much criticism by social workers who argue, for example, that child development theories do injustice to social work

practice with children and families, given the deficit approach they adopt (Taylor, 2004). These theories fail to appreciate the present value of children (Corsaro, 2011) and do not fully capture the 'essence of caring for children' (Smith, 2011 p. 85). The social, cultural, political and economic aspects of care which contribute to children's capacities (Lansdown, 2005) are thus neglected. The limitations of these approaches therefore highlight the need for a more reflexive approach to and critical analysis of development theories. Such an approach will promote critical self-reflection and help to determine how conventional assumptions about children and childhood inform how practitioners engage with service users (Smith, 2011; Taylor, 2004).

Notwithstanding the limitations of developmental psychology, it was valuable in the present study for providing an understanding of the different ways in which children of different ages related to their caregivers. For example, the older children in the Homes were able to engage in more complex and abstract decision making, which is in line with Piaget's (1968) work. The participation experiences of children in the study can therefore be seen in a developmental context, providing support for the view that children's 'evolving capacities' need to be considered if their rights are to be respected (Lansdown, 2005, p. 3). The capacity of children to think in logical and abstract ways was demonstrated in their interpretation of injustice, how they consciously devised strategies to participate when they felt excluded and how they arrived at decisions about self-exclusion and passive resistance towards authority. Relying on children's demonstration of mental capacity as an indicator of their agency is nevertheless inadequate. Because of the developmental challenges they faced and

their experiences of abuse and neglect, looked after children may not be as well-equipped mentally or intellectually as their peers, and we should be realistic about this (Berridge, 2002). A lack of stability and continuity of care may further affect their educational achievement, emotional, behavioural and mental health (Jackson, 2002). It is therefore important to observe their behaviours and interaction within the environment in order to understand how they give meaning to their care experiences.

### 9.3.2: Children's agency, present and future citizenship

The functionalist view of childhood sees children as threats to society who need to be socialised and normalised (Parsons, 1955). This argument about children as a threat is supported further by Hendrick's (2003) historical account. He indicates that whether or not children were labelled as victims or threats, their 'objective' condition was the same and only varied as far as they were socially constructed by adults (p. 12). A view of children as agents of change therefore challenges the idea of children as threat. This view presents an alternative to protectionist discourse which focuses on adults as protectors of children, safeguarding them from risks and subsequently preventing them from developing agency (Smith, 2011). It also acknowledges children's participation in decision making whereby children can take reasonable risks and have opportunities to solve problems for themselves.

Children's participation in care is further linked to ideas about citizenship, whereby children demonstrate agency through their ability to problem-solve and think independently. Citizenship refers to children's participation in civil, political and social activity and recognises children's role as responsible members of society, caring

for others, being resourceful contributors to social and economic development, and fulfilling obligations (Cockburn, 2013). It is thus argued that children's participation can only be correctly understood within the framework of rights and citizenship as the concept of participation has not provided a strong enough theoretical basis (Theis, 2010 p. 344). The concept of children as future citizens has been criticised for being limited in its scope (Cockburn, 2013) but as applied to the children in the study, it raises issues about their after-care experiences, which were a concern of caregivers and policy makers. Children's homes are supposed to be safe havens for children as they prepare for adulthood and participation in society. However, attaining a certain age does not necessarily mean that one has become a citizen, as capacities evolve over time (Lansdown, 2005; Theis, 2010).

Without meaningful opportunities to develop, children's prospect of active citizenship is compromised. Some caregivers and policy makers have referred to the practice of residential care as 'warehousing abused children', suggesting that meaningful intervention for children was lacking and children were simply marking time until they were of an age to leave care. One male care leaver I interviewed described the experience as 'delaying children's failure to adulthood'. He argued that care leavers seldom fit into society because of lack of preparation for the realities of the world beyond the Homes. The counsellor at H1 noted that girls often ended up in abusive relationships. These accounts show how seeing children as future citizens discounts their ability to be present, active citizens, able to contribute to their present care situation (Qvortrup, 2005; Jans, 2004). The findings also imply that looked after

children should become more actively involved in decision making processes at their Homes to protect themselves from further abuse and prepare themselves for civic engagement.

The preoccupation with risks, which diverts attention away from children's needs (R. Smith, 2008), also limits meaningful intervention with children. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is an increasing number of care leavers and looked after children in correctional facilities in Trinidad and Tobago (Superintendent, 2011). Recently, concern about children's after care experiences has contributed to the discourse on crime and looked after children among policy makers, illustrating the process of criminalising social policies (Rodgers, 2008), in this instance, child care and youth policies. More attention is given to 'children at risk' and their negative experiences than to children as competent, responsible decision makers. Although focusing on and understanding risks is important to developing appropriate protective interventions (Healy, 2005), it is often over-emphasised.

Crime prevention has taken precedence over social work and social welfare (Burnett & Appleton, 2004). This is evidenced in Trinidad and Tobago by contradictory attitudes about young offenders and how to treat them, such as placing the responsibility of child protection under the Ministry of National Security (National Strategic Plan for Child Development, 2012-2016). The ministry coordinates military-led programmes for children deemed to be at risk and the programmes have been used as an alternative care route for care leavers. Three senior boys were placed in a military-led programme during my study as there were no other options for their

after-care. Intervention measures which focus on crime prevention as their justification may fail to address the children's more pressing needs such as intra-psychic issues associated with abuse and neglect, and cannot focus on developing their unique talents.

The strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1997) therefore opposes the criminalisation agenda and the contradictory ways in which adults approach children's participation, as children are encouraged to be responsible citizens. Through it, a contemporary approach to children's participation can be achieved (Jans, 2004) whereby the ways in which children give meaning to and impact on their environments are understood. By emphasising their strengths and competencies as planners and decision makers, children can be enabled to become partners in the helping process (Saleebey, 1997), fulfilling their role as active citizens. Criminalising care leavers cannot promote the positive change that is needed. Encouraging children's participation and promoting their strengths is in accordance with formal statements of their rights (James & Prout, 1990; Mayall, 2002). Shifting focus to these areas will help to de-criminalise looked after children and provide avenues for promoting more meaningful citizenship.

### 9.3.3: Power and children's agency

It was not surprising that power as a concept that defined the interaction between adults and children emerged naturally in the study, but power was not easily interpreted and the form it took, who held it and how it was demonstrated were often unclear. It is too simple to say that in the child-adult relationship it is the adults who

have the power. The degree to which power is handed over to children from adults (Franklin, 1997) or shared between children and adults (Shier, 2001) helps to explain children's participation. The transfer of power to children may occur through the exercise of legal rights (Lansdown, 2010). But although it was seen as important and acknowledged by children, caregivers and other adults, 'transferring power' to children was not a prominent feature in the study, although 'sharing power' was. Children did not want control or power over adults but sought adults' guidance; and adults could not relinquish power to children. This might suggest that there are issues which need to be addressed in Trinidad and Tobago's residential child care system for which an appeal to child rights does not present the solution. In applying Foucault's (1980) analysis of power as an aspect of all social relations, it is evident that the children's power resulted from their interaction with adults within the circumstances of the Homes. Children demonstrated resistance and this could influence planning decisions of adults.

### 9.3.4: Tokenistic participation as a hindrance to children's agency

In applying Boyden and Ennew's (1997) interpretations of the term participation as either meaning 'taking part in' or having a real say in decisions, for the most part at both Homes, participation seemed to mean being present or taking part. The children in the study expressed this concern clearly in their interviews and there were numerous observations to substantiate this claim - as in their exclusion from planning meetings, the way they were prepared to respond to sponsors and the limited ways they interacted with volunteers. Additionally, throughout the study, the

distinction between participation and consultation remained unclear. This has long been a contentious area in the field of children's participation (Hill *et al,* 2004; Vis & Thomas, 2009), and refers to how children are engaged and to what extent. Using Roger Hart's (1997) Ladder of Participation (see Chapter Two) to analyse the participation experience of looked after children, it may be concluded that children were primarily engaged at tokenistic levels. Such tokenism failed to meet children's more essential needs (Hart, 2007) or to prepare them for independent living, as children sometimes left care without basic knowledge about how to 'fend for themselves' by cooking or shopping, according to caregivers and the children themselves.

It is unrealistic to imagine, however, that children can have total control over their lives. Treseder (1997) and Kirby (2003) have developed circular models to address this concern, suggesting that there are certain spheres in children's lives, such as school, where children may never really take total control of the outcomes, despite their contributions. The levels of engagement they propose with children are non-sequential and process-based as opposed to outcomes-based. Furthermore, these models suggest that participation is based on the circumstances and settings in which it takes place and should not be used as a blueprint for all situations.

Thomas (2007) suggests an approach that integrates active participation and politics where it is practical to do so. He highlights the ways in which children's participation reflects mainstream politics and how children's representative democracy fails to meaningfully engage children. For example, children are unable to

influence decisions because the processes are essentially adult-led with fixed adult agendas unrepresentative of children's true concerns and priorities. Additionally, the children who are selected as representatives may not reflect all children, as was found in this study at the consultation meetings. Thomas (2007) has therefore broadened the discourse on children's participation in a way which is relevant to this study, given the significance of adult-child relations and the politics involved in managing children in public care. It is also useful in understanding the broader context of children's agency, where looked after children assume roles in governance decision making such as the national standards of child care. Children's participation, based on my study, seems to be best understood in the social, cultural and political context of adults and children working together. The concern about children or adults being all-powerful is thus irrelevant here. For children to be engaged meaningfully adults must have a role to play and for adults to work effectively, children's cooperation is needed.

## 9.4: The Interdependence of Adults and Children in Residential Child Care

The argument presented here is that children's participation in decision making is dependent on how adults and looked after children relate to each other. Based on the findings of the study, I argue that the interdependence of adults and children is a valuable experience which can enhance children's participation. Children and adults in the study shared relationships where they co-constructed their experiences on a daily basis. Their relationships were vibrant and fluid and children were particularly eager to be guided by their caregivers. This experience highlights the

negotiated nature of power (Gallagher, 2008), as adults and children influenced each other's actions.

Managers at both Homes emphasised caring roles over custodial roles but this was also a complex issue, which was influenced by formal work structures, caregivers' perceptions of children and their rights, allegations of child abuse at children's homes and staff-management relationships. There was an entire breakfast meeting in January 2012 at H1 entitled 'Embracing New Horizons', where management shared a new approach to child care which included a culture of caring for children, different from the norm of merely supervising them.  At H2, a caring approach was favoured over a custodial approach by management as well, which was reinforced at a special meeting to discuss the sexualised behaviours of the children (see Chapters Four and Seven).

Earlier chapters have provided evidence on the nature of relationships in care settings, which have been analysed by earlier theorists who dichotomised caring relationships into physical care and caring care (Maier 1979), instrumental tasks and affective endeavours (Tronto 1994) and caring for and caring about (Noddings (1984). Noddings further categorised caring into natural caring[16] and ethical caring[17] (Noddings, 1984, 2003). These categorisations, of which I found Noddings' to be particularly relevant, help us to understand the diversity of caring relations.

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[16] Natural caring: that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination (Noddings, 1984, 2003 p. 5)

[17] Ethical caring: a state of being in relation, characterised by receptivity, relatedness and engrossment. It is the relation in which we meet the other morally and arises out of natural caring (Noddings, 1984, 2003 p. 4)

Conversely, people actually involved in caring relationships do not dichotomise the caring relationships but see them in terms of relatedness (Pettersen, 2011, p. 62), which was also found in this study. Accordingly, it may be the systems and structures within which the relationships are formed that create the dichotomy. The accounts of H1 and H2 provide evidence of how care for children was dichotomised in practice and how this was not a straightforward process as it was based on who was involved and the organisational structures which informed practice. For example, where job titles were concerned, the JHS's who were in statutory positions and guided by the 'Healing Care' philosophy[18] of the SASC provided custodial care, and caregivers, who were contracted workers hired by the Board of Management, were expected to provide compassionate care.

Applying a care ethics analysis to my findings, policy makers seemed to be caring 'about' children, focusing on larger issues of rights and care standards which impacted on all looked after children, while caregivers and JHS's cared 'for' children, which was more interpersonal. Also, the scope of practice informed caring approaches as social workers, Welfare Officers and policy makers were concerned about ethical caring and caregivers were concerned about nurturing or natural caring. Applied to the residential child care setting, the practicality of the affective ideal is complicated by the structures and systems that are in place to care for marginalised children.

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[18] The Healing Care philosophy applied the traditional medical model of working with abused and neglected children.

### 9.4.1: Ethics of care and systems impacting on caring relationships with looked after children

The study presents evidence to suggest the ways in which there are departures from the affective ideal given the context of practice. Caring relationships were affected by shift work, the characteristics of caregivers who brought their own baggage to the job, the characteristics of children who experienced abuse and had therapeutic needs and how they responded to caregivers based on their experience. The intersections of children's individualities such as age, gender and race also impacted on the caring relationship.

The levels of caring – both caring for and caring about - are also affected by organisational structure, environmental factors such as crime and macro systems such as politics and legislation. The practice setting inevitably influences the nature of caring and this is particularly applicable to children in residential settings, governed by boards and statutory authorities. In this context, as one manager explained: *'The adults care for children from a distance.'* The focus becomes completing instrumental tasks and limiting personal involvement with children.

Relationships between adults and children in residential care must be genuine and personal (Smith, 2011) and not reduced to affectionless responses which make for disconnected and uncaring work. A personal, caring approach is essential to ensuring that adults can positively influence children's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, and researchers have argued that it will contribute to better outcomes for children (Clark 2001; Smith, 2011). The impact of organisational issues on staff

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attitudes towards children and how they engaged with them did not make caring relationships impossible. Caregivers' personal motivations and their ability to sympathise with the children, as well as their concern for children's after care experiences, often took precedence. By being sympathetic towards children, adults were able to communicate care and concern, which was valued by the children. Through this experience of maternalism (Boris & Kleinberg, 2003), values of caring and nurturing were extended. Applying maternalism buffered some negative effects of paternalistic ideals such as when caregivers were empathetic towards children and allowed them flexibility to participate in activities they would not have been allowed to otherwise. It can therefore provide practical problem solving approaches as opposed to rigid rules about what ought to happen.

### 9.4.2: Ethics of care and ethic of justice[19]

Looked after children exist in a system where the ethic of care can be easily overshadowed by an ethic of justice as adults become preoccupied with issues of rights, outcomes and accountability (Barnes, 2007; Holland, 2010). Such tensions between the ethic of care and the ethic of justice were evident in the study. For instance, social workers such as the Social Worker and Welfare Officers of H2, in addition to having concerns about the quality of care at the Homes, were concerned about children having the right to information about themselves and their families

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[19] An ethic of justice focuses on questions of fairness, equality, individual rights, abstract principles and the consistent application of care whereas an ethic of care focuses on attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance, and cultivating caring relations (Held, 2006. p. 161)

and participating in decisions concerning their well-being. Managers were mainly concerned about cultivating caring relationships at the Homes. However, the looked after children were very clear about what they wanted to see – justice and care combined. They saw justice, rights and care as interwoven ideas which contributed to their quality of life.

As discussed in Chapter Four, looked after children at the youth detention centre and at the Homes expressed their satisfaction with Magistrates who listened to them and demonstrated fairness even when their outcomes were unfavourable. The children's views support the argument that the dichotomies can be better addressed when they can be applied in practical ways through lived experiences (Lister, 2003; 2007). This finding is also consistent with the findings of Barnes (2007), who examined the perception of children in foster and residential care in the UK and found that the young people preferred caring relationships alongside advocacy work over advocacy work alone. Although the children appreciated the work of their child rights advocates, they felt that even as they promoted justice, they needed to respect the relationships they shared with their caregivers. 'Caring advocacy' (Barnes, 2007) therefore counteracted the effects of paternalistic advocacy (adults knowing what was in the best interest of children) and better incorporated children's opinions and the context of care.

Additionally, there is evidence that an ethic of justice and an ethic of care can feasibly co-exist in the same context (Masters & Smith, 1998). Applying the concepts to criminal justice in Britain, the authors argued that with adequate systems

and procedures in place to facilitate caring expressions by those in authority, such as re-integrative shaming as an expression of the ethic of care, justice and care can co-exist. They also underscored the importance of relationships and fundamental cultural values and beliefs in making this approach possible.  The importance of combining care and justice ethics in care is further supported by Held (2006). However, she highlights that care is the greater value as justice cannot exist without it.

The findings in the study have implications for restorative justice[20] in residential child care. Adopting a restorative justice approach in residential child care has proven to have a positive impact on the relationships between children and staff even where children's behaviours were challenging (Littlechild & Sender, 2003, 2010). Applied appropriately, restorative justice could reduce the use of police intervention (Nacro, 2003; Taylor, 2006), thereby de-criminalising looked after children – a concern highlighted by adults in the Homes and the children and adults at the Youth Training Centre. Restorative justice is also consistent with the principles of participation, communication, care and justice and it presents an alternative to bureaucracy as it does not rely on formal procedures. The approach would allow children to talk through their concerns, reach amicable solutions, develop empathy, take responsibility for their actions and in the process learn decision making skills related to reparation and justice (Littlechild & Sender, 2003, 2010). It would also foster better

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[20] Restorative justice is 'a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future' (Marshall, 1999 p. 5)

adult-child relations as staff members are encouraged to collaborate with children on problem-solving. A restorative justice approach in residential child care thus complements the idea of caring and justice being intertwined.

### 9.4.3: Promoting children's agency by 'caring with' looked after children

The reality of power imbalances between children and adults is not discounted and needs to be managed (Smith, 2011). One way this can be achieved is by caring *with* children. Applying care ethics in participatory work with looked after children helps to broaden the discourse on children's participation to include its relational aspects. The adults in the study viewed the children in ways based on their own values and interacted with them accordingly, which is consistent with the assumptions of care ethics (Held, 2006). They positioned themselves as knowing better, being in control and as child protectors, a paternalistic view with little room for children's participation. The study has highlighted how reframing the relationship between adults and children (Mannion, 2010) is possible through participatory work. Although the children welcomed adults' guidance, the manner in which it was given was important to them. For instance, they did not respond well when participation was imposed upon them. Through participatory activities such as the Eighteen and Beyond Programme and the relocation exercise at H1, and the leadership meetings and Carnival activities at H2, adults saw the possibility of repositioning themselves where children's participation was concerned so that there was mutual interdependence. This reframing shows how adults can share power with children, rather than

maintaining old values of having power over them (Mannion, 2007; Kirby, *et* al, 2003; Shier, 2001.

The power imbalance between children and adults can therefore be mediated by embracing a philosophy of 'caring with' children rather than merely 'caring for' or 'caring about' them. This new outlook on children will be important in avoiding seeing children as abstractions (Smith *et al,* 2013) and in removing obstacles to children's participation in decision making. The collaborative approach being proposed will shift the caring relationship to another level that will facilitate children's agency and promote self-protection and self-advocacy (Hart, 2007) as children contribute meaningfully to their life space. It will also minimise risk-averse approaches to child care which focus on children's weaknesses and vulnerability and the need to (over)protect them (Smith *et al*, 2013; Munro, 2001).

Making connections between micro and macro levels is a long-standing problem for social theory (Scheff, 1997). However, my research goes some way towards making this connection. This study provides useful data to show how the personal, social and political can be linked to children's participation in care, using care ethics. Participatory work with children proposes a transformational model in which children's participation is an emergent process dependent on positive relationships with adults (Mannion, 2007, 2010). This model allows young people to have a more engaged and reflective role with adults. It provides evidence that affective responses (Noddings, 1984, 2003) in caring are possible in residential settings and is consistent with the argument put forward by Mason and Hood (2010)

that transformational participation can help reduce the conflicts which arise in participatory approaches. However, the ability to meet children's needs is confined by rules and regulations governing residential child care and the limitations of a work system based on shifts. This further complicates the ability to operationalise sympathy and empathic responding as workers guard their feelings for fear of crossing boundaries and being accused of engaging in misconduct - a fear mentioned by some of the caregivers and managers. Consequently, administrators and policy makers are left with the challenge of seeking to balance the needs of children with the need to protect them. This entails the risk of a resort to legislating for and formalising love and caring, which may only create other relational problems (Smith, 2011), through attempts to standardise and generalise subjective experiences.

## 9.5: Children's participation as an indigenous experience: Considerations for culturally relevant practice

### 9.5.1: Defining indigenous children's participation

My interest in the issue of indigenising children's participation emerged from the data which described how caregivers challenged ideas about child rights, how children applied knowledge of child rights to their experiences and how the children circumvented bureaucratic challenges so they could participate. Adults in the study also openly expressed the need for children's participation as it applied to child rights to be more culturally relevant, given the difficulties they found in operationalising it in practice. The ways in which children interacted with each other and adults and how they expressed themselves provided evidence of indigenous practice.

The children demonstrated that there might be common, inherent impulses that contribute to indigenous care - for example, the ways in which children forged their collective identity, related to each other and adults and integrated cultural experiences into their world. There were particular strengths and resources which the children possessed despite being unable to fully participate in meaningful decision making. The extent to which these actions are supported by the Homes' organisation and policies thus requires attention if indigenous practice is to be achieved. This will be in addition to the informal care system based on cultural values about caring. An indigenous approach to children's participation seemed possible, based on these local experiences which challenged a strictly child rights approach to children's participation. Concern with child rights worked as a policing mechanism (Barrow, 2001) to monitor adult-child interactions but there were other issues which needed to be addressed in the child care setting, to which child rights did not provide the answers. As such, child rights were not seen as being supportive to caregivers and managers. This response to child rights was also coupled with caregivers' own feelings of disempowerment and their reservations about how they should care for the children within a child rights framework, given the increasing concerns about child abuse.

There were some situations which were unique to residential child care in the context of Trinidadian cultural values, such as how religion influenced caring and how formal and informal caring shaped the adult-child relationship. These situations either facilitated or hindered children's participation and illustrated the complexity of

indigenising practice. The essential argument here is that although there were aspects of children's participation which were indigenous to children and which influenced adults' thinking about indigenising children's rights, to achieve this is not straightforward. There are specific social, cultural and political challenges and implications which must be considered. These challenges include issues related to family and gendered relations, religion/spirituality, legal and policy issues, governance issues and the extent to which children are exposed to information and participation.

The concept 'indigenous' here applies to situations that are unique to a particular context based on a particular history. Indigenous populations have their own distinct ways of managing resources as they possess the knowledge and experience that is relevant to their space and time (Briskman, 2007). In this regard, indigenous practice would entail learning from past experiences to shape the present and future of indigenous people (Briskman, 2007). Children's participation as an indigenous experience suggests that, given our colonial history in the Caribbean, countries need to look beyond North America and Europe for solutions to problems in the local environment (Girvan, 2007) if the solutions are to be culturally relevant. One of the ways in which colonial ideals continue to survive is through the universalisation of the discourse of human rights (Ife, 1995). Universalisation includes 'a universally applicable morality' which is imposed on others by those with political will and political power. Applied to Western influence on the developing world, universalisation is doomed to failure given that the cultural and economic values of the West are under challenge due to ongoing economic and social inequalities and

instabilities (Minogue, 2002), and societies such as Trinidad and Tobago question the effectiveness of applying values such as child rights. Children's right to participation is one such concept which has been imported into the culture of children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago and, from the findings of this study, complicates the ordinary experience of children participating in care. As such, to see participation as a right only is to adopt a colonial view, which may not be useful as it challenges embedded qualities of adult-child relationships and creates adult suspicion and resistance.

The UNCRC is very broad and abstract (Skelton, 2007) and its impact on societies varies locally, which means that some degree of indigenisation is inevitable. A positive way to reframe the UNCRC that will promote participation in the child care system is to examine what already exists in children's homes and to see how the formal structures can facilitate the positive aspects of actual experiences - for example, how the cultural experience of maternal caregiving (Barrow, 2011, 1996) counteracts the effects of paternalism. Some other positive experiences included adults' role in safeguarding children; utilising Carnival and other cultural experiences to voice concerns; and community living where children were naturally integrated into the communities where the Homes were located and where religious values promoted philanthropy among children and adults. Negative experiences included: traditional values about children's competence, which hindered children's participation; transferring gender roles to the care situation, which affected how girls participated as opposed to boys; and overprotecting children, which may be associated with child-rearing practices arising from slavery (Patterson, 1982).

### 9.5.2: The role of stakeholders in indigenising children's participation

Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally been dependent on Western and British colonial powers to make decisions and in the 21st century struggles to find its way so that practices can be contextually relevant. Residential child care, as seen in Chapter One, has been heavily influenced by the older British model of residential child care. In addition, the country is a signatory to the UNCRC and is required to uphold the rights of all children. This influence has been reinforced over the last few years with the guidelines for residential child care (UN, 2010). Although ratification of the UNCRC has taken place, the legislation remains inadequate in facilitating its proper operationalisation. This legislative limitation reinforces some adults' negative attitudes towards children.

Where caregivers were aware of the limitations of legislation, some felt that their attitudes towards children were justified. For instance, one caregiver in the study had a legal background and was aware of the vagueness of the children's legislation at the time as it related to administering corporal punishment and child rights. The caregiver insisted on using corporal punishment to discipline children, which was consistent with her traditional views about child-rearing but posed a challenge to management's goals of transforming children's care experiences. However, cases where caregivers challenged management to this extent were not the norm, as the informal structures embedded in practice helped to counteract negative attitudes towards child rights and participation. Consequently, children were afforded opportunities to participate when adults used an approach that was not derived from

the UNCRC principles but from their own acknowledgment of the benefits of children's participation.

In the case of looked after children, to indigenise practice means that the police, Probation Officers, magistrates, managers, caregivers, policy experts, and other adults should understand what children's participation means to the children in different contexts. One way in which children brilliantly incorporated their experiences with adults into their world was demonstrated in the cooperative story telling exercise in H1, which showed how they saw police and religious personnel influencing their lives. What will be required for this level of adaptation on the part of the adults is the ability to relinquish power, to listen to children and incorporate their views into policies and interventions. Again, this will require legislative and institutional support that will send a message of adult-child partnerships.

### 9.5.3: A way forward: Children's participation in residential child care services in post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago

The extent to which countries such as Trinidad and Tobago have transcended the influence of colonialism remains a contentious issue (Best & Levitt, 2009; Beckford, 1999; Fanon, 1967). Thus, the idea of 'post-colonial' can be misleading (Miege, 1980). Critiques of the concept of post-colonialism are premised on the fact that societies remain bound by North American and European ideologies as reflected in institutions and bureaucratic styles (Beckford, 1999; Said, 1978, 2003). Therefore, neo-colonialism is said to exist given the indirect economic, political and social control by affluent countries through cultural imperialism, international lending

agencies and foreign investment (Nkrumah, 1965). However, the neo-colonial approach to development in this instance is mitigated by an awareness of and response to the need of Third World countries to develop a local response to their own issues such as those in the area of children's participation rights. This example of indigenising child rights is reflected in recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to make children's participation rights more culturally relevant and fully integrated into programmes and policies (UNCRC, 2006). In addition to what has been identified by Caribbean authors, some specific areas to consider in developing child care policies which are indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago were highlighted in this thesis, such as the multi-ethnic composition of the society, which makes it difficult to universalise principles, outdated laws which do not reflect the important role of professionals such as social workers working with looked after children, and the ways in which child protection is interpreted and practised.

Linked to indigenising practice and social policies for looked after children, children's participation promotes collaborative efforts between children and adults who are exposed to creative ways of utilising local human and material resources (Nolas, 2011), such as the adaptation of cultural events and art forms. Participatory approaches also help young people to develop a sense of identity and social justice (Kjorholt, 2002). With these benefits to participation, looked after children can participate more fully in wider society, in a way that recalls Fox Harding's (1997) fourth value position in child care policy – children's rights and child liberation perspectives. This perspective takes into account children as rights holders able to participate in

decision making, and this study adds to knowledge in the area by showing how this can be achieved practically. It has long been argued that 'children be actively involved in the process of charting a new course for the [Latin America and the Caribbean] region' (Green, 1998, p. 202). Green (1998) explained that such active participation by children would entail changing the approach to governance by placing children at the forefront of development, and through greater child advocacy by non-governmental organisations and shifting perspectives of children from 'voiceless objects' to 'active participants in building their futures' (p. 208). This study provides useful examples of how children's active participation can be encouraged, using local expressions such as Calypso, performing and visual arts.

The practicalities of developing a Caribbean perspective on child rights therefore remain a challenge as child rights cannot be seen in isolation from other social issues such as poverty, parental responsibility and basic human rights (Brown, 2001), which are all linked to the legacy of colonialism (Said, 1989). Fundamental to this legacy is the attitudes and beliefs held by adults about children's competence in decision making. Children's participation therefore gets entangled in one-sided debates about child rights and we sometimes fail to see what is more important – that children have something important to contribute and we should pay attention to them. Focusing on children's participation in care as an organic part of their experience might be more rewarding and serve as a platform for promoting child rights rather than the other way around, where child rights are seen as driving participation.

It appears that traditional values about children are so embedded that even adults who should know better are sometimes unable to demonstrate what children's participation should look like. As a result, decisions regarding children and young people do not necessarily reflect meaningful and genuine child participation with child advocates and policy makers. These experiences reflect the similar concerns of authors such as Hart (2007), who attributes the problems to the following:  a lack of knowledge and experience with participation; children mirroring adults to meet the adult agenda; the complexities involved in balancing children's participation rights and the need for their physical and psychological protection. Transformation to a more collaborative approach can be achieved by open dialogue between adults and children (Kirby, *et al,* 2003), who will both benefit from alternative perspectives based on their interaction. The open dialogue will promote action and reflection (Freire, 1976 p. 75), which will counteract the effects of paying mere lip service to participation, and allow it to become a source for social change and transformation. Such action will be reflected in supportive policies and infrastructure to make children's participation work.

Development ethics as posited by Goulet (1995) provides a useful theory for understanding the ethical basis for increasing children's agency through participation as a means of mitigating value conflicts and helping decision makers focus on processes and quality of human relationships in development. He argued against development that does not value local experiences as he believed that the solutions to essential development concerns exist within local populations. Central to

Goulet's ideas and is the importance of retaining those aspects of tradition which contribute to human development and taking a critical approach to traditional values and beliefs. Goulet's work promotes ideas of civil participation and helps to diffuse elitist ideals (Goulet 1995), for example on what is best for children. Development ethics is therefore an essential concept to children's participation as it acknowledges and promotes the rights of those who will be affected by policies and practice to contribute to decision making. Development initiatives which are adopted from developed countries are seen as 'mimetic' development that is 'judged to be spurious and distorted' according to Goulet since development should really emanate from within the 'latent dynamism of that society's value system[21]' (1995, p.88). Goulet's view is supported by Caribbean authors who highlighted the importance of considering socio-demographic issues in planning and development, based on our colonial history. Such considerations include local experiences of fertility and migration (Brown, 2002), the Caribbean family structure (M. Smith, 1971; Barrow, 1996) and the impact of migration on children (Barrow, 2010).

Cooke and Kothari (2004) emphasise the importance of understanding the motivations behind participation work and considering 'how the different, changing and multiple identities of individuals impact upon their choices' (p. 9). They highlight the political issues involved in participation work which seem to work in favour of those in authority and the importance of considering the role of social structures and

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[21] The value system which Goulet talks about includes a society's traditional beliefs, its meaning system, its local institutions, networks of solidarity and popular practices (Goulet, 1995, p. 88-89).

how 'local knowledge' is represented. This view is supported by the study where bureaucratic structures and paternalism presented barriers to meaningful children's participation, but through cultural practices and everyday experiences, children were nevertheless able to demonstrate their agency. Also, among themselves, children had a good sense of benevolence and empathy towards others, particularly needy children, which was attributed to their own experiences of being cared-for. They empathised with other children within and outside the Homes, as was seen when children organised themselves to distribute excess gifts and snacks they received from charity to children who they felt were in greater need. Applied to a broader level of participation and development, these findings suggest that there are inherent cultural resources which facilitate indigenous practices (Weiss, 1998).

## 9.6: Looked after children as collective decision makers

'Children as a collectivity comprise a multitude of experiences and positionalities' (Oswell, 2013 p. 77). The children in this study were considered collectively by management according to their age and sex, which determined how their group care was organised. When purchases were made for children in preparation for school, it was the norm to buy in bulk, which meant that children often had similar types of clothing, footwear and other necessities. Although typical of residential care, this was a major issue for the children when they discussed issues of identity in the focus groups with me. The children had their own sense of collective identity separate from how management saw them. They used this collective identity

to influence decisions about themselves in what they saw as their best interests. The experience of collective identity being given primacy over the individual expression of need was apparent on several occasions but more so in H1. Such a reality became apparent to me on several occasions where issues of racial identity surfaced, where the children organised representation and action around their collective identity and where there was an active culture of ex-residents identifying with the Homes.

At both Homes, the children demonstrated the ability to organise themselves outside of the formal structure. As discussed in Chapter Five, when the children thought that adults were not making decisions in their best interest, they organised themselves and made alternative plans. This was most evident in their preparation for their field trip at H1 and at cultural events and leadership meetings at H2. Outside of the formal meetings and adults' influence, the children quickly gathered, a leader emerged, and decisions were made. They used non-verbal communication when adults were present, to indicate whether or not a plan would take effect. It seemed as though there was a hidden decision making system or 'hidden transcript[22]' (Scott, 1990), which only the children had access to.

The collective identity which was demonstrated by the children was reinforced by experiences with adults and the structure of the Homes. For example, the culture of unionisation and collective representation by staff did not go unnoticed by the children. Through direct and indirect interaction with adults, children learnt about

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[22] James Scott (1990) states that every subordinate group creates a hidden transcript from their ordeal, which represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant (p. xii)

their caregivers' labour issues, which imparted values of solidarity, justice and fairness. Additionally, there were activities at both Homes which took the children outside, such as a trip to Spain by H2 residents and vacation off-site camps at H1. These activities reinforced the collective identity of looked after children and fostered a sense of belonging to the Homes through lessons and daily activities on collective representation. Interacting with other groups allowed the children to understand what was different about their experiences, which reinforced their similarity with their peers in their Homes and their collective identity.

### 9.6.1: Children's participation in care as a dominant political discourse

The reason for promoting children's participation has been associated with political discourse on citizenship and democracy (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000; UNICEF, 2003). Lately in Trinidad and Tobago, children's participation has been linked to youth crime as a threat to citizenship. During the time of the study, crime and more particularly youth crime was a major concern for politicians, policy makers and practitioners, where children and youth were seen as victims and perpetrators. Looked after children became objects of attention by the public when allegations of abuse at various children's homes and school violence were on the rise. Being a child in care was therefore associated with being at risk of criminal behaviours as victim or offender and children and youth policies were increasingly criminalised. These ideas transferred into children's homes as interventions were targeted to divert children from criminal activities. These interventions were usually designed with universal themes that tended to treat looked after children as a collective with a single unified

identity. One positive approach was the attention placed on children's participation in decision making in care. However, the expectations seemed unrealistic as there was more talk than actual implementation.

The fear and suspicion among adults about children developing a collective identity were also linked to the emerging gang culture in Trinidad and Tobago. Caregivers worried that the group identities fostered through competitions within the Homes had gang-like features. The many positive outcomes of being in groups were overshadowed by the prevailing discourse on gang violence. The positive potential of group involvement for children risked being forgotten in the face of these anxieties about crime.

The emphasis on developing and implementing legislation to address child protection issues further highlights the politicisation of children's participation. With increasing reports of child abuse in Trinidad and Tobago in general, pressure was placed on the government to implement child protection legislation. During the time of the study, a special ministry was formed to address children's issues specifically, and the Children Act of 2012 was passed but not proclaimed by the President of the country, so it had no force of law. In addition, the frequent change in Ministers for this Ministry contributed to some instability and delays in decisions. There were three changes in Ministers during the time of the study. For the most part, the various children's departments based their practice on a sense of children's rights, which were not supported by law as the laws were inconsistent with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006). For example, up to the time of writing

this thesis, the definition of a child was inconsistent with the UNCRC's definition. The application of the UNCRC was highly dependent on adults' interpretation of its relevance to practice. One of the approaches used in the Homes to signal that children's issues were being addressed seemed to be consulting children on children's policies, and raising issues of children's participation rights, which included increasing their participation in activities such as fun and family days and consultation exercises. As seen earlier, these initiatives seemed tokenistic. White and Choudhury (2007) have referred to the way in which participation has become a project of agencies that draws children in as 'projectisation' (p. 547). This 'projectisation' does not contribute to meaningful participation and brings into question the extent to which children are genuinely allowed to demonstrate their agency. The authors therefore call for another model of children's participation which is extensive and inclusive, focusing on survival rights, the resources through which children's agency is built and the influence of development models on children's participation.

### 9.6.2: The challenges of addressing looked after children collectively

The ways in which children had been socialised appeared to influence how they demonstrated their agency collectively, with boys using their collective identity more than girls to influence decisions. This point was highlighted where males and females interacted in formal settings. At both Homes, the girls seemed to be less in solidarity with each other when decisions were made and gave individual, emotional responses. They were more easily influenced by adults and changed their minds about their decisions more quickly when adults opposed them. Also, the boys allowed their

peers to speak on their behalf more readily than the girls. It seemed to be more accepted by the girls for the boys to represent their views than vice versa. This might be related to the gendered roles ascribed to children, with girls taking on more submissive roles than boys. Where there was resistance among the children, the boys responded in greater solidarity than the girls, who became more emotionally abusive towards staff on a more personal level. The gendered nature of socialisation in Caribbean families has been well documented (Barrow, 1996, 2010, 2011; Chevannes, 2001, Evans & Davies, 1997; Leo-Rhynie, 1993; M.G. Smith, 1962, 1971), and findings are consistent with the behaviour patterns of looked after children today as seen here in this study. Gendered socialisation for looked after children is further complicated by the caregivers' own upbringing and how they perceive children's needs and vulnerabilities, which informs how children are socialised and cared for (Barrow, 2011). The potential for residential child care to counteract the effects of unfavourable socialisation such as lack of communication in Caribbean families (Leo-Rhynie, 1993) is therefore limited.

Understanding how the children interpreted and used their collective identity is further complicated by the way adults seemed to impose the label of 'home children', which created resistance by the children. Labelling by children was more acceptable than when adults labelled them. For example where the children's buses had the name of the home painted on the side, they attempted to deface the sign; when caregivers informed their teachers at school about their situation, they were offended and reacted negatively; or when they would create Facebook accounts and

state that they lived at the Homes but have reservations about joining Facebook pages created by adults which affiliated them to the Homes. It is possible that the children valued their collective identity more when they were independent of adults' control that made it mandatory.

### 9.6.3: 'Interpretive reproduction', social competence and children's collective decision making in care

Children organised themselves as a unified body when they wanted to be heard and they took care of younger children willingly. This social competence is possessed by children in their own right and not decided on by adults. Such experiences also show how the children can reproduce knowledge and integrate adults' worlds into theirs as they work to find the meaning of their participation experiences. This 'interpretive reproduction'[23], according to Corsaro (2005, 2011), extends the meaning of socialisation beyond internalisation and adaptation, which are characteristic of institutionalisation (Goffman, 1961, 1971). It recognises the value of collective communal activity and children's ability to negotiate, share and reproduce culture (Corsaro, 1992; James *et al*, 1998), within the structure (social and organisational) and culture of society and the Homes. This approach also stresses the present being of looked after children: they can contribute to their present well-being, which affects their present *and* future outcomes. A key element of interpretive reproduction is children's participation in cultural routines (Corsaro, 2011). Such

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[23] Interpretive reproduction – the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society who not only internalise society and culture but actively contribute to cultural production and change. Children, through their participation, are also constrained by the existing social structures and by societal reproduction (Corsaro, 2011)

routines were distinguishing features of the Homes. They included children's participation in field trips, annual social and cultural events, vacation camps and internal decision making structures such as leadership and house meetings. The organisation of dormitories/houses and unionised behaviours of adults were also part of the cultural routines, as well as membership in extra-curricular activities, religious practices and the regular everyday activities such as eating together and interacting with staff members. Through iterative processes a rhythm is formed in the home (Smith *et al,* 2013), where children learn patterns of rule-making, which provide security and send the message that rules can be adapted with adults' acceptance (Corsaro, 2011). Such routines also reinforce the positive aspects of paternalism.

There is a counter-argument to the value of routines in children's homes. The routines varied between the Homes and the difference in the degree to which collective identity was used by the children in the Homes was evident. As mentioned in the introductory section of this thesis, H1 had less formal structures than H2, which allowed for closer relationships between staff and children and less formal disciplinary systems. Nevertheless, there was greater resistance from the children in H2. Therefore, the lack of formal systems or routines facilitates the demonstration of children's collective agency in positive ways, encouraging creativity and flexibility.

Contrary to literature which describes the powerlessness of people in institutions (Goffman, 1961; Mathiesen, 1965), children in my study internalised their care experiences and participated in informal and unofficial ways beyond the paternalistic structures of the Homes. Although Mathiesen's study was conducted in

a prison, which was more bureaucratic and with more clearly defined power structures, it is important to the analysis of children in institutions. The inmates in Mathiesen's study seemed to rely heavily on staff for their rewards and punishment (p. 71), whereas the children in my study devised their own strategic ways of claiming these. Even in their ostensibly powerless and dependent condition, looked after children had the capacity to add, in some ways collectively, to what they saw as being in their best interest. These findings highlight the important role that power, structure and perceptions play in the relationship between residents and staff. In the children's case, power was more relationally defined, reinforcing the point that power needs to be seen as contextual.

### 9.7: Conclusion

The arguments presented in this chapter underscore the relevance, possibilities and complexities of looked-after children's participation in decision making as it relates to their day-to-day experiences and at the policy level. My intention is not to promote any one approach to children's participation but to highlight the complexity of the issues involved and how it actually works in practice in a residential child care context. I also acknowledge that care and control as historic functions of social services are difficult to separate in practice (Goroff, 1974; Satyamurti, 1979) and that adults have inescapable responsibilities to safeguard children. My objective was therefore to provide deeper insights into the social, cultural, political and economic issues that influence how children participate in

residential settings, and relate these to the larger discourse of development ethics (Goulet, 1995) and new ways of increasing our understanding and acceptance of children's participation in a Caribbean context; children's citizenship and agency (Cockburn, 2005; Jans, 2004; Oswell, 2013); and how paternalistic care systems can be mediated by an ethic of care. In this research context I was interested in the emergence of children's agency and how they were able to influence and be influenced by adults in residential settings. The analysis therefore presents a critical approach to understanding residential child care, which provides some answers to the five research questions that guided this study.

# Chapter 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

## 10.1: Introduction

This study initially focused on five primary decision making opportunities for children at the children's homes. These were:

- Assessment, care planning and the review process

- Disciplinary proceedings

- Participation in education

- Accessing specialist services

- Leaving care process

The focus shifted to an extent as opportunities for observations or observations of such formal processes were lacking. New areas of focus emerged from my observations and informal interactions at the Homes. By examining less formal decision making points this research provided useful evidence of how looked-after children negotiated power in a paternalistic structure using relationships, technology and resistance in the socio-cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago. Useful insights were thus provided into the agency of looked after children. The research illuminates the need for adults to re-evaluate their assumptions about children and the dominant narratives which describe them as incompetent and lacking the capacity to make decisions in their interests. Evidence from the study also supports the view that children have social and cultural resources with which adults should learn to work.

An emphasis on child rights is acknowledged as having a useful place in child welfare and its usefulness as a blue print is not denied. It can support stakeholders by providing them with a framework for shaping the welfare outcomes of children but can also be criticised on the grounds of being contextually inadequate. A rights-based approach to children's participation is not the only option, as this study has shown, similarly to the findings of Mannion (2007; 2010), that a relational approach that promotes positive adult-child relationships is possible. That is, approaches which promote positive child-adult relations should be explored in developing the discourse on children's participation in decision making. Additionally, the usefulness of adopting an indigenous approach to children's participation is supported by this study. It advances the discussion on children's participation by exploring the complexities involved in achieving culturally relevant practice. This takes into account indigenous ways of caring for children which keeps adults in the picture. Underlying most of the challenges are the deep-seated values that are associated with our colonial experience of leadership which is modelled on bureaucracy and paternalism. By overcoming the obstacles to culturally sensitive children's participation, values such as interdependence, reflection and self-determination can be realised by children. The issue is not whether or not children's participation should be or can be indigenised, as this is a given. Focus should be placed on how we interpret children's ability to utilise cultural experiences to increase their agency and how structures can support such indigenous experiences and thus ultimately promote culturally relevant practice.

## 10.2: Reflections on ethnographic research

I began my research with the aim of gaining a better understanding of children's participation in residential care. Assisted by the children and adults with whom I interacted during the pilot study, I narrowed my focus to a specific area which examined the relational issues that influenced children's participation. The decision to use ethnography as my primary research method derived from the insights I gained from children and staff about undocumented aspects of their lives which were difficult to explain. When I asked them to describe their daily experiences, one child in H1 lamented: '*You need to see for yourself. Come on regular days to really see what our life is like*'. The children at H2 shared similar sentiments. Ethnography and participant observation allowed me to experience important aspects of the children's lives at the Homes; I engaged with the children in informal ways with which they were comfortable and I established a trusting relationship with both the children and staff.

This research has benefitted from a multi-dimensional experience which describes my journey to this point. My position on the Board of Management of The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, and my experience as a trained social worker, teacher and school counsellor, provided me with some background knowledge and resources which were useful in exploring children's participation in care. I gained access, negotiated my way in the field, networked and gained the trust of the management and staff of the Homes because of my credibility and reputation in the field among peers. I used my skills as a social worker to engage children meaningfully and to overcome some of the ethical challenges associated with

researching children, and looked after children in particular (Alderson, 2004; Renold, *et al,* 2008; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). A mutually respectful relationship was maintained with the Homes and the participants of the study. This supported my being able to engage in methodological triangulation (Mason, 1996), whereby I used different research methods to corroborate each other, qualify perceptions and ascertain the reliability of data.

As a member of The Association of Caribbean Social Work Educators, I had opportunities to access key stakeholders in Caribbean social work who provided me with useful data regarding regional practices in child care. As a student at Lancaster University I was able to compare assessments of child welfare in the UK and the experience in Trinidad and Tobago primarily through discussions with supervisors in the development of this study, as well as on a personal visit to Durham and the NGO "Investing in Children", in addition to reviewing reports and other related literature from the UK. Many of the ideas which derived from this study were tested among researchers, practitioners and policy makers at various local, regional and international conferences where I presented my findings. The ideas were generally accepted and where they were contested, the feedback mainly included questions about cultural relevance and practicality of implementation given economic and legal constraints. The feedback reinforced the importance of social work practice taking into account the historical, social and cultural contexts of service users' lives (Allan *et al,* 2009).

An ethnographic journal which included observational, methodological and theoretical notes (Atkinson, 1990; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) was extremely beneficial in helping me to manage the large volume of data I collected over the period of my study and allowed reflection, as I captured those feelings and thoughts which emerged from my experiences and how they influenced my research. An added benefit of the journal was that it served to keep me focused and motivated when I felt discouraged as I revisited both my personal and research goals and my reasons for pursuing the study. My research experience can be described as a transition from feeling somewhat like Alice in Wonderland, when I entered the Homes and was shocked by some of the realities of residential care, to feeling that I was part of an extended family - accepted, trusted and enlightened. Because of my expertise and managers' awareness of my role as a social worker, it was a challenge to be a 'fly on the wall', inconspicuously observing and note taking. Requests were made by children and adults for me to intervene in situations or to share my professional opinion. Over time I developed some strategies to avoid the 'expert' role. I deferred responses and reframed and refocused solution-oriented questions directed at me so that managers were encouraged to think about what the children or caregivers would think in the situation when it involved them. I was also conscious of my professional interest in promoting children's welfare  and seeking changes in the child care system, so I needed to manage this by consciously switching my role from social worker to researcher and by being objective and asking the question – 'what is really going on here as I see it and experience it now?'. Finally, the management and analysis of the

data I compiled benefited from my use of the Atlas.ti7 software described in the methodology section (and see **Appendix IX**).

In reflecting on my work on the thesis, I believe that the participation of adults and children in the design and evaluation of the research was important both as input and as outcome. Another important benefit of the study was that after spending time with the children and adults in the Homes, I reciprocated by delivering sessions to the children and contributing to policy development processes. As an outcome of my research I had the opportunity to work with the children and to teach staff about participatory approaches, which provided convincing evidence to adults of the benefits of partnering with children and working closely with colleagues. It became clear to me that promoting children's participation required the cooperation and support of staff, not only because of their responsibility to the children but because the children valued their presence and often relied on their caregivers to endorse activities.

In this study I was consistently aware that the success of the research depended on the active participation of primary stakeholders such as the children and the care givers at the Homes. A deliberate effort was made to engage stakeholders in those activities which supported data collection, analysis and triangulation. These included policy review meetings at the Homes and legislative consultations at the state level, and subjecting these to the litmus test of the perceptions and interpretations of children and care givers in the Homes. These activities enhanced the validity of the study as I returned to the key stakeholders at the final stages for

perception checking and validity checks to clarify what I had interpreted after completing my data analysis. This also allowed me to demonstrate practically to the children that their input as research participants was valuable. This hopefully contributed to their sense of self-worth and an improved perception of their capacity for agency. I believe I am justified in concluding that this research has made a contribution which is needed in social work research (Fook, 2004; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) as it adds to our understanding of the realities of looked after children. It also provides practical suggestions for operationalising children's participation, which includes but is not limited to children having a voice.

The endorsement of this study by policy makers, managers, caregivers and children highlights its relevance to the child care system in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, my ongoing engagement with the Children's Authority and involvement in the development of curricula for child care workers at tertiary institutions in my country is evidence of the significance of my research. Such outcomes also highlight the advantages of professional practice in small states such as Trinidad and Tobago where knowledge and expertise are easier to apply than in larger societies. This may be due to closer professional networks which facilitate faster information dissemination, knowledge of available resources and opportunities to circumvent bureaucratic barriers.

The findings from this study support a transformational approach to children's participation (Long, 2001; Watkins & Shulman, 2010), where emphasis is placed on shifting the focus of children's participation from events to processes and on recognising the integrity of these processes. The social, historical and cultural contexts are important (Allan, 2009), which implies the need to be culturally sensitive and to apply knowledge of cultural practices to the process of promoting children's rights to participate. The point is not that the principle of children's participation should be compromised but that realistic and feasible measures should be adopted to ensure the best approach to engaging children through fostering meaningful adult-child relationships. Thus, balancing paternalism and partnership remains critical in a post-colonial society such as Trinidad and Tobago where child protection at the state level is in its infancy. This process should begin from the time a child is recognised and accepted as being in need of care and protection so that children are engaged at an early stage. This principle extends to the organisational culture of children's homes and other children's agencies, where children's participation should be embedded, making participation structures and engagements part of the standard operations beyond the mandate of the state. Agencies such as those mentioned in this thesis along with the two Homes should aim to create a culture of participation in which children are expected to exercise agency as they participate in decision making. In this regard policies and procedures need to have the input of care givers and looked after children to ensure that children's rights are recognised and respected, social inclusion

is practised, and the best interests of children served. The organisation must be able to accommodate and be responsive to a process of administration that includes child participation. Some specific considerations for making children's participation local and specific to the context of Trinidad and Tobago were discussed in Chapter Nine. This discussion of cultural sensitivity took into account the similarities and differences of other Caribbean territories and the implications of adopting a universal approach to children's participation. Using the experiences of the children at H1 and H2, some specific aspects of caring were considered for promoting culturally relevant practice. As highlighted in this study, the key challenges to children's participation lie in the legal, social and cultural systems. The manager of H2 described the experience as 'First world standards and expectations with a third world infrastructure' (H2 Manager, 2012), though "first world" standards and expectations are not necessarily met in the "first world" either. The Manager argues that the attitudes and resources which are needed for meeting acceptable international standards of care are deficient. Budgets must therefore meet the financial cost of participatory work with looked after children to ensure that they have opportunities to develop their strengths, receive training in decision making processes such as preparation for leaving care, and contribute as far as possible to decisions which affect them.

Children's participation promotes children's agency and self-determination. The multiple realities of looked after children are considered in developing an understanding of children's participation and how it can promote positive experiences for children. Despite the thrust to de-institutionalise child care practice

internationally, residential child care in Trinidad and Tobago will continue to be a central element of child care and this strengthens the argument made in this study for the positive visibility of looked after children through the facilitation of their participation. The approval of a budget allocation of $26 million (GBP2,600,000) in 2013 in support of a modernisation programme for children's residences (Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, 2013) means that this is an opportune time to secure the recommendations developed in this study for a transformational approach to children's participation as a fundamental pillar in child care.

### 10.3.1: Children's agency and children's participation in care

When children are encouraged to participate in decision making process, the outcomes better reflect choices that are made in their best interest (Lansdown, 2001). However, for this to be achieved, it is recommended that children's rights in care, including participatory roles and responsibilities, should be clearly identified and embedded within a regulatory process that is described by a charter of rights such as the UNCRC. The charter of rights must be interpreted in the social context of looked after children in a way that recognises children's individual differences based on their developmental stage or capacity for agency. These guidelines will increase the capacity of children as decision makers as they become more aware of their rights and able to monitor their outcomes. To complement this, a policy position must be established to support positive views about children and childhood in care such that they are encouraged to contribute to decision making. This would ensure that all involved will have a clear sense of who the children are that they engage with and

how they should participate with children according to their individual and cultural differences.

### 10.3.2: A special consideration for modern ICTs

Looked after children will be in a better position to participate in decision making when they have opportunities to interact with adult decision makers and have access to information which broadens their perspectives on life (Tregeagle & Darcy, 2008). This will entail the provision of ICTs which will support access to information that will enable children to better participate in decision making processes. Safe access to ICTs is therefore important in enabling decision making. Safety issues include managing confidentiality and access to online content. Child protection policies as they relate to ICT use should be strengthened in ways that deter child predators and safeguard looked after children and their peers from victimising others.

ICTs should facilitate communication at all levels, where children should be able to communicate with each other and with caregivers. ICTs should also be used to facilitate a process of monitoring, surveillance and capacity building for both adults and looked after children. This will entail specialised security and tracking computer software, and special arrangements for computer use such as the schedules developed at the Homes and ICT training for staff. Additionally, the introduction of social care "e-services"[24] and ICT use in child welfare (Horton, 2012; Tregeagle & Darcy, 2008) will enable children and adults to have access to therapeutic support and

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[24] Social work e- services involve an electronic interface with children and adults.

monitoring services. It will also promote a shift in power dynamics through changes in 'discursive practices'[25] as some barriers to traditional ways of communicating are removed (Fairclough, 1992; Tregeagle & Darcy, 2008). For example, there can be special e-services for children leaving care so that they can access information about relevant services or receive training that prepares them for citizenship, such as registering for identification cards, applying for drivers' licences and completing job applications.

### 10.3.3: Supporting healthy adult-child relations in residential care

10.3.3a: Restorative justice, care ethics and children's participation

Applying a combination of restorative justice and care ethics to participatory work can present a feasible means of enhancing the quality of care for children living in residential settings. Restorative justice approaches include restorative conferencing and informal restorative meetings and discussions as well as mediation and other conflict resolution strategies. Restorative justice is therefore a way of promoting children's participation and reducing the criminalisation of looked after children Littlechild & Sender, 2010; Taylor, 2006; Willmott, 2007).  The approach is consistent with the principles of participation, communication, care and justice and it presents an alternative to bureaucratic disciplinary processes as it does not rely on rigid procedures.  The structure of the Homes in the study provides a good opportunity for restorative work to be done and to be successful. The blend of formal and informal relationships and the nature of the children who will need to develop

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[25] 'Discursive practices' refers to the processes by which cultural meanings are produced and understood.

alternative problem solving skills based on their past experiences with abuse and neglect also provide ideal opportunities for restorative justice work. This approach should be coupled with activities that promote adults caring *with* children so that the message of justice and care is communicated clearly.

By caring *with* children, adults will acknowledge that children can contribute to their well-being in planning, service delivery and evaluation of services and adults will provide ample opportunities for children to demonstrate their agency and develop skills which foster independence. The looked after children will develop greater confidence to contribute to their present and future life spaces in non-threatening and responsible ways as they learn to appreciate how they influence their environment. Such mutual interdependence can also contribute to more trustful relationships between adults and children (Smith, 2011).

### 10.3.3b: Staff recruitment, training and motivation for participatory work

Having acknowledged that participatory work with looked after children requires caregivers who are confident enough to share power with children and who have the qualities associated with caring and nurturing relationships, a selection and recruitment process which supports these requirements is necessary. This will ensure that the child's needs remain at the centre of care relationships and at the same time balance professionalism with personal commitment. The process will therefore require an appropriate system for evaluating the personal qualities and personality traits or virtues of child care applicants, and a training regime which will harness self-

awareness, self-care and reflective skills so that workers value the role of using self in practice (Dewane, 2006; Ruch, 2000; Wosket, 1999). Standardised personality evaluation tools which measure emotional intelligence and personality traits will need to be included in the recruitment process. This means that an entire paradigm shift in the philosophy of child care in Trinidad and Tobago is needed.

A training policy framework will include:

1) The development of appropriate training modules for caregivers with a heavy focus on practical components, to be administered by training institutions.

2) The development of current staff and the training of new staff so as to build capacity in a modernised framework for child care which supports a shift in conventional ideas about children and childhood, with a focus on caring relationships.

A stipulated staff-child ratio that provides more individualised and responsive support for looked after children and the provision of living spaces which are designed to model family settings and encourage active child participation will support training. Also significant to the process is the realisation that increasing staff training and qualifications alone will not solve the problems associated with child care (Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998). Other issues to consider include the culture of homes, understanding how staff members make sense of change, how they see the need for change and come to terms with change situations, which create feelings of loss and despair (Marris, 1974). At the same time staff members need to maintain their self-worth and understand they are needed by the children and management. They should therefore be included in the change process as much as possible at every level. A useful

approach is to engage both adults and children in consultation sessions where they can work together to devise new care strategies. This is a very important finding of the study which needs to be carefully considered in developing a new approach to child care. The perceived losses and motivations of adults coming into child care work have to be taken into account - these were often revealed as wanting to rescue children from harm, to instil discipline or to avoid further harm to children. Promoting a shift in power relations between adults and children may lead adults to feel threatened with a loss of power and control, more so when this is perceived as an externally imposed mandate such as by the UN.

Helping caregivers to see children's rights and participatory work in a positive light may therefore be challenging and caregivers will require time to reach this position. The recommendation is that during the transformation process, managers should ensure that adult caregivers do not lose their sense of self-worth and that they are encouraged to contribute innovatively to the change process. The transition should also be made gradually rather than abruptly to allow time for reflection and expression of feelings and to develop creative responses to these thoughts and feelings.

In conclusion, taken together, the findings of this study do not support strong recommendations to discontinue residential child care but rather support the idea of repositioning the balance of power in adult-child relationships. The findings suggest the need for a re-examination of those characteristics such as traditional values, roles, responsibilities, managerialism and other policies which define the bureaucratic

structures. The study supports arguments that child care systems need to focus on strengthening relationships between children and adults  (Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2012; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Smith, 2011) while taking a cautious approach to standardising systems and adopting risk-averse approaches which overprotect children (Munro, 2001). It further provides a basis for the exploration of how adults and children redefine their space within this structure of relationships through a realignment of their perspectives on children's participation.   Taking a more transformational approach to child care better reflects the requirements of the UNCRC and the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as set out in Chapter 1:01 (The Recognition and Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms).

The recommendations outlined describe a discourse that situates the participation of children in the process of decision making as a central and critical pillar in the construction of an enabling environment which seeks to serve their best interests. This environment does not discount paternalism nor does it undermine the value of the right of children and adults to a participative democracy. It describes the use of assets of all stakeholders in support of sustainable outcomes for children. Policies and legislation which support children's participation are deemed important to the process (Crimmens & West, 2004) but in a way that recognises and respects the agency of both adults and children and avoids resistance to change. Embedded in the recommendations is the recognition of the need to reorient the perspective and practice of adults as care givers to take a dynamic and relational view of children's participation.

## 10.4: Strengths and Limitations of the study

The study is the first of its kind in Trinidad and Tobago and therefore provides data which could usefully inform aspects of the review of the formal child protection system which is currently underway. Particularly useful to the new system should be the suggestions of how looked after children can contribute to policy level decision making and their everyday care. The findings can be useful for guiding policy makers on how to achieve sustainable growth and human development as it relates to marginalised children - the second pillar of the government's medium term policy framework 2011-2014, which is also aligned to the Millennium Development Goals (Ministry of Planning and the Economy, 2011).

This study will potentially be beneficial to all those working in direct practice with looked after children and policy makers in child care and protection, and to looked after children themselves. But it will only be helpful in these ways if its findings are disseminated and attended to. If they are successfully disseminated, children and caregivers will gain insights into the practicalities involved in applying participatory processes as a means of promoting affective caring. The research also highlights important transition issues such as after care placements, career decision making, employment and needs for additional support, as also highlighted by earlier research (Stein, 2012). These issues should be carefully examined, especially as they relate to decision making as it promotes resilience, independence, critical thinking and active citizenship.

Because the study focused on looked after children in only two of the four government-approved residential settings in Trinidad and Tobago, and the children were not officially defined as mentally challenged or in conflict with the law, the findings should not be generalised to all looked after children. It was only incidental that a few children fell into these categories and that I had completed work with children in conflict with the law, as I did not initially set out to include them. However, my interaction with them revealed that their experiences and views were similar to those of the children in the study. This might be related to common experiences with adults and the bureaucratic structures which govern them.

## 10.5: Further research

A major strength of qualitative research is that it affords the researcher opportunities to focus on detailed accounts of specific social phenomena, but this may result in other areas being overlooked (Silverman, 2010). During a rigorous research process other issues, such as those found in this study, may surface, which will require further examination at some point. These include:

- The gendered aspects of children's decision making in care and agency and how caregivers influence these experiences.

- How close to face-to-face interaction do children come when engaging with ICTs and how does this experience influence children's individual and collective identities and agency?

- Further investigation is also needed to determine how adults who work in direct practice with looked after children, and eventually make the transition to managerial

roles, approach child care and how this impacts on the outcomes for children. Does a closer connection to the issues affecting children justify the need to include lower level staff in policy making or are the care issues more complex?

- What approaches to children's participation in decision making are most sustainable for looked after children over time?

- What is the impact of children's participation in decision making in care and how does this relate to their readiness for leaving care?

In conclusion, this thesis provides new ways of looking at old ideas related to helping relationships in social work, given the different context, experiences and approaches that have emerged. It has highlighted the importance of focusing on the processes involved in strengthening helping relationships, new ways of approaching child participation as it relates to caring, the sustained role of carers and the need to emphasise their self-development and self-care through support mechanisms. A balanced approach is presented where child rights are acknowledged and respected and adults' roles and responsibilities to provide support and guidance are welcomed.

- Comparison between 'regular' children and children in public care

- The inability of the culture member to be objective (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995)

- Group work skills vs teaching skills as effective methods of working with children in care. What's the difference?

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