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Enhancing Children’s Rights
Connecting Research, Policy and Practice

Edited by
Anne B. Smith
University of Otago College of Education, New Zealand
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The year 2014 marked the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) entering into force. Celebrations of this milestone recognised that significant progress has been made for children. For example, from 1999 to 2008 the number of primary school-age children not in school fell by 37 million, infant mortality is declining in most countries and 44 countries have banned corporal punishment.

However, there is a growing understanding that business as usual is not going to achieve the social, economic and political changes that are needed for every child to be healthy, educated, protected and participating. Leadership, innovation, planning, coordination and mobilising resources are critical to ensuring the full implementation of the convention so that children around the world can enjoy their rights.

The chapters in this book make it clear that many countries face challenges in ensuring that their child-protection systems respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children; understanding that some groups of children carry a disproportionate burden of poverty, with consequences for public health; recognising that more must be done to ensure that good-quality early childhood education is accessible to all children; and few countries have incorporated the UNCRC into domestic law.

Advocating for improvements in the status and well-being of children demands tireless communication of the evidence supporting change and the promotion of the human rights of children. There are times when evidence and rights are dismissed because they don’t fit the prevailing ideology or because people don’t fully understand children’s rights. However, one of the most effective ways to counter those ideological barriers is to uphold children’s right to be heard (Article 12 of the UNCRC) and bring a variety of children’s voices to the debate. Children’s voices are powerful and poignant. They deliver insights and realism that speak to the context of different children and reinforce the status of children as active citizens. The challenge for all of us is to ensure that the voices of even the youngest children can be heard.

As in other countries, child advocates in New Zealand are working to bring children’s voices to the fore, and are organising themselves to maximise impact and inspire greater political focus on children. Achieving public understanding of children’s rights and engagement in some of the issues remains a challenge but this engagement is a necessary part of creating change.

*Enhancing Children’s Rights* will make a valuable contribution to anybody who is determined to ensure that children’s rights are upheld and their
potential realised. It places children’s rights firmly at the centre of efforts to achieve social and economic justice for children and reminds us of the need for advocates to be bold in their use of rights-based arguments for change.

Deborah Morris-Travers
UNICEF NZ National Advocacy Manager

Notes

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The content of this book reflects the untiring efforts of advocates and researchers throughout the world who have made an impact on children’s rights, so I should like to acknowledge that their work is critical to this publication. To the politicians who are brave enough to champion children’s rights, long may your efforts continue. Thank you to the children and families who have participated in our research projects, for their input to our work. The support of the NZ-UK Link Foundation, whose award of a fellowship to me in 2013 allowed me to begin work on this book, was invaluable. I would also like to thank the contributing authors, many of whom produced their chapters under stressful conditions, including pressure of other work and illness. The work of colleagues who assisted with reviewing chapters; my husband, John Smith, for proofreading and reference checking; and Rachael Brinsdon, for formatting and checking the manuscript, is greatly appreciated.
Key Note

UNCRC is the abbreviation for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which is used throughout this book. CRC is the abbreviation used for the Committee on the Rights of the Child based in Geneva.
Contributors

**Priscilla Alderson** is based at the Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, UK. She has worked in sociological research since 1984 and has published on children’s rights, ethics and healthcare. Her books include *Young Children’s Rights* (2008), *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook* (with Virginia Morrow, 2011) and *Childhoods Real and Imagined: An Introduction to Critical Realism and Childhood Studies, Volume 1* (2013).

**Vinnarasan Aruldoss** is a research fellow at the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth at Sussex University, UK. Recently he completed his PhD at Edinburgh University on children’s and parent’s experiences of early-years provision. His research interests are in the areas of childhood, children’s rights, early-years provision and social policy. Previously he worked as a lead practitioner in India on children’s rights, human development and emergency response, with international non-governmental organisations, government and multilateral organisations. He holds a bachelor’s degree in statistics and a master’s degree in social work from Madras University, India.

**Liepa V. Boberiene** is a programme evaluator at the Office of Achievement and Accountability in Baltimore, US, who studies youth engagement and uses research to improve education policy. She has evaluated bullying prevention, early education, and civic education programmes in the US and Eastern Europe, and studied the resilience of vulnerable children and families, including children with disabilities, disengaged youth, and military families. For her PhD from Clemson University, US, her research centred on how youth harness new media to create opportunities for real-world activism in young democracies. She has received the Kimbrough and Melton Parents Award for Outstanding Achievement in International Family & Community Studies.

**Judith Cashmore** is a developmental psychologist based at Sydney Law School, Australia, who focuses on research on children’s involvement in civil and criminal proceedings in which decisions are made about children’s lives. She has been a consultant to various government agencies and state and federal government committees. She is an appointed member of the Judicial Commission of New South Wales and an adjunct professor at Southern Cross University, Australia. She was jointly awarded the 2013 Stanley Cohen
Distinguished Research Award by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts for outstanding research in the field of family and divorce.

**John M. Davis** is based at the University of Edinburgh, UK. He was Director of the BA in Childhood Studies and then Head of the Department of Educational Studies. He is now Professor of Childhood Inclusion. His research has examined participatory childhood research methods, and children and young people’s perspectives on inclusion, social justice and integrated working. His knowledge-exchange projects have supported children, families and professionals to collaboratively develop contemporary, innovative and inclusive children’s services. His work has also examined international approaches to multiprofessional working and increased our understanding of the factors that foster creative and innovative learning.

**Robbie Gilligan** is Professor of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, where he is also Associate Director (and co-founder) of the Children’s Research Centre. In addition he holds visiting appointments as Extraordinary Professor at the Optentia Research Programme in North West University, South Africa, and as a research fellow at the Danish National Centre for Social Research. He has served as President of Childwatch International Research Network (2009–2013) and is a member of the board of the European Scientific Association for Residential and Family Care for Children and Adolescents.

**Megan Gollop** is a senior research fellow at the University of Otago Children’s Issues Centre in Dunedin, New Zealand. She has an honours degree in psychology and a master of education, endorsed in counselling. She has been a researcher at the University of Otago for 25 years. Her work focuses on the rights and well-being of children and families as relevant to policy and practice, predominately sociolegal research concerning parental separation and divorce. She has a particular interest in children and young people’s perspectives and their participation in research.

**Anne Trine Kjørholt** is Professor at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management. She was the Director of NOSEB, developing an international master’s programme in childhood studies and a PhD programme in child research. She has led a number of large projects, including Cost Action on Children’s Welfare, and the Effects of Civil Society on Early Childhood Education and Care in Zambia and Ethiopia. Among her research interests are children’s rights and citizenship, early childhood care and education, childhood in cross-cultural perspectives and childhood as a symbolic space.
Jill D. McLeigh is based at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, US. She is the Assistant Editor for *Child Abuse & Neglect* and Symposia Editor for the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Her research looks at preventive measures and interventions to strengthen communities’ capacity for family support and mutual assistance, and the design and delivery of family services which promote child safety and well-being. She has been the recipient of the American Psychological Association’s Division of Psychologists in Public Service Outstanding Student Award and the South Carolina Professional Society on the Abuse of Children Community Award.

Gary B. Melton is based at the Kempe Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect in Aurora, Colorado, US. He is Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, Professor of Community and Behavioral Health in the Colorado School of Public Health, Adjoint Professor of Psychology at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs and Adjunct Professor of Family and Community Studies at Clemson University, US. He has received awards for distinguished contributions to research and public service from the American Professional Society on Abuse of Children, the American Psychological Association (four times, an unprecedented feat), two APA divisions, the American Psychological Foundation, and Prevent Child Abuse America.

Philip Mendes is the Director of the Social Inclusion and Social Policy Research Unit in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, Australia, and the lead author with Guy Johnson and Badal Moslehuddin of the major Australian text in this field, *Young People Leaving State Out-of-Home Care: Australian Policy and Practice* (2011). He is currently coordinating three leaving-care projects pertaining to youth justice, disability and an evaluation of Berry Street’s Stand by Me Program, and he hopes to commence an indigenous leaving-care project in the early 2015.

Francisco Pilotti specialises in social policy, demography, child welfare and social service management. He worked for the Organization of American States from 1987 to 2012 and held senior management posts, including Director of the Department of Social Development. He studied at the University of Chile and at Fordham University, New York, US. He has held teaching posts at the University of Chile, City University of New York and Universidad Diego Portales, Chile. He has published over 25 books and articles on social policy and children’s issues. He is currently advising the Chilean government on the reform of Chile’s child welfare system.

Gillian Pugh has worked throughout her life in the children’s sector, retiring from the position of Chief Executive of the children’s charity Coram in 2005.
She has advised governments on services for children and families, and published widely, including *London’s Forgotten Children: Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital* (2007) and *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years* (sixth edition, 2014). She advised the House of Commons Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families; reviewed the family justice system; chaired the Advisory Committee for the Cambridge Primary Review; and is co-author of the final report *Children, Their World, Their Education*.

**Rita Shackel** is Associate Dean (Teaching & Learning) and Associate Professor at Sydney Law School, Australia. She holds degrees in law, science (pure mathematics), psychology and education. She has worked as a lawyer, legal policy officer and academic in a range of settings. She has participated extensively on government, institutional and professional committees and working groups, and she has delivered professional training programmes to legal practitioners and judicial officers in Australia and overseas. She has worked and published widely in the field of children and the law. She is committed to public interest, social justice and community work.

**Anne B. Smith** is Emeritus Professor at the University of Otago College of Education, Dunedin, New Zealand, and Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University, New South Wales. She is the former Director of the Children’s Issues Centre, a research, education and advocacy centre. She has been involved in teaching, research, policy development and advocacy for children since the 1970s. Her research interests focus on children’s rights in the everyday settings of their lives, such as families and early childhood centres. She has written or edited several books, including *Children’s Voices, Children as Citizens, Learning in the Making, Global Pathways to Abolishing Physical Punishment* and *Understanding Children and Childhood*.

**Nicola Taylor** is the Director of the Children’s Issues Centre at the University of Otago, New Zealand. She is qualified in both social work and law, and she is a barrister and solicitor of the High Court. She carries out socio-legal research with children, parents and professionals. Her current research interests include children’s care arrangements following parental separation; relocation; ascertaining children’s views; family dispute resolution; international law and human-rights issues affecting children; and the ethics of research with children. She is also a board member of the Childwatch International Research Network based at CINDE in Columbia.

**E. Kay M. Tisdall** is Professor of Childhood Policy at the University of Edinburgh, UK, and Programme Director of the MSc in Childhood Studies. She is Codirector of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships.
She has been active in influencing policy as well as collaborative research work on children’s rights with national and international partners.

**Weijun Wang** was a high-school teacher and school administrator in China, where he completed his undergraduate study. His master’s is from Dunedin, New Zealand and his doctorate from Clemson University, US. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow in education and psychology in the University of Ottawa, Canada. His research involves the examination of youth culture and aggression, specifically bullying and its link to school climate, school transition, mental health, race and ethnicity, and literacy. He has been active in Chinese community activities, and he is interested in the neighbourhood behaviour of Chinese immigrant families and children in Western cultures.

**Carolyne Willow** started her career as a child protection social worker and has spent the past 25 years campaigning for children’s rights. She was national co-ordinator of the Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), and led the charity’s successful fight for transparency in restraint techniques in child prisons and initiated legal action against the government’s unlawful restraint. She has published on many aspects of children’s rights, and was the author and editor of CRAE’s annual State of Children’s Rights in England reports. Her book, *Children behind Bars. Why the Abuse of Child Imprisonment Must End* is to be published in early 2015.

**Ekaterina Yazykova** is based at the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University, US, and studies the protection of vulnerable populations, including children without parental care, and victims of family violence and armed conflict. She has worked in academic, intergovernmental and non-governmental settings on issues that promote recovery and develop confidence in trauma-affected individuals and groups. Her doctorate from Clemson University involved communities that were struggling with ethnic strife, poverty and a lack of personal security in Kosovo. She has worked on measures to make intercountry adoption safer, and reported on violations of the rights of disaster victims, victims of domestic abuse, prisoners and other vulnerable groups in the US.