An exploration of the potential for Co-construction of Safeguarding Policy in Early Years: A Welsh Context

Introduction

This literature review will explore the potential for participatory approaches to be adopted in the co-construction of policy design in the field of safeguarding. It is important to recognise that safeguarding can be a sensitive and complex concept for the individuals concerned (Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust, 2025). Despite this, the voices of those involved, including children, parents, guardians, professionals and other key stakeholders should be represented (Sherwood-Johnson and Mackay, 2020). This review comprises a critical analysis of existing literature outlining the process of co-construction and in turn identifies any recurring themes that could inform and support the conceptualisation of co-constructing of safeguarding policy. Given the persistent shortcomings and failings in safeguarding practice (Research in Practice, 2025; Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2024), this exploration is particularly pertinent and could position policy development as a potential mechanism to address some of the systemic challenges.

Safeguarding is a critical responsibility in early years education and care (Walsh *et al*., 2023; Burton and Reid, 2017) and it is everyone's duty to protect children from harm (Burton and Reid, 2018). Furthermore, this is outlined as a legal obligation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), specifically, Article 19, which states that children have a right to be protected from violence (UNICEF, no date). Safeguarding policy is the underpinning foundation to keeping children safe (NSPCC, 2025; Cocker *et al*. 2021). However, Ball *et al.* (2024) claim that despite a commitment from government at a policy level and practicing professionals, there remains a considerable challenge in developing and implementing effective policy in practice. Furthermore, according to Phippen (2025), the fragmented dynamics between policy makers, professionals and professional services creates a system that fails to meet the nuanced and distinct circumstances of affected individuals.

Policy development in safeguarding in the early years is a complex and multifaceted process (Buckler, 2025; Janssen, 2018). Canavan *et al.* (2022) assert that it

continues to be an ongoing dilemma at a political and societal level. Conceptually, safeguarding complex and multifaceted due to the number and variety of issues being faced by those at risk (Gillen and Canavan, 2023). It is this inherent complexity that contributes to the significant challenges of developing a cohesive and comprehensive public affairs policy framework. Furthermore, White *et al*. (2015) observe that safeguarding is a 'wicked problem' highlighting it as a moral, political and societal issue that is of such complexity and, as such, it does not lend itself to a one size fits all solution. The term 'wicked problem', coined by Ritttel and Webber (1973) denotes a problem that cannot be easily solved through conventional social planning strategies. However, Depuy and Defacqz (2021) believe that co-construction of policy has the potential to go some way toward solving 'wicked' problems.

Additionally, The British Academy (no date) state that the safeguarding landscape has undergone vast transformative change over the last century, not least in terms of how children are cared for, educated, perceived and valued. The current legislative framework for safeguarding in Wales aims to be robust and focussed (Social Care Wales, 2025). *The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* provides a robust foundation for the safeguarding agenda (Social Care Wales, 2025). Key responsibilities of this legislation include placing duties on organisations to protect and promote the safety and well-being of children and adults. The Act introduced Regional Safeguarding Boards; their function is to coordinate and organise safeguarding processes (Social Care Wales, 2025). Although safeguarding is a matter devolved to the Welsh Government, there is UK legislation which applies to the principality including the *Children Act 1989* and the *Children Act 2004*, which also play a pivotal role in co-ordinating, investigating and intervening in safeguarding matters in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021).

Currently policy in Wales aims to promote a shared safeguarding responsibility rather than imposing a statutory duty. However, despite the welcomed introduction of the *Rights of Children and Young persons (Wales) Measure 2011* (Croke and Hoffman, 2024), and its commitment to giving children a voice, Wales's (and the whole United Kingdoms') commitment to children's rights still has significant steps to take to ensure legislation puts children at the forefront of decision making (Crowley, 2012, p.8). In addition, The British Academy (2022) highlight their Childhood Policy

Programme which aimed to scrutinise the position of the state when considering children (and childhood). The programme aimed to pursue the goal of bringing together experts, policymakers, professionals and children in an effort to reframe the narrative around how children are perceived and considered in UK policy. However, the legislative basis for directing the UK and Wales's safeguarding strategies can be viewed as dated and do not always consider contemporary and contextual factors which align with the ever-evolving nature of safeguarding (Firmin, 2020; Orr, 2021; Holmes, 2022).

Currently, both UK and Welsh Safeguarding legislation (and subsequent policy and procedures) have been driven and designed by policymakers whose roles may not have a direct connection to the current lived experiences of children and their families (Rogowski, 2014; Parton, 2011). This reinforces the fact that safeguarding policy has been dominated by officials who are far removed from real-world experiences of families and professionals. Moreover, the safeguarding legislative system prioritises accountability and performance over relational and child centred practices (Munro, 2011). Additionally, the current policy situation fails to acknowledge the evolving complex and multifaceted nature of safeguarding (Firmin, 2020; Association of Directors of Children's Services [ACDS], 2025). This is supported by Nyathi (2022) who argues that a contextual approach is necessary to compliment the underpinning theoretical models, practical approaches and governmental priorities of the safeguarding process.

Co-construction

Terms such as co-design, co-develop, co-production, co-creation and co-construction are being used more frequently in the fields of research and policy to describe or characterise the process of shared participation between experts, stakeholders and those which decisions impact (McGill *et al.*, 2022). For the purposes of this piece of writing, the term co-construction will be used.

Co-construction has the potential to be a creative, innovative and adaptive approach to developing effective and responsive policy, fit for its intention. This vision is supported by Tsouvalis *et al.* (2025) who identified that innovation and creativity is fostered by the sharing of ideas, experiences and expertise in the sector – resulting in the design of policies which have the capability of conquering a range of complex

challenges. However, it could be argued that this approach is in contrast to some aspects of the current neo-liberal governmentalism of policy making. Where citizens are often perceived as having problems that need to be solved or as having a deficit of some kind as opposed to being valued or respected for themselves, their experiences and capabilities (Sherwood-Johnson and Mackay, 2020).

Tsouvalis *et al.* (2025) state that the process of co-construction can be more adaptive and responsive than current methods; stakeholders involved in the process are best placed to provide continuous and relevant feedback in real time. Tsouvalis *et al'*s (2025) paper, offers some significant and useful insights into co-construction in policy making, however, many of the policies included in their research are highlighted as not yet being fully implemented. This means that any long-term data on the outcome or efficacy of the policy design process and the impact of the policies created is limited.

According to Leino and Puumala (2020) the process of co-construction is becoming more popular globally due to its commitment towards creative approaches to reducing hierarchies and formalities between government officials and its citizens.

The role of parents and guardians is fundamental to the effective implementation of safeguarding measures for children. Equally, practitioners and professionals play a significant role in the implementation of safeguarding policy at a practical and grassroots level, and therefore have the potential to play a purposeful, informed and knowledgeable role in policy design and development (NSPCC, 2023). Including children, parents/ guardians, early years practitioners and professionals alongside government officials and experts in the field of safeguarding in the design and development process is key to appropriate, relevant, contextual and effective safeguarding policy (Parton, 2011 and Buckler, 2023).

Co-construction has been established as an effective way to design policy over recent years (OECD, 2020; Farr, 2017). Parton (2010) outlines that there should be a drive and a focus on collaboration and participation for the purpose of prevention by considering how to include broader perspectives in the process of safeguarding children. Buchanan and Sharma (2024) support this, stating that policy can make a bigger impact at practice level by gathering real world data from those impacted by policy.

This literature review aims to explore the potential for all stakeholders' involvement and participation in the development of safeguarding policy in the Early Years Sector in Wales. To do this, key themes specifically linked to the process of co-construction will be identified and critically analysed.

There is limited evidence in the current literature of co-construction of policy development within the field of safeguarding. However, the method of co-construction has been successfully adopted in other fields such as psychology and education (Reusser and Pauli, 2015), health (Thorburn *et al*., 2023; Farr, 2017), environmental issues (Yuan, 2024) and sustainability (Xu *et al*., 2023). The adaption of the co-constructive approach in these fields suggests the potential for its application in the safeguarding arena. This is consistent with Brandola-Gill, Arthur and Leng (2023) who state that co-construction holds significant theoretical value and potential for practical application as an effective strategy for translating research evidence into real-world policy making in a variety of fields, including safeguarding.

Mcwayne *et al*. (2020) explore how the Readiness through Integrative Science and Engineering [RISE] project in the United States used a collaborative method for early childhood science education and teacher professional development. This method was not utilised for the purpose of policy development, however Mcwayne *et al's*. (2020) paper outlines some key advantages to co-constructing for improving children's education. These include deeper stakeholder engagement, more responsive approaches, and a stronger alignment between practice and development. Furthermore, Ruscoe (2025) states that children in Australia are successfully demonstrating their competence at assisting policy development in a meaningful way.

Emergent Themes

Theme 1: Power

Aside from the practical challenges of co-construction, there is potential for more intricate challenges such as power imbalances (Goulart and Falanga. 2022; Farr, 2017)

Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha (2018) explore the concept of co-construction between government officials and external stakeholders. This paper explores how

non-governmental organisations (NGO's) in Canada are contributing to policy design through the process of co-construction between government and external partners. Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha (2018) use the term 'interactive policymaking' as a way of defining the engagement and co-construction process. According to Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha (2018) policy reflects the dynamics of power within society, highlighting that power can be unevenly distributed. Moreover, Tsouvalis *et al.* (2025) believe that despite the intention of the process of co-construction to democratise decision-making, there is the potential for imbalances of power to occur. If a group of stakeholders are deemed as having more influence or power over another, the concept of co-construction may be challenged. Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha's (2018) paper highlights the potential for a clash between government officials and environmental organisations in terms of power. This could potentially occur in the field of safeguarding in the early years with the presence of power imbalances in the complex relationships between any of the participating stakeholders. Consideration of the contemporary failings in safeguarding policy versus the autonomy of families to nurture and develop young people may lead to a dissonance. This is further supported by Goulart and Falanga (2022) who state that the different levels in knowledge and experience possessed by individuals, and the concept that technical and formal knowledge often dominate local or experiential knowledge, can result in hierarchies which then limit the potential of successful co-construction and participation.

Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha's (2018) paper identifies uneven power dynamics, and failure of government officials to value the contributions of others as significant challenges in the co-construction process. This could suggest that the final decision-making authority will ultimately be retained by government officials, which may limit the influence or impact that non-governmental figures feel they can have, resulting in a lack of depth to contributions, and a laissez-faire attitude toward commitment, ultimately rendering the process unproductive.

Heley and Moles (2012) highlight the concept of uneven collaboration, where some partnerships and networks will thrive as a result of shared values and experiences and others may find challenging because of structural barriers. This paper identifies that involving stakeholders such as patients and members of the public in decision making processes can help align any interventions with the needs of those using the

service (Heley and Moles, 2012). A point that is highlighted in the field of policy making by Lefton and Fleming (2024) who state that considering lived experiences is key to ensuring policy is fit for purpose. There are limitations with Heley and Moles (2012) research; it took place in West Wales, a small, geographical and rural area. What might be effective in a small county may not be applicable on a broader geographical scale. The work took place in 2012; there have been many societal shifts in Wales in the subsequent 13 years, not least the Covid pandemic and a change in UK Government leadership. However, these findings can offer several key signposts for policymakers in health, social services, research, and local government collaboration. Ultimately, policymakers and government officials have an opportunity to create meaningful engagement rather than merely a symbolic or tokenistic approach.

According to Turnhout *et al.* (2020) co-construction has the potential to foster mutuality, trust, respect, reciprocity and equality amongst a diverse group of partners. However, they continue by adding that despite this, power asymmetries are still likely to exist which can favour those considered elite. This supports the concept of hierarchy development within groups; those at the pinnacle of the structural hierarchy have an established elevated power base, typically initiate the collaborative process, typically define the terms of reference and scope, possess the greatest resources and command governmental authority and communication power (Turnhout *et al.,* 2020). This relates to Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha (2018)'s ideas on whether final decision-making is retained by those with the most power and raises the critical question of whether participation is genuinely valued as a method for co-construction or if it is merely tokenistic gesture which lacks any substantive impact.

This concept closely relates to Arnstein's 1969 ladder of participation (Varwell, 2022) and Hart's 1992 ladder of participation (Rahimi *et al*., 2023). Both ladders illustrate the varying degrees of influence and power individuals have in the decision-making processes that impact them, ranging from non-participation to full participation with a range of levels in-between. Both Rahimi *et al*. (2023) and Varwell (2022) conclude that ladders of participation can be a valuable tool to understand and improve participation. In considering safeguarding policy development these ideas would need to be applied critically; assessing context, equity and the evolving nature of the

participatory process to ensure it is effective. This will be further explored further in subsequent work.

Gray, Purdy and Ansari (2022) allude to the fact that power imbalances can contribute to the ‘wickedness’ of problems. Furthermore, they address the fact that co-construction should result in a deeper understanding of the problem and more effective solutions than taking a siloed approach. It is also recognised that where there is unequal power, collaboration may be disproportionate, or individuals may be pressured into decisions that are not a true representation of their views and feelings (Gray, Purdy and Ansari, 2022).

Croke and Hoffman (2022) believe that intervention is necessary to improve opportunities for all stakeholders to exert their power in the decision-making processes that impact them. Furthermore, Croke and Hoffman (2022) argue that due to the lack of power and influence that children have on matters which affect them, there is a need to focus on power relations between adults and children and distribute the power more evenly.

Fousiani (2020) articulates that relationships are rarely equal and that ‘power asymmetry’ within organisations is inherent and is made up of those with feelings of power and those who feel powerless. Furthermore, Gray, Purdy and Ansari (2022) add that groups formed to address a specific problem can often fail in achieving their objective due to power asymmetry. Moreover, Goulart and Falanga (2022) claim that co-construction is rarely harmonious, in part, due to competing interests and priorities, which can decrease momentum and limit success co – constructed outcomes.

Filipe, Renedo and Marston (2017) believe that co-construction has the potential to advance beyond tokenistic participation and superficial consultation toward a more balanced and equitable power distribution. This makes the process more meaningful and genuine, based on values, rights, respect and trust.

A mitigating strategy for challenges around power dynamics as stated by Crompton (2018) is to employ the use of a facilitator to govern any power struggles. In addition, Fillingham, Smith and Sealey (2023) state that another strategy for managing power dynamics within the co-construction process is to build confidence in those

contributing to construct a positive atmosphere where individuals can voice their opinions in a genuine and authentic way.

Theme 2 – Bureaucracy and sectoral siloes

Where government is involved in processes, there is likely to be a necessary element of bureaucracy which may impact the flexibility required during co-construction (Dupuy and Defacqz, 2022; Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018). This bureaucracy, along with siloed approaches to working, can limit stakeholder collaboration. It could be argued that a whole systems approach would be more beneficial to ensuring true collaboration (ADCS, 2025). A whole systems approach is an effective way of tackling complex, multifactorial problems by taking an integrated perspective, incorporating all systems and stakeholders to create effective, long term, durable and combined efforts where policy design is viewed as interconnected rather than isolated (Fallowfield and Cairns, 2025). Collaboration should be cross sector, cross discipline and stretch across bureaucratic levels. In contrast to currently used traditional siloed methods, which includes individual departments/ stakeholders operating independently, often duplicating work and failing to share goals, co-construction can help move away from siloed approach and bureaucracy (Scott and Gong, 2021).

Department of Health and Social Care (2020) believe that bureaucracy, rules and systems are essential in complex political processes, however they can burden and impact the efficacy of practical processes. Reducing bureaucracy and simplifying processes supports stakeholders in feeling empowered to focus on the task in question. Co-construction has the potential to value and promote the iterative process (McGill *et al*., 2022). Additionally, Gofen, Rønning and Sønderskov (2024) refer to the importance of direct, open and effective interactions and communication between bureaucratic officials and citizens to shape policy for individuals and society more broadly. However, according to Sørensen and Torfing (2024) bureaucracy can result in a failure to foster an iterative, open dialogue which focuses on experiences, needs and desires.

Bureaucratic approaches are often linear and rigid. Sørensen and Torfing (2024) question whether ‘linear policy models’ are best placed to solve today’s ‘wicked’

problems. They continue by claiming that a bureaucratic approach can impede progress, focus on rules, and prevent the delivery of effective, robust and responsive approaches to societal issues. In contrast, co-construction can be useful in solving 'wicked problems,' where solutions need to evolve to be fit for purpose (Leixnering *et al*., 2025).

Bureaucratic processes value the technical, institutional or political contributions whereas co-construction values lived experiences, local insight as well as expert knowledge (McGann, Wells and Blomkamp, 2021). Furthermore, for co-construction to be effective, relationships, trust and effective communication are key, often factors that are prove challenging to (or completely absent from) bureaucratic systems.

The transient instability of political, bureaucratic priorities and commitments can affect the smooth running of the co-construction process, often leading to interruptions and changes in focus and priorities. This can negatively impact or impede the effectiveness of the process of co-construction. However, Depuy and Defacqz (2021) believe that co-construction has the potential to cut through the bureaucracy of policy development. Furthermore, Depuy and Defacqz (2021) believe that co-construction has the potential to bridge the gap between government and its citizens.

Crompton (2018) states that co-construction represents a transition from the traditional bureaucratic approach to policymaking to a participatory and joined up approach. Furthermore, Gray, Purdy and Ansari (2022) address the fact that co-construction should result in a deeper understanding and more effective solution finding than a bureaucratic and siloed approach. Crompton (2018) states that co-construction, though underutilised, offers a valuable opportunity to engage in deliberative conversations between the bureaucratic officials and everyday citizens. Furthermore, they stipulate than an effective co-construction framework can mitigate for the traditional bureaucratic process.

Theme 3 – Inclusion and Empowerment

Co-construction has the potential to improve inclusion and empowerment ensuring everyone involved has equal representation (Farr, 2017). Fillingham, Smith and Sealey (2023) highlights that for co-construction to be effective, a clear and inclusive approach is necessary, with flexibility to meet the needs of those participating.

Notably, Fung (2015) believes that ensuring inclusivity is one of the most influential factors that impacts the success or failure of co-construction.

Tsouvalis *et al.* (2025) explored five empirical examples where co-design/ co-production has been used in environmental policy design. Tsouvalis *et al.* (2025) identified a range of advantages to this approach to policy design. Firstly, where relevant stakeholders were included in the co-construction of policy, a range of diverse perspectives and knowledge could be gathered, resulting in policies being more effective, relevant and better informed, and subsequently being better suited to addressing real world issues (Tsouvalis *et al.,* 2025). Furthermore, Tsouvalis *et al.* (2025) identified that there was an enhanced legitimacy to the policy.

Furthermore, Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha (2018) found that the method of engagement used by the Canadian government significantly impacted the level of engagement, inclusion and empowerment. Their paper highlighted that the government utilised a range of formal and informal invitations in their co-constructive approach. Formal approaches to engagement included committees, consultations and hearings. Informal approaches included personal connection, unofficial discussions and networking (Wellstead, Evans and Sapeha's, 2018). Formal bureaucratic processes applied were prohibitive because participants were sampled from existing networks, relationships or exclusive groups that met a specific, restrictive criterion. This process significantly limits the range of participants as it obstructs co –construction's aim of fair representation and broader inclusivity. Informal approaches could be more inclusive and productive. This is largely because informal mechanisms include those who are not in positions of power (e.g. young children) and those who are unfamiliar with complex bureaucratic paradigms. This approach supports the development of shared values and facilities genuine contributions from important stakeholders; the informality reduces the exclusivity of rigid and rigorous corporate structures, ultimately leading to feelings of empowerment.

When considering inclusivity, ensuring that all stakeholders in the safeguarding process have equal representation could be challenging (Farr, 2017). If certain stakeholders are harder to reach or less willing to engage – this would raise the critical question of if all stakeholders are truly represented and included (Tsouvalis *et*

al., 2025). Croke and Hoffman (2024) believe that true participatory methods should be a process that is not only inclusive but safe, enabling and empowering to promote effective dialogue between children and professionals. However, Fillinigham, Smith and Sealey (2023) outline a challenge: being inclusive may not be easy, specifically when it comes to including experiences of all of those contributing, for example, due to time limitations.

Crompton's (2018) research found that participants of co-construction processes believed that the aim was to achieve a truly inclusive and genuine system which aligns with the needs of everyone. Furthermore, Clarke, Waring, and Timmons (2019) claim that during the process a culture of inclusivity should be created. A lack of empowerment can negatively impact the efficacy of the process, they continue that where groups start to disregard inclusion, momentum in the constructive process can be slowed down which can result in the eventual dissolution of the co-construction.

Heley and Moles (2012) outline that participatory methods and stakeholder engagement should be embedded into policy making and development and be viewed as the norm rather than the exception. Heley and Moles's (2012) paper explores how local governments in Wales collaborate to effectively deliver services to its service users. Whilst this research is not specifically focused on policy making, the findings from this research can offer key insight into policy making in important fields including healthcare, social care and education in Wales. This study highlights what influences service delivery, specifically, in children's services, as well as identifying factors that can enable and restrict the process of collaboration in this field. Moreover, there should be a focus on geographical inequalities, this will promote the concept that stakeholders receive consistent approaches. This is particularly important in safeguarding because of the contextual differences between geographical locations. A truly inclusive co-constructive approach should be applied to all regions to reflect true representation.

Croke and Hoffman (2024) purport that empowerment within the co-construction paradigm is about improving an individual's capability in order that they can exert power in decision making that affects them. Empowerment is a feature that is recognised in several examples of co-construction. OECD (2020) reflects on the

process of co-construction within education policy. This report validates the inclusion of professionals, children, parents and other stakeholders in creating and developing education policy, believing it to promote a shared understanding, empower all involved and to help bridge the gap between policy and practice. This emphasises the point that if co-construction can work in education policy, it has potential to work for safeguarding policy.

Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett (2018) state the term co-construction implies a level of empowerment of the stakeholders and that they are permitted the ability to meaningfully contribute to matters that affect them. Additionally, Crompton (2018) believes that the method of facilitation in co-construction can impact levels of empowerment; the more effective the facilitation the greater the sense of empowerment. Furthermore, Fung (2015) identifies the establishment of smaller groups as an effective strategy to promote equitable empowerment among participants, by fostering confidence to engage before contributing in a larger, broader forum.

When participants feel they are valued as ‘experts’ this can lead to ‘emotional empowerment’. This fosters feelings of pride, belonging and motivation which can improve output (Metz *et al*., 2022). When there is clear communication and transparency over decision making and use of data, this builds trust and reinforces legitimacy of the process and consequently participants feel empowered. Reflexivity and critical thinking should be encouraged by all participants, especially professionals, by promoting reflective thinking about their own biases, power, positioning will support a more equitable and empowered response.

The direct involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process of policy design can build trust, ensure that voices are heard, their input valued, and diversity represented, all elements of feeling empowered. This is likely to result in those enacting to better accept and support the policy resulting in successful implementation and an increased buy in from stakeholders (Tsouvalis *et al.,* 2025; Buchanan and Sharma, 2024). Compton, Luetjens and Hart (2019) claim that stakeholder buy in is key to success. It can enhance the legitimacy of the policy developed; it can foster shared ownership leading to smoother implementation, transparency and inclusion. Furthermore, co-construction has taken place, and

stakeholders feel empowered by the process, there is likely to be less resistance or 'push back.'

Discussion.

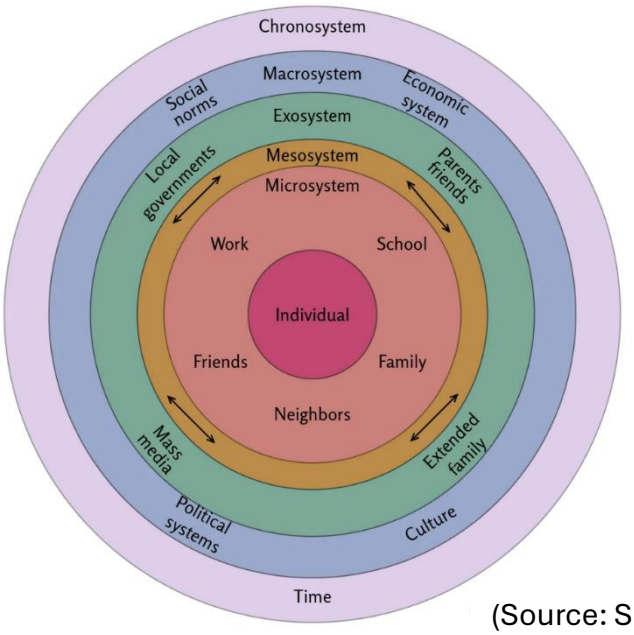
A. Potential paradigms for considering co-construction

This section will explore theoretical models that could be applied to underpin and facilitate the inclusion of stakeholders' voices through co-construction in developing safeguarding policy.

1) Ecological Systems Approach

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory has the potential to be an effective lens with which to view the fast-evolving safeguarding landscape. This ecological lens encourages exploration of the diverse social systems impacting individuals' experiences (Wroe, 2021). Contemporary approaches to safeguarding require a thorough understanding of the potential for harm to occur in extra familial situations such as peer groups, online and within communities; a contextual approach (Wilson, Diaz and Usubillaga, 2022). This demonstrates the need to consider the dynamics and interconnectedness of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System



(Source: Simply Psychology, 2025)

The reciprocal nature of those influences most closely associated with children's development and care relates to the microsystem within Bronfenbrenner's model (Anthony, 2022). Furthermore, the multiagency and collaborative approach to safeguarding and the inclusion of vested stakeholders in implementing policy links to the bi-directional nature of the mesosystem and exosystem. The macrosystem links to the concept of considering how government, culture, norms and values are a key aspect of safeguarding approaches (Richards and Gallagher, 2017). Finally, the chronosystem promotes the consideration that both risk and protective factors evolve over time which is crucial as safeguarding is a long-term process (Gonzales, 2020). Phippen (2025) highlights the importance of paying due attention to the broader concept of the ecosystem rather than viewing them as distinct areas, shifting the paradigm towards a more integrated approach to safeguarding.

2) Rights Approach

When viewed through a rights lens, safeguarding policy directly impacts the rights and needs of children and young people, in addition to those who care for them. Children's rights should, therefore, be a central consideration to any policy design; Ogle and Vincent (2022) emphasise that participatory rights are ratified by the requirements of key legislation such as the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 through the UK's socio-legal context.

Using a rights lens to analyse safeguarding policy ensures decision making is grounded in human and children's rights, respect, dignity and participation (McCafferty, 2024). This is important because it empowers children; giving them a voice, challenging bias by addressing forms of discrimination and promotes ethical practice need more on participatory

However, Leino and Puumala (2020) claim that co-construction could be a response to represent a 'trend' for participation instead of a genuine approach towards making creative, responsive and significant change.

B. Policy context

Delahunty (2019) reflects on the strengths of the *Children Act 1989*, also stressing that some elements may render it somewhat outdated; such as the changes in family

dynamics, increased complexities in safeguarding, underfunding, tension between support and intervention and an over focus on legal and procedural duties. Similarly, Association of Directors of Children's Services [ACDS] (2019) outlined limitations with the *Children Act 2004* including confusion over decision making responsibilities, over reliance on process, inconsistent messaging from government and a shortage of professionals to be able to implement it effectively. Aynsley-Green (2019) proposed there should be a new Children Act where contemporary and contextual needs of children are central.

This strategic perspective is reflected globally. The initiative by 'Children in All Policies' [CAP] (2024) is prioritising the aim of creating a partnership to ensure that children and young person's voices are heard in both political and societal realms (CAP, 2024). Additionally, in Wales, Children in Wales (2025a) state that the Welsh government funded initiative, 'Young People' aims to hear and empower children with the purpose of influencing decision making and policy in Wales. Furthermore, Children in Wales (2025b) outline that the National Participation Standards provide a framework for promoting and including children's voice in the design, delivery and evaluation of services across Wales.

Given that children and young people in the early years sector are directly affected by these policies, their involvement in developing and shaping them should be a key consideration. This is a concept which is directly linked to Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that children have the right to be heard in matters that affect them and are capable of expressing their opinions (UNICEF, no date). This is supported by The British Academy (2022) who state that incorporating children's voice into policy should be a priority, whenever and wherever appropriate. Croke and Hoffman (2024) support this, stating that by empowering children, they are better able to exert their rights in matters that affect them, doing this can hold others to account. Furthermore, DosReis *et al*. (2024) believe that policy can be profoundly impacted by failing to include children in their development. DosReis *et al*. (2025) further highlight that children must be actively involved in policies that impact them and affect their lives. Additionally, they continue by identifying that children's mental health can be negatively impacted by policy that affects them and more importantly, excluding children from policy development can lead to policy that unintentionally harms them reinforcing the benefits of evidence-based child-inclusive policy making (DosReis *et*

al., 2025). Furthermore, the authors claim that to understand the impact of policy on children's mental health, children's voices must be included in the development of policy. DosReis *et al*. (2025) ultimately call for a paradigm shift from developing policy where decisions are made about children to developing policy where decisions are made with children; participation. There are however limitations to the work of DosReis *et al*. (2025), their calls for action may stem from a values perspective and lack any reference to any empirical data. Whilst advocating for including children in policy development – they offer little in the way of strategies and that there could be a focus on rights of children over feasibility. However, evidence points to the need for a focus on how best to incorporate children's voice and improve participation, focusing on how children and their diversity, can successfully drive policy development (Horgan and Kennan, 2021). McGann, Wells and Blomkamp (2021) discuss the original approach of 'innovation labs' being used by governments globally to inventively solve real world problems. The aim of these is to reflect a change in direction towards a more productive approach to developing policy which focuses on values such as empathy, creativity and responsiveness.

The Inclusion of children in safeguarding issues can be challenging (Toros, 2021). One barrier to including children in the development process of safeguarding policy is the perception of children's capacity to contribute in a meaningful way. Aynsley-Greene (2018) is a staunch advocate for recognising and respecting children as competent and having capacity when it comes to decision making, in particular in the policy making process. Furthermore, Aynsley-Green (2018) states that children are often underestimated and marginalised in systems that view them through a deficit lens. However, Ruscoe (2025) highlights that there is increasing realisation that children are competent to contribute effectively to matters that affect them.

The social construct of the child has changed and evolved with time and context (Heywood, 2018; Norozi and Moen, 2016). Historically, young children have been viewed as 'small people' with no distinction between adulthood and childhood. Children were undervalued in Middle Age society due to high infant mortality rates (Muller, 2018). The seventeenth century saw children begin to be viewed as distinct to adults (Aries, 1960), this notion being cemented by philosophers Rousseau and Locke, who believed children should be seen as free, pure and innocent (Pouwells, 2023). Philosophers of the 18th century began to emphasize specific needs in terms

of caring for and protecting children and supporting their development, therefore changing their status within society (Power, 2022; Batten, 2020). Early in the 19th century, perceptions of children were evolving, being viewed not only as equals to adults but also as competent and capable beings (Dasen, 2022). Mcculloch (2020) states that the introduction of education reforms led to children being viewed in a more positive light with the potential to contribute to society. However, despite these positive changes, some literature highlights the adultism perspective; a view that positions adults as inherently superior to children which can result in systematic marginalisation of children's voice, rights and agency (Aynsley-Green, 2018). Ultimately, adultism is a form of age-related discrimination (Freutel-Funke and Wanka, 2025). This perspective can undermine Article 12 of the UNCRC – children's rights to participation, provide a justification for exclusion from decision making processes (Corney *et al*., 2021), reinforce inequalities in safeguarding, education and justice systems (Vranješević, 2020) and negatively impact children's worth and agency (Németh *et al*., 2025). According to Corney *et al*. (2021) adultism must be challenged to reposition childhood as a valid and valuable position and recognise children as rights holders with a unique and perceptive set of perspectives to be utilised for the betterment of society. Kosher and Ben-Arieh (2020) state that historically, children have been viewed as passive in issues that directly impact them, and subsequently they are perceived as incapable of influencing or contributing to the systems that directly affect them. However, in contrast, recognising their potential, Cartmel *et al.* (2023) and Halpenny (2020) explore the use of contemporary, innovative and creative methodologies to engage with children to harvest their valuable insight. One such approach is the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017). The Mosaic approach will be explored in more depth in later work for its potential as a participatory method of including children in policy development.

In the last fifteen years, since the formation of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government, an authoritarian neoliberal approach to keeping children safe and considering welfare has emerged (Parton, 2014). This is important because it has led to a landscape where support and assistance has been reduced whilst simultaneously increasing the level of surveillance, regulation and control over those most vulnerable. As such, Parton (2014) believes that the first quarter of this century has relied on a 'top-down' approach rather than a 'bottom-up' approach to

governing and executing the safeguarding agenda. ‘Top-down’ being an administrative approach which lacks stakeholder engagement and ‘bottom-up’ being an approach that allows for a more participatory approach to meet specific needs (Imperial, 2021). Balamurugan (2021) claims that whilst the top-down approach can be beneficial because it has structure and clarity, efficient allocation of resources and clear lines of accountability and direction, ‘bottom-up’ can be more effective in policy development because it ensures a more responsive, flexible, adaptive and innovative approach to policy making. Furthermore, Leino and Puumala (2020) believe that co-construction moves towards a more multi-directional approach to solving problems in contrast to a top-down or bottom-up approach.

Conclusion

This literature review has illustrated both the urgency and the complexity of improving safeguarding policy in Wales. The literature reflects a fragmented system that is shaped by changing priorities, historical contexts and persistent power imbalances where policy is shaped by those removed from the lived experiences of children and families. The evidence also indicates that robust existing legislative frameworks, implementation and interpretation remains inconsistent. As such safeguarding continues to be treated as a bureaucratic endeavour rather than a relations and rights-based practice.

The exploration has identified that while co-construction offers promising potential in the design of safeguarding policy within the Early years sector in Wales, its success is dependant on navigating deep-rooted structural challenges such as power and representation. The literature has demonstrated that power, whether between government officials and external stakeholders or between adults and children, can significantly shape the dynamics of co-construction and participation. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that without proactive strategies to mitigate these asymmetries, the process of co-construction is at risk of becoming a symbolic and meaningless gesture rather than a meaningful process.

Additionally, whilst bureaucracy and sectoral siloed approaches remain embedded features of policymaking which can impede the flexibility, collaboration and responsiveness, co-construction emerges as a genuine alternative. It offers an

authentic substitute that break through rigid, formal systems by fostering inclusive, iterative and cross sector engagement.

The evidence presented refers to the fact that inclusion and empowerment are not only desirable features of co-construction but are fundamental to its success. Valuing equal representation, diverse contribution and fostering confidence in stakeholders are critical for shaping effective safeguarding policy in the Early Years. Through deliberate and thoughtful facilitation, inclusive engagement strategies and contextually sensitive approaches, co-construction has the potential to transform, empower and enhance safeguarding policy.

Reference List

Anthony, E. (2022) 'Framing Childhood Resilience Through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: A Discussion Paper', *Cambridge Educational Research e-Journal*, 9, no page number. https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.90564

Aries, P. (1960) *Centuries of Childhood: Asocial history of family life*. New York: Random House.

Association of Directors of Children's Services [ACDS] (2019) *Reflections on the Children Acts 1989 and 2004*. Available at: https://www.adcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ADCS_Reflections_on_the_Children_Acts_1989_and_2004_FINAL.pdf (Accessed: 21 June 2025).

Association of Directors of Children's Services [ACDS] (2025) *ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Research – Phase 9.* Available: adcs-safeguarding-pressures-phase-9-final.pdf (Accessed: 21 June 2025).

Aynsley-Green, A. (2018) *The British Betrayal of Childhood : Challenging Uncomfortable Truths and Bringing about Change.* London: Taylor and Francis Group.

Aynsley-Green, A. (2019) 'Thirty years on, has the Children Act changed family life for the better?', *The Guardian*, 13 November. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/nov/13/children-act-changed-family-life-children-better (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

Balamurugan, K. (2021) 'A Critical Assessment of the Value of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Public Policy Implementation Theories, with Reference to the Case of Implementation of Passport Seva: An eGovernance Policy in India', *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, *67*(4), pp. 525-539. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1177/00195561211051517

Ball, E., McManus, M., McCoy, E. and Quigg, Z. 'Implementation of Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements Regarding Exploitation of Young People: Aligning Policy and Practice Using Normalisation Processing Theory', *Journal of Applied Youth Sciences,* 7, 449–468. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-024-00133-2

Batten, J. (2020) 'John Locke and Rousseau: Changing Attitudes to Childhood and Depictions in Art' *The Cultural Me*, 22 May. Available at: https://thecultural.me/john-locke-and-rousseau-changing-attitudes-to-childhood-and-depictions-in-art-603466 (Accessed: 16 January 2025).

Brandola-Gill, J., Arthur, M., and Leng, R. I. (2023) 'What is co-production? Conceptualising and understanding co-production of knowledge and policy across different theoretical perspectives', *Evidence & Policy*, *19*(2), pp. 275-298. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16420955772641

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Harvard University Press: Massachusetts.

Buchanan, C. and Sharma, N. (2024) 'People-centred and participatory policymaking' *Policy Lab*, 19 November. Available at: https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/19/people-centred-and-participatory-policymaking/ (Accessed: 04 July 2025).

Buckler, R. (2023) *Developing Child-Centred Practice for Safeguarding and Child Protection; Strategies for Every Early Years Setting*. London: Routledge.

Buckler, R. (2025) 'Safeguarding 2025: What the latest reforms mean for early years settings' *Nursery World*, 25 February. Available at: Nursery World - Safeguarding 2025: What the latest reforms mean for early years settings (Accessed: 03 July 2025).

Burton, S. and Reid, J. (2017) *Safeguarding and Protecting Children in the Early Years.* 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Burton, S. and Reid, J. (2018) 'Introduction', in Burton, S. and Reid, J. (eds) *Safeguarding and protecting children in the early years*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Canavan, J., Malone, P., Parton, N., Gillen, A. and Mulvihill, A. (2022) 'Focussing on the big picture', in Canavan, J., Devaney, C., McGregor, C., Shaw, A. (eds),*Understanding System Change in Child Protection and Welfare*. Milton Keynes: Taylor and Francis.

Cartmel, J., Irvine, S., Harrison, L., Barblett, L., Borbongie-Harris, F., Lavina, L. and Hadley, F. (2023) 'Conceptualising the education and care workforce from the perspective of children and young people', *Frontiers in Education*, 8, pp. 1-10. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1167486

Children Act 1989, c.41. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

Children Act 2004, c.31. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents (Accessed: 17 July 2025).

Children in All Policies [CAP] 2030 (2024) *What we do*. Available at: https://cap-2030.org/what-we-do/ (Accessed: 21 June 2025).

Children in Wales (2025a) *Young People*. Available at: https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/children-young-people/young-wales/ (Accessed: 21 June 2023).

Children in Wales (2025b) *National Participation Standards*. Available at: https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/children-young-people/young-wales/our-work/national-participation-standards/ (Accessed: 21 June 2025).

Clark, A. (2017) *Listening to Young Children: A guide to understanding and using the Mosaic approach*. 3rd edn. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Clarke, J., Waring, J. and Timmons, S. (2019) 'The challenge of inclusive coproduction: The importance of situated rituals and emotional inclusivity in the coproduction of health research projects', *Social Policy Administration*, 53, pp. 233-248. https://doi.org/10.1111/spol12459

Cocker, C., Cooper, A., Holmes, D. and Bateman, F. (2021) 'Transitional Safeguarding: presenting the case for developing Making Safeguarding Personal for young people in England', *The Journal of Adult Protection,* no page number. https://doi.org/10.1108/JAP-09-2020-0043

Corney, T., Cooper, T., Shier, H. and Williamson, H. (2021) 'Youth participation: Adultism, human rights and professional youth work', *Children and Societies*, 36 (4), pp. 677-690. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12526

Croke, R. and Hoffman, S. (2024) 'A response to decentralised governance of human rights: a Children's Rights Approach in Wales', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 28 (7), pp. 1189-1207. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2023.2236030

Crompton, A. (2018) 'Inside co-production: Stakeholder meaning and situated practice', *Social Policy Administration*, 53 (2), pp. 219-232. https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12466

Crowley, A. (2012) *Is anyone listening? The Impact of children's participation on policy making.* PhD Thesis. Cardiff University. Available at: https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/27397/ (Accessed: 21 June 2025).

Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership (2024) *Annual Report Highlights Persistent Challenges in Child Safeguarding.* Available at: Annual Report Highlights Persistent Challenges in Child Safeguarding | Croydon Safeguarding (Accessed: 1 July 2025).

Dasen, P. (2022) 'Culture and Cognitive Development', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology,* 53 (7-8), pp. 789-816. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221092409

Delahunty, J. (2019) 'The 30th anniversary of the Children Act 1989; Is it still fit for purpose?' *The Family Justice System*, 31 January. The 30th Anniversary of The Children Act 1989: Is It Still Fit For Purpose? (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

Department of Health and Social Care (2020 *Call for evidence outcome; Busting bureaucracy: empowering frontline staff by reducing excess bureaucracy in the health and care system in England*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/reducing-bureaucracy-in-the-health-and-social-care-system-call-for-evidence/outcome/busting-bureaucracy-

empowering-frontline-staff-by-reducing-excess-bureaucracy-in-the-health-and-care-system-in-england (Accessed: 6 July 2025).

Depuy, C. and Defacqz, S. (2021) 'Citizens and the legitimacy outcomes of collaborative governance An administrative burden perspective', *Public Management Review,* 24 (5), 752-772. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.2000254

DosReis, S., Willis-Gorman, R., Anderson, L., Duncan, L., Guadino Jr, J.A., Taylor Wilson, R., Raynes-Greenow, C. and Bell, K. (2024) 'Child health: a multisectoral and multidimensional betrayal', *British Medical Journal*, q317, p.384. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.q317

DosReis, S., Willis-Gorman, R., Anderson, L., Duncan, L., Guadino Jr, J.A., Taylor Wilson, R., Raynes-Greenow, C. and Bell, K. (2025) 'An Imperative to Include Children's Voices in Policy Development: Part of the Solution to Understanding the Impact of Policy on Children's Mental Health', *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry,* 64(1), pp. 3-4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2024.08.488

Dupuy, C. and Defacqz, S. (2022) 'Citizens and the legitimacy outcomes of collaborative governance An administrative burden perspective', *Public Management Review,* 24 (5), pp.752-772. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.2000254

Fallowfields, J. and Cairns, J. (2025) 'Whole System Approach to designing, implementing and measuring health and performance benefits of improving diet behaviour in a military setting', *British Medical Journal Military Health,* January 2025, no page number. https://doi.org10.1136/military-2024-002861

Farr, M. (2017) 'Power dynamics and collaborative mechanisms in co-production and co-design processes', *Critical Social Policy*, 38 (4), no page number. https://doi.org/10.1177/026101831774744

Filipe, A., Renedo, A. and Marston, C. (2017) 'The co-production of what? Knowledge, values, and social relations in health care', *Plos Biology*, 15 (5), no page number. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2001403

Fillingham, J., Smith, J. and Sealey, C. (2023) 'Reflections on Making Co-production Work: The Reality of Co-production from an Insider Perspective', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 53 (3), pp. 1593-1601. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad019

Firmin, C. 2020) *Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Fousiani, K. (2022) 'Power Asymmetry, Negotiations and Conflict Management in Organizations', *Organizational Conflict - New Insights*. No volume, issue or page number. http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.95492

Freutel-Funke, T. and Wanka, A. (2025) 'Introduction Linking Ages—An Invitation to a New Agenda in Life Stage Research', in Wanka, A., Freutel-Funke, T., Andresen, S.

and Oswald, F. (eds) *Linking Ages A Dialogue between Childhood and Ageing Research*. London: Routledge.

Fung, A. (2015) 'Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future', *Public Administration Review,* 75(4), pp. 513–522. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361

Gillen, A. and Canavan, J. (2023) 'Complexity Theory and Child Protection and Welfare: A tool of hindsight and/or a tool to assist improved decision making in child protection and welfare work', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 180, pp. 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad180

Gofen, A., Rønning, R., and Sønderskov, M. (2024) 'Street-level bureaucracy and Co-creation: towards theory synthesis and cross-fertilization', *Public Management Review*, pp. 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2429013

Gonzales, M. (2020) 'The Chronosystem', *Systems Thinking for Supporting Students with Special Needs and Disabilities*, no volume or issue number, no page number. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4558-4_9

Goulrart, P. and Falanga, R. (2022) 'Co-production and Voice in Policymaking: Participatory Processes in the European Periphery', *The European Journal of Development Research*, 34, pp. 1735-1744. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-022-00551-z

Gray, B., Purdy, J. and Ansari, S. (2022) 'Confronting Power Asymmetries in Partnerships to Address Grand Challenges', *Organization Theory*, *3*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221098765

Halpenny, A. (2020) *Capturing Children's Meanings in Early Childhood Research and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Heley, J. and Moles, K. (2012) 'Partnership working in regions: Reflections on local government collaboration in Wales', *Regional Science Policy and Practice*, 4 (2), pp. 139-153. https://doi:10.1111/j.1757-7802.2012.01061.x

Heywood, C. (2018) *A History of Childhood*. 2nd edn. Medford: Polity Press.

Holmes, D. (2022) 'Transitional Safeguarding: The Case for Change', *Practice: Social Work in Action,* 34 (1), pp. 7-23). https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2021.1956449

Horgan, D. and Kennan, D. (2021) *Child and Youth Participation in Policy, Practice and Research*. London: Routledge

Imperial, M. (2021) 'Implementation Structures: The Use of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches to Policy Implementation', *Policy*, no volume number, no page number, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1750

Jansen, A. (2018) 'It's So Complex!': Understanding the Challenges of Child Protection Work as Experienced by Newly Graduated Professionals', *The British journal of social work,* 48(6), pp. 1524–1540. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx127

Kosher & Ben-Arieh (2020) 'Children's participation: A new role for children in the field of child maltreatment', *Child Abuse & Neglect,* 110, no page number, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104429

Lefton, V. and Fleming, A. (2024) 'Launching the Lived Experience in Policymaking Guide: Reflections on the principles, behaviours, and mindsets that underpin lived experience work', *Policy Lab*, 13 March. Available at: https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/13/launching-the-lived-experience-in-policymaking-guide-reflections-on-the-principles-behaviours-and-mindsets-that-underpin-lived-experience-work/ (Accessed: 04 July 2025).

Leino, H. and Puumala, E. (2020) ' What can co-creation do for the citizens? Applying co-creation for the promotion of participation in cities', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 39 (4), pp. 781-799. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1177/2399654420957337

Leixnering, S., Jancsary, D. C., Ayrault, J., Gehman, J., Gray, B., Linnenluecke, M. K., Meyer, R. E., and Pavez, I. (2025) Collaboration for Tackling Grand Challenges: A Curated Conversation', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 0 (0), no page number. https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926251330828

McCafferty, P. (2024) 'Children's Participation in Child Welfare Decision Making: Recognising Dichotomies, Conceptualising Critically
Informed Solutions', *Child Care in Practice*, 30 (2), pp. 112-129. https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2021.1896990

Mcculloch, G. (2020) 'Compulsory School Attendance and the elementary Education Act of 1870: 150 years on', *British Journal of Education Studies*, 68 (5), pp. 523-540. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2020.1831434

McGann, M., Wells, T. and Blomkamp, E. (2021) 'Innovation labs and co-production in public problem solving', *Public Management Review*, 23, pp. 297-316. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1699946

McGill, B., Corbett, L., Grunseit, A., Irving, M. and O'Hara, B.J. (2022) 'Co-Produce, Co-Design, Co-Create, or Co-Construct—Who Does It and How Is It Done in Chronic Disease Prevention? A Scoping Review', *Healthcare*, 10 (4), p. 647. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10040647

McGill, b., Corbett, L., Grunseit, A.C., Irving, M. and O'Hara, B.J. (2022) 'Co-Produce, Co-Design, Co-Create, or Co-Construct—Who Does It and How Is It Done in Chronic Disease Prevention? A Scoping Review', *Healthcare*, 10 (4), 647 -663. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10040647

Mcwayne, C. M., Mistry, J., Brenneman, K., Zan, B. and Greenfield, D. B. (2020) 'A Model of Co-Construction for Curriculum and Professional Development in Head Start: The Readiness through Integrative Science and Engineering (RISE) Approach', *Teachers College Record*, *122*(11), pp. 1-46. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012201111

Metz, A., Jensen, T., Farley, A., Boaz, A., Bartley, L. and Villodas, M. (2022) 'Building trusting relationships to support implementation: A proposed theoretical model', *Frontier Health Services*, no volume, no page number. https://doi.org/10.3389/frhs.2022.894599

Muller, A. (2018) *Framing Childhood in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals and Prints 1689-1789*. London: Routledge.

Munro, H. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report; A child-centred system.* Department of Education: London.

Németh, B., Sulyok, R.S., Szabó, B. and Miklósim M. (2025) 'Children as 'becomings'—Mapping parental adultcentrism in Hungary' *Children and Society,* 39 (1), pp34-53. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12892

Norozi, S. and Moen, T. (2016) 'Childhood as a Social Construct', *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 6 (2), pp. 75 – 80. https://doi.10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n2p75

NSPCC (2025) *Safeguarding and Child protection*. Available at: https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection (Accessed: 29 March 2025).

NSPCC Learning (2023) *Duty of care and safeguarding.* Available at: https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/duty-of-care-and-safeguardingning (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

Nyathi, N. (2022) A Synthesis of Contextual Safeguarding and Commonly used Safeguarding Theoretical Models and Approaches', *Journal of Children's Service,* 17 (3), pp. 175-191. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-02-2022-0008

OECD (2020) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales, Implementing Educational Policies*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Ogle, J., and Vincent, S. (2022). 'It is Really Important That We Sometimes Remember the Children and Their Views Rather than Just Our Own; The Presentation and Representation of Children's Views in the Child Protection Conference', *Practice*, *34*(4), pp. 273–288. https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2022.2084

Orr, D. (2021) *Child protection in the 21st century: a role for contextual safeguarding*. Available at: https://www.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/insights-60.pdf (Accessed: 21 June 2025).

Parton, N. (2010) 'Child Protection and Safeguarding in England: Changing and Competing Conceptions of Risk and their Implications for Social Work', *British Journal of Social Work*, 41 (5), pp, 854-875**.** https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq119

Parton, N. (2011) 'Child Protection and Safeguarding in England: Changing and Competing Conceptions of Risk and their Implications for Social Work', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 41 (5), pp. 854-875. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq119

Parton, N. (2014) 'The Changing Politics and Practice of Child Protection and Safeguarding in England', in Wagg, S. and Pilcher, J. (eds) *Thatcher's Grandchildren?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 45-68.

Phippen, A. (2025) *Policy and Rights Challenges in Children's Online Behaviour and Safety*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Pouwels, J. (2023) 'Infinitive avoidance and splendid isolation: Rousseau and the use of conflicts in education', *International Journal of Social Pedagogy,* 12 (1), pp. 1-14. https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2023.v12.x.014.

Power, K. (2022) 'The influence of changing discourses of childhood on 1860s educational policy', *History of Education*, 51 (1), pp. 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2021.1953158

Rahimi, M., Marzijarani, S.S., Sfandyarifard, E. and Teimoury, M. (2023) 'A Systematic Literature Review of Citizen's Participatory Ladder Models', *Creative City Design*, 6 (3), pp. 37-49. http://doi.org/10.30495/ccd.2023.1984773.1208

Research in Practice (2025) *Latest research shows changes in safeguarding pressures*. Available at: Latest research shows changes in safeguarding pressures | Research in Practice (Accessed: 1 July 2025).

Reusser, K. and Pauli, C. (2015) 'Co-constructivism in Educational Theory and Practice', *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, pp. 913-917. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.92026-9

Richards, C. and Gallagher, S. (2017) 'Common vigilance; A perspective on the role of the community in safeguarding children', in Brown, Z. and Ward, S. (eds). *Contemporary issues in childhood*. Routledge: London, p. 84-93.

*Rights of Children and Young persons (Wales) Measure 2011, (*nawm) 2. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/2/contents (Accessed: 17 July 2025).

Rittel, H. and Webber, M. (1973) 'Dilemmas in a general theory of planning', *Policy Sci*ence, 4, pp. 155–169. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01405730

Rogowski, S. (2014) 'Re-Imagining Child Protection: Towards Humane Social Work with Families', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44 (5), pp.1356–1357. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu076

Rotheram, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust (2025) *Safeguarding Children Policy*. Available at : https://www.rdash.nhs.uk/policies/safeguarding-children-policy/ (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

Ruscoe, A. (2025) 'Responding to children's voices: the new frontier in education policy reform', *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 52, pp. 1245–1260. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00761-w

Scott, I. and Gong, T. (2021) 'Coordinating government silos: challenges and opportunities', *Global Public Policy and Governance,* 1, pp. 20–38. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43508-021-00004-z

Sherwood-Johnson, F. and Mackay, K. (2020) 'Building knowledge for policy and practice based on service user and carer experiences: A case study of Scottish adult safeguarding research', *Journal of Social Work*, *21*(5), pp. 1182-1202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017320952047

Simply Psychology (2025) [Image] *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.* Available at: https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html (Accessed: 17 July 2025).

Social Care Wales (2025) *About the national safeguarding training, learning and development standards*. Available at: https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/safeguarding-list/national-safeguarding-training-learning-and-development-standards/safeguarding-standards-about (Accessed: 03 July 2025).

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (anaw 4) Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/contents (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

Sørensen, E. and Torfing, J. (2024) 'The ideational robustness of bureaucracy, *Policy and Society'*, 43, (2), pp. 141–158. https://doi.org/10.1093/polsoc/puae015

Sorrentino, M., Sicilia, M. and Howlett, M. (2018) 'Understanding co-production as a new public governance tool', *Policy and Society*, 37 (3), pp. 277-293. https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2018.1521676

The British Academy (2022) Reframing Childhood: Final Report of the Childhood Policy Programme. Available at: BA1117_Childhood_Policy_Programme_V4-Digital_130722.pdf (Accessed: 13 June 2025).

The British Academy (no date) *The Childhood Policy Programme.* Available at: The Childhood Policy Programme | The British Academy (Accessed: 13 June 2025)

Thorburn, K., Waks, S., Aadam, B., Fisher, K. R., Spooner, C., and Harris, M. F. (2024) 'Creating the conditions for collaborative decision-making in co-design', *CoDesign*, *20*(4), pp. 567–584. https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2024.2349578

Toros, K. (2021) ‘ Children’s participation in decision making from child welfare workers’ perspectives: A systematic review’, Research on Social Work Practice, 31 (4), pp. 367-374. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731520984844

Toros, K., Tart, K. and Falch-Erikson, A. (2021) ‘Collaboration of Child Protective Services and Early Childhood Educators: Enhancing the Well-Being of Children in Need’, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49, pp. 995-1006. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01149-y

Tsouvalis, J., Little, R., Fajardo-Escoffie, J., Hartley, S.E., Rose, D.C., Ambrose-Oji, B., De Boon, A., Maderson, S. and Urquhart, J. (2025) ‘Co-design in policy development: Leveraging opportunities, addressing challenges, and proposing solutions for inclusive governance - Lessons from England’, *Land Use Policy,* 150, no page number. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2024.107440

Turnhout, E., Metze, T., Wyborn, C., Klenk, N. and Louder, E. (2020) ‘The politics of co-production: participation, power, and transformation’, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability,* 42, pp. 15-21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2019.11.009

UNICEF (no date) United Nations on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available at: https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 2025).

Varwell, S. (2022) ‘A Literature Review of Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation: Lessons for contemporary student engagement’, *The Interdisciplinary Research Journal,* 10 (1), pp. 108-144. Available at: https://exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/article/view/1156/958 (Accessed: 05 July 2025).

Vranješević, J. (2020) ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adultism: How to Deconstruct a Myth?’, in Kodelja, Z. and Štremfel, U. (eds) *Convention on the Rights of the Child: Educational Opportunities and Social Justice*. Available at: Šolsko polje, XXXI, 2020, 3-4: Convention on the Rights of the Child: Educational Opportunities and Social Justice, eds. Zdenko Kodelja and Urška Štremfel (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

Walsh, K. Ey, L.A., Smith, R., Howard, S., Fenton, A., Whiteford, C., Brown, M., Pinnock, R. and Rodier, L. (2023) ‘Child protection and safeguarding in initial teacher education: A systematic scoping review’, *Children and Youth Services Review,* 150, no page number. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106951

Wellstead, A., Evans, B. and Sapeha, H. (2018) ‘Policy Advice from Outsiders: The Challenges of Policy Co-construction', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 41 (14), pp. 1181-1191. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2017.1354023

Welsh Government (2021) *Social care - what is devolved?* Available at: https://law.gov.wales/public-services/social-care/social-care-what-devolved (Accessed: 03 July 2025).

White, S., Wastell, D., Smith, S., Hall, C., Whitaker, E., Debelle, G., Mannion, R. and Waring, J. (2015) 'Improving practice in safeguarding at the interface between hospital services and children's social care: a mixed-methods case study', *Health Services and Delivery Research,* 3 (4), no page number. Available at: Improving practice in safeguarding at the interface between hospital services and children's social care: a mixed-methods case study - NCBI Bookshelf Accessed: 3 July 2025).

Wilson, N., Diaz, C. and Usubillaga, J. (2022) 'Implementing the contextual safeguarding approach: a study in one local authority', *Journal of Children's Services*, 17 (3), pp. 221-236. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-10-2021-0043

Wroe, L. (2021) 'Using Contextual Safeguarding to teach connections between Social Work Theory and Practice' *Contextual Safeguarding*, 31 March. Available at: https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/blog/using-contextual-safeguarding-to-teach-connections-between-social-work-theory-and-practice/ (Accessed: 03 July 2025).

Xu, C., Zhu, S., Yang, B., Miao, B., and Duan, Y. (2023) 'A Review of Policy Framework Research on Promoting Sustainable Transformation of Digital Innovation', *Sustainability*,1 (5), no page number. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15097169

Yuan, Y. (2024) 'Research on Co-construction and Sharing of Regional Ecological Environment Governance', A*cademic Journal of Business and Management*, 6 (3), pp. 255-261. https://doi.org/10.25236/AJBM.2024.060332

.