Implementing co-productive practice with public services: Messages from the research

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1.1 Introduction

This literature review was commissioned by the Violence Prevention Unit in South Wales to explore how best to implement co-productive practice within public services. The review adopts the definition of co-production as, 'public service organisations and citizens making better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency' (Loeffler, 2020 cited by Loeffler and Bovaird, 2020:206). Hence, co-production involves the voluntary and active engagement of community members, including those with lived experience and/or those within the wider community, working in partnership with public service practitioners to add value to outcomes and outputs.

1.2 Method

The literature review was undertaken between June and September 2020 and aimed to identify evidence of good practice in relation to co-production. The search strategy drew upon eight databases and nine online resources to ensure coverage of academic evidence and grey literature published since 2000. The literature review identified 133 records. Following deduplication, 59 were excluded as they did not meet the search parameters. Therefore, 64 sources were included for the review. Data was subject to preliminary assignment to broad themes. A second cycle of coding was then undertaken where categories and themes were identified from the initial coding. Key findings are summarised in relation to the themes that emerged. To aid clarity, the report adopts the terms, 'child(ren)' and 'young people/persons' to refer to child and youth experts by experience. The term 'service user' has been adopted to refer to adult experts by experience.

1.3 Co-production

- With no agreed upon definition, co-production is often used as an umbrella term for a range of activities, from more prosaic service user involvement to transformational service change.

- While co-production can be presented as a cure for all ills in public services, there is currently a lack of evidence of its effectiveness. More robust evidence is needed that identifies the key components of co-production and how it affects change.

- Co-production is associated with numerous benefits and challenges.

    o For children and young people, the benefits include being valued as assets and creators of knowledge. The challenges include ensuring equitable access for all children and young people, recognising them as able and capable to co-produce, and ensuring they are actively involved.

- o For practitioners, co-production yields greater job satisfaction arising from increased understanding of the lives and lived experiences of those they work with. The challenges include increased accountability, skill development and having the time and resources to adopt co-productive practice.

- o For public services, co-production can lead to better services, better outcomes, a fairer system, and a more equitable relationship between practitioners and children and young people. The challenges include access to appropriate resourcing, and the fit between co-production and existing performance indicators.

1.4 Adopting co-productive practice

- To date, co-production has primarily been adopted in the social care sector rather than policing. Where co-productive practice has been adopted there are four main approaches: co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivery, and co-assessment.

- Co-productive practice consists of five levels of engagement: listening to the child's voice, supporting the child to articulate their views, considering the child's views, involving the child in decision making, and shared power and responsibility for decision making.

- The adoption of co-production is dependent upon commitment from local government, senior management, practitioners, and children and young people. Hence, public services must recognise the need for co-productive practice and change service structures and attitudes to accommodate it.

- Recruitment and engagement can be fostered by considering the added value of engagement for young people. This may include training, work experience opportunities, qualifications and/or awards as well as remuneration.

- Hard to reach and/or disadvantaged groups may be recruited and engaged in co-productive practice by ensuring that recruitment messages are framed appropriately. This includes focusing on young people as assets and experts by experience rather than emphasising their problematic behaviours.

- Strategies to facilitate co-production with children and young people include clarity around the purpose and aims of co-production, setting realistic expectations as to resultant change and ensuring that children and young people are provided with feedback as to outputs and outcomes.

1.5 Conclusion

- In light of the increase of wicked problems involving children and young people, such as youth violence, child criminal and sexual exploitation there is an intuitive logic to including children and young people in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services aimed at tackling these issues.

- Co-production provides a vehicle by which children can exercise their right to have their voices heard in matters that affect them, as well as offering opportunities for obtaining a range of direct and indirect benefits, such as improved self-esteem, confidence, skills development, and improved service development.

- Care must be taken to mitigate against the challenges of co-production. This includes ensuring equitable access for all groups of children and young people, supporting their active involvement in decision making and ensuring that co-production is not used to promote and/or justify service cuts.

- In order to implement co-productive practice, there must be commitment and belief that children and young people are assets who are able to add value to public service outputs and outcomes.

2.0 Introduction

The literature review was commissioned by the Violence Prevention Unit in South Wales in order to explore how best to implement co-productive practice within public services. The term 'co-production' emerged in 1978 when economist Elinor Ostrom observed the inter-related relationship between the police and the community and its role in effective crime prevention. This led Ostrom to conclude that,

> *Unless public officials and the suppliers of services take account of the aspirations and preferences of the people they serve, they are apt to find reticent citizens who consider themselves victims of exploitation rather than as active participants in collaborative efforts to realize joint outcomes (Ostrom, 1993:8).*

Ostrom emphasised that community members are hidden, or untapped resources that can enable the development of more effective and efficient public service outcomes and outputs (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Booth, 2019). Whilst the concept has attracted widespread interest, there is currently no agreed upon definition for co-production. Some authors use the terms 'co-production', 'consultation', 'participation', and 'involvement' interchangeably (McNeilly, Macdonald and Kelly, 2015). There is also variance in the terms used for co-production actors, such as 'community members', 'service users', 'people with lived experience', 'experts by experience' and 'service users' (Clinks, 2016). This elasticity is fuelled by the manner in which co-production has developed. Hence the concept is used across different subject domains with different motivations, actors, measures, and in different spheres, including private, public, and voluntary arenas (Burgess and Durrant, 2019; Faithfull et al., 2019). There are further discrepancies in what co-production entails. Some authors state that co-production is an umbrella term for four main approaches: co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivery, and co-assessment (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). Others state that co-production must encompass the whole process of service planning, design, development, implementation, and assessment. Conversely Bovaird and Loeffler (2012) argue that full co-production must comprise both co-commissioning and co-delivery. Nevertheless, co-production is dependent upon interdependence between service users and service practitioners and requires different ways of thinking and approaches to public service delivery in order to achieve better outcomes (Fugini et al., 2016). Of the various definitions available (e.g. Aked and Stephens, 2009; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Boyle and Harris, 2009) it is generally agreed that co-productive practice involves the voluntary and active engagement of service users who work in partnership with public service practitioners and who add value to outcomes and outputs. For the purposes of this report, the following definition has been adopted,

> *Public service organisations and citizens making better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency (Loeffler, 2020 cited by Loeffler and Bovaird, 2020:206)*

This definition highlights the collaborative nature of co-production between public services and citizens, where the term 'citizen' includes people with lived experience of the service and/or those living in the community (Loeffler and Bovaird, 2019).

Since its inception in 1978, interest in co-production has waxed and waned with renewed attention in the twentieth century (Sicilia et al., 2019). This renewal has been associated with three main factors: increasing demand for service responses for 'wicked problems', public sector austerity measures, and the children's rights agenda (Fugini, Bracci and Sicilia, 2016). First, wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973) are complex social and/or cultural problems that are comprised of multiple interdependent factors. Consequently, the manner in which the problem is defined will vary according to individual perspective. This renders it difficult to identify the exact nature of the problem. According to Rittel and Webber (1973), solutions for wicked problems cannot be tested, they must be implemented. In addition, proposed solutions cannot be judged as inherently right or wrong; there are only good solutions or bad solutions. For example, youth violence can be seen as a wicked problem as it is a complex social problem with no inherently right or wrong solutions, and where solutions cannot be tested prior to real world implementation (Maxwell and Corliss, 2020). However, co-production can aid the development of solutions as people with lived experience '...become coproducers ... through the contribution of their activities' (Ostrom et al., 1978:383) with the aim of creating relevant, sustainable, and resilient services (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012).

Figure 1: Hart's Ladder of Participation
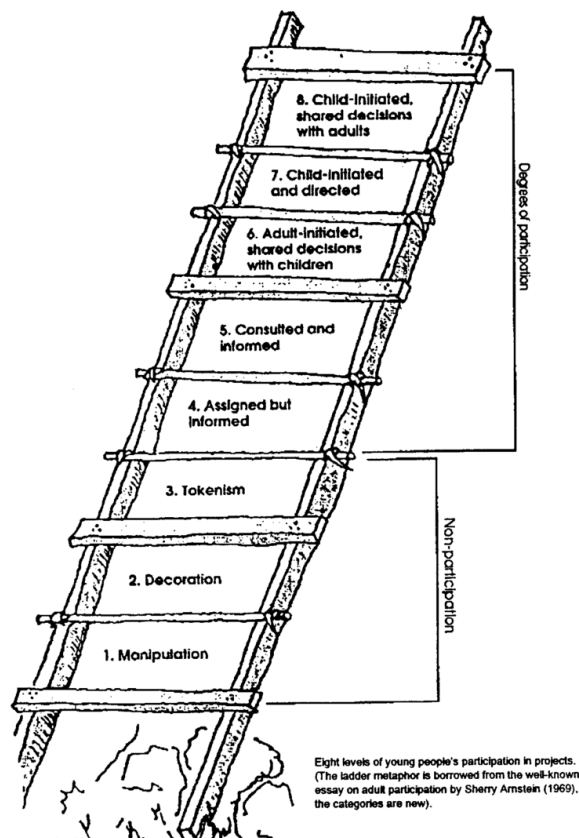
Second, within the climate of public austerity measures it has been argued that co-production can be exploited in the quest for public service efficiencies in provision and the need for services to 'do more for less' (Booth, 2019; Fugini et al., 2016). The downside is that there is a risk that public services may use co-production to pursue cuts in provision (Mazzei et al., 2020). Indeed, the extent

to which public services engage service users' assets, resources and contributions can be represented in the form of a continuum (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1994; Slay and Penny, 2014). For social care, and particularly children and young people, Hart's (1992) ladder of participation is often cited in the co-production literature (e.g. Crowley, 2015; Head, 2011; McNeilly et al, 2015; Shier, 2001). This ladder is broadly divided into non-participation and participation, with the higher five rungs representing increasing degrees of participation with child-initiated, shared decision making between children and adults signifying full co-production (figure one). Despite being criticised as an oversimplification, Hart's ladder is useful in highlighting the differential power relations that exist between children and adults. Hart's (1992) ladder acknowledges that some forms of youth participation are adult-led. Indeed, the first three rungs of the ladder represent non-participative approaches, including manipulation, decoration, and tokenism. Such approaches undermine children's rights to have their voices heard.

Third, the child's right to have their voice heard is enshrined in the adoption of the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2010; Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014). Specifically, under Article 12 of the Convention, children have a right to express their views about matters that affect them, in accordance with their age and maturity. The children's right agenda added impetus to co-productive practice as it enables a shift in public service approaches from doing things to passive service recipients, to acknowledging them as legitimate actors in the process (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Munro, 2011).

In this context, the literature review was commissioned to consider the messages from the research evidence in regard to implementing co-productive practice in public services. While the review focused on children and young people up to the age of 25, due to the relative lack of literature for co-productive practice relating to children and social care, the report draws upon findings relating to adults where appropriate. Therefore, to aid clarity, the report adopts the terms, 'child(ren)' and 'young people/persons' to refer to child and youth experts by experience. The term 'service user' has been adopted to refer to adult experts by experience.

3.0 Method

The literature review was undertaken between June and September 2020 and aimed to identify evidence of good practice in relation to co-production. As noted, the terms co-production, consultation, participation, and involvement are often used interchangeably. Initial searches revealed that co-production and participation tend to be used synonymously and as such the following search terms were adopted:

GROUP	adolesc* or preadolesc* or youth or youths or young adj (person* or persons or people)
AND	coproduc* or co-produc* or collabora* or participat*
AND	United Kingdom

The search strategy drew upon a range of databases and electronic data sources to ensure coverage of academic evidence and grey literature published since 2000. The following databases were searched: ASSIA, British Education Index, Social Policy and Practice, International Bibliographic of the Social Sciences, JSTOR, NSPCC Library, PsychInfo, Social Care Online. A search for grey literature, using key terms, was conducted of the following online resources: Barnardo's, Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, Children's Society, Child Welfare Information Gateway, GOV.UK, Early Intervention Foundation, NSPCC Library, Research in Practice and Social Care Institute for Excellence. Searches were limited by year to post 2000 and to the English language.

Searches were supplemented by hand searching of journals. All records were imported into an Excel Spreadsheet and deduplicated, resulting in 123 records (see Appendix B for PRISMA diagram). Of these, 39 were excluded as they did not meet the search parameters. After a full read, 20 further records were excluded. Therefore, 64 sources were included for the literature review.

A coding frame was devised for initial data extraction with broad categories, including definitions, context, mechanisms and implementation. Authors worked independently to extract data from included papers using NVivo v12 computer software. A second cycle of coding was then undertaken where themes were identified from the initial coding.

4.0 Co-production

With no agreed definition, co-production is often used as an umbrella term for a range of activities (Booth, 2019; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). This means that co-production may refer to range of activities, from more prosaic service user involvement to transformational service change (Burgess and Durrant, 2019). Within the literature four main approaches for co-production emerged: co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivery, and co-assessment (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). It should be noted at the outset that while the research evidence emphasises the benefits of co-production, there is currently a lack of evidence of its effectiveness (Campanale et al., 2020; Crowley, 2015; Keenan, 2018; Loeffler and Bovaird, 2019; Sicilia et al., 2019). While co-production has achieved popularity due to its potential for anti-oppressive practice and social justice, to some extent this appears to be based on the belief that simply involving children and/or adults adds value to public service provision (Bell and Pahl, 2018; Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere, 2019). Hence, co-production was posited as a 'cure for all ills' of public services (Bussu and Galanti, 2018:347). Where effectiveness evidence does exist, this is limited to single case studies rendering it difficult to determine what does and does not work (Loeffler and Bavaird, 2020; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Sicilia et al., 2019; Voorberg et al., 2015). Therefore, there is a need for more robust evidence regarding the effectiveness of co-productive practice as well as explanatory research relating to which elements of co-productive practice are of most importance. This section outlines the findings from the literature relating to the benefits and challenges of co-production for children and/or adult service users, practitioners, and public services.

4.1 Benefits of co-production

When children and young people participate in co-production they are valued as assets and 'creators of knowledge' who have the skills and expertise to collaborate with practitioners (Tisdall, 2017:69). Consequently, involvement in the co-production process yields several benefits for children and young people including increased self-esteem, confidence, social skills, and motivation to access services (Aked and Stephens, 2009; Coates and Howe, 2016; Collins et al., 2017; O'Hare et al., 2016; Woodall et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2006). Findings also suggested that feelings of empowerment are retained as a result of their engagement (Sicilia et al., 2019). Engagement in co-production can also promote inclusion as it brings together young people from diverse backgrounds providing them with a sense of belonging, solidarity, and individual and collective responsibility as well as a wider perspective of the world around them (Lister, 2007; Thomas, 2012). In doing so, children and young people are given a voice to communicate their needs,

> Because they have direct experience of services, service users know better than anyone what works – and what does not. Involving them in your work brings unique insights and taps into a valuable resource (Clinks, 2016:9).

For practitioners, co-production yields greater understanding of the lives and lived experiences of those who they work with (Woodall et al, 2019). This requires the development of skills such as active listening, experiential learning, and facilitation (Co-production Wales, 2013; Sicilia et al., 2019). According to the literature, the co-production process enables ongoing dialogue between

children and practitioners leading to more responsive and responsible approaches to public service provision (Booth, 2019). Consequently, practitioner job satisfaction is improved through 'knowing that projects and services developed are truly meeting the needs of beneficiaries' (Co-production Wales, 2013).

For organisations, the main benefit of co-production is 'better services, better outcomes, a fairer system, and a more equitable relationship' (Booth, 2019; Co-production Wales, 2013). Co-production can serve to humanise services as it necessitates consideration of how services are experienced by children and young people as well as challenging existing assumptions. (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Keenan, 2018). This leads to the development of public services *with* service users rather than *for* service users enhancing the extent to which service user needs are met (Trischler et al., 2019; Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015). By placing value on youth contributions and perceiving them as assets, their lived experience, skills, and knowledge are used to influence service design and delivery (Acked and Stephens, 2009; Bussu and Galanti, 2018). This can facilitate the design of innovative and creative service models (Trischler, Dietrich and Rundle-Thiele, 2019). Consequently, co-production adds value to the service as the quality and relevance of service provision is improved and costs are reduced as services become more proactive rather than reactive (Atkinson et al, 2019; Clinks, 2016; Keenan, 2018; Woodall et al., 2019).

4.2 Challenges of co-production

The literature alluded to a 'dark side' of co-production which included inefficient or ineffective practice and where co-production failed to address inequalities and/or transparency (Loeffler and Bovaird, 2020:206; Mazzei et al., 2020). In support of Hart (1992), there was evidence that co-production exists as a continuum from tokenistic inclusion at one end of the spectrum to full engagement at the other. This is captured by a Year Six pupil in Percy-Smith's (2015) critical reflection of the difference between hearing a child or young person's voice and active engagement,

> It's about involvement, getting involved – 'doing the idea'; that's different to pupil voice which is giving suggestions to others (Primary student year 6).

As the above quote demonstrates, while co-production means 'doing the idea', this can be constrained where adult perceptions disregard the child's capacity or ability to engage. This can lead to 'top down, patronising or tokenistic' involvement (Head, 2011:546). Where adults disregard the child's ability to co-produce, findings suggested that this was associated with the belief that children have lower competence than adults (Burns, 2019). According to Tisdall (2018:161) these perceptions are based on developmental approaches to childhood where children are seen as 'human becomings' who must pass through a series of stages in order to acquire appropriate intellectual and moral capacities to truly participate,

> The concentration is on children's competence and not the adults' lack of competence in enabling children to participate (Tisdall, 2018:161).

While the UNCRC requires that consideration be given to the child's age and maturity, a theme from the literature was that they need to be perceived as reliable in order to have any credibility and for their point of view to be taken seriously (Cody, 2017; Head, 2011). Aligned to this was the

notion that children should only comment on 'children's issues' as they may be deemed incapable, irresponsible or only able to view issues from their individual perspective (Gal, 2017).

There is a risk that co-production may exacerbate existing inequalities between adults and children generally, or specific groups, such as disadvantaged children and young people (Bussu and Galanti, 2018). Hence the differential power relationship can be exploited where adults mediate child involvement. This can include parents who act as gatekeepers for their children or where practitioners communicate with parents rather than the child or young person (McNeilly et al., 2015). This poses the risk that young people are only included in a tokenistic way (Hart, 1992). The literature revealed a range of ways in which adults could mediate co-productive practice with children. This included limiting the child's involvement, for example, by asking them to decide between pre-determined options or only consulting them when it is too late in the process for them to respond or have any influence on decision making (Mazzei et al., 2020; Tisdall, 2017; Wyness, 2009). It can also include overriding the child's voice,

> *one of the young people was scheduled to report … but very soon the worker in charge had taken over … Later in the same meeting the worker was drawing proceedings to a close, when the (relatively young) group member who was designated as chairperson for the occasion asserted his own right to close the meeting (Thomas, 2012:461).*

Crowley (2015) reported that practitioners tended to perceive co-productive practice as yielding benefits for children and young people rather than as having an impact upon service planning, delivery, and evaluation. This includes where children and young people are consulted, but do not receive feedback on whether changes were made following co-production (Tisdall and Davis, 2004). Shier (2001) notes that whilst this is not stipulated under the UNCRC, it is good practice to provide children with feedback as to what decisions were made and why.

Co-production with children can also be impeded by child centred factors such as practical, financial, and personal challenges (Lister, 2007). In their independent evaluation of the New Belongings programme for care leavers, Dixon and Baker (2016) identified a range of barriers including accessibility, where young people did not live close to venues, availability, due to college or work responsibilities, and personality differences, which could lead to clashes between group members or children and practitioners. In some cases, group dynamics can deter the involvement of other young people (Clinks, 2016). Further, children and young people may require help and support to actively participate. Aligned with this are previous experiences with public services. For example, children and young people may be reluctant to co-produce with the police due to fear that they may be punished (Burns, 2019). Finally, child engagement is associated with the belief that change will occur.

For practitioners, co-production can present challenges as it denotes a shift in the nature of the relationship between practitioners and service users from vertical to horizontal accountability (Tisdall, 2017). In doing so, co-production necessitates new ways of working and increased accountability. The literature indicated that practitioner challenges were particularly notable when practitioners felt that they had not been appropriately consulted, lacked the necessary skills for co-productive practice, where they felt threatened or wary of hearing users views of their practice (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Clinks, 2016). This can be compounded by the co-production process as practitioners become acutely aware of service user expectations (Campanale, Mauro and

Sancino, 2020). In addition, a key challenge for practitioners is ensuring that children and young people are appropriately safeguarded and protected throughout the process, while also enabling them to actively participate. This is particularly pertinent in the arenas of social care and criminal justice where issues of risk, vulnerability and staff worries regarding boundaries can emerge (Clinks, 2016). To mediate some of these challenges, Hart et al.'s (2011) observations from a four year participation process within Save the Children Denmark highlighted the need for reflective space as a way of empowering practitioners so that they could consolidate knowledge and develop their confidence.

For public services, there must be the political will for co-production and the financial commitment to facilitate this approach. The literature revealed that public services determine the extent to which co-production is adopted according to alignment with organisational aims, commitment, and capacity. A central theme throughout the findings was the need for adequate resourcing in order to engage in co-production (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Clinks, 2016; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). Regarding co-commissioning, narrowly defined performance indicators may constrain the extent to which funders support co-produced services especially where they seek tangible outputs aligned with wider strategic vision (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012). Moreover, with reference to adult service users, Voorberg et al.'s (2015) systematic literature review found that politicians, managers and practitioners perceived co-production as unreliable due to the unpredictability of community members. Such unpredictably was not confined to community members. Findings from third sector organisations in social care, health, transport, and criminal justice found variance in the extent to which co-production was employed (Mazzei et al., 2020). Specifically, they found that while some organisations had established relationships with service users others,

> *claimed legitimacy through their long-standing relationships with service users, and/or an expertise in consultation methods. However, our study also highlighted that the type of third sector organisation is not a guarantor of meaningful service user inclusion (Mazzei et al., 2020:1279).*

Specifically, Mazzei et al. developed a typology of third sector co-productive practice which ranged from tokenistic or limited engagement to full advocacy for their service users. These findings are particularly pertinent where public services depend upon third sector organisations as a proxy for service user engagement.

5.0 Adopting co-productive practice

Findings revealed three main themes in facilitating co-production: commitment and level of participation, public service culture and structure, and the recruitment and engagement of children and young people. This broadly supports findings from Sicilia et al.'s (2019) systematic literature review of co-production in a range of public services, including health, education and social care; co-production has primarily been in the social care sector rather than policing (Burns, 2019). This section begins by illustrating the four main approaches to co-production before considering level of engagement with reference to Shier's (2001) pathways to participation model. This is following by discussion of the factors that promote the adoption and delivery of co-production in public services.

5.1 Co-production as an umbrella term

Campanale et al.'s (2020) case study of co-produced services for disabled children in Italy can be used to illustrate the four main co-production activities presented in the literature: co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivery, and co-assessment (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). The case study found that the first activity involved engaging a range of public service practitioners, disabled children, and their families. Co-commissioning was then undertaken where the group met in order to identify the children's needs. According to Capanale et al. (2020), the process included an additional co-production activity which they entitled 'co-elaboration' where,

> the main goal is to put users in the condition to live independently, while in the case of coproduced services for young disabled people, the main goal is to make users more autonomous as they move into adulthood.

Once the overall goals had been agreed upon, Campanale et al.'s (2020) evaluation found that adherence to the overall goal was strengthened when all parties signed written agreements. Once co-commissioning had been completed, co-design of service provision was undertaken. In this example, practitioners, children, and their families worked together to determine personalised pathways aimed at supporting the transition to adulthood. This service was then co-delivered by children, their families, and practitioners. Throughout this process frequent meetings were undertaken for co-assessment of goal realisation. Findings from the wider literature suggested the development of evaluative tools to determine the extent to which services had been co-produced and the effectiveness of this approach.

5.2 Commitment and level of participation

Regarding commitment and level of participation, Shier's model (2001) outlines five stages of child and young person participation. Further, Shier's (2001) model includes three levels of commitment necessary for co-production to occur: openings, opportunities, and obligations. At each level, practitioners must consider the risks and benefits of child and youth engagement, along with the wider situational factors, such as access to resources. The pathway begins with practitioner readiness to identify openings. Shier (2001) notes that opportunities for co-production vary

according to the task. Identifying opportunities for engaging children in co-productive practice will be easier for child focused services than local planning or policy development. Once an opening has been identified, practitioners must have opportunities to engage. Shier's (2001) model states that an obligation is established when co-production becomes an organisational policy.

Regarding organisational policies and processes, this can range from a mandatory obligation to engage in co-production to a more general statement regarding the need for consideration of the child's perspective. Where co-production is mandatory, the model emphasises that practitioners should have access to training on how to foster engagement and enable children to share decision making. Such training is vital as co-productive practice signifies a change in role where practitioners become responsible for supporting and co-ordinating service users (Bovaird, 2007). For example, Vis et al. (2012) report findings from a study with Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) which found that practitioners wanted training in how to communicate with young children. Other considerations include the creation of child friendly physical spaces where children and young people feel able to share their views and contribute to decision making (Collins et al., 2017; Shier, 2001; Wright et al., 2006).

Alongside these three levels of commitment are five levels of participation. The first three; listening to the child's voice, supporting the child to articulate their views, and considering the child's views, adhere to the minimum expectation under the UNCRC. Whereas the upper two levels, shared decision making and/or shared power reflect active participation, or co-production. This may mean that children and young people's views are taken into account (level three) but they are not involved at the point the decision is made (level four) or share decision making with adults (level five). For example, in Beal et al.'s (2019) study of adolescents in local authority care, slightly less than half of adolescents felt that their voice had been considered (level three). Most adolescents indicated that they wanted to share decision making with trusted adults (level five). It is important to note that children and young people should not be solely responsible for decision making, but rather share the role and responsibility with practitioners or other adults. Adoption of the higher two levels is dependent upon practitioner assessment of the risks and benefits, such as safeguarding considerations, the child's willingness to take responsibility for decision making, age and ability (Shier, 2001). Findings revealed that that these assessments can be complex, especially for certain groups of children and young people. For example, Vis et al (2016) discussed the balance between *protecting* a child where lived experiences are upsetting or distressing, and *protectionism* where adult perceptions are used to prevent the child from accessing their rights to participate in decision making. Potential risks and benefits may also include the time afforded to practitioners for co-production as well as the time and inconvenience for children and young people. Hence, consideration must be given to ensuring that children do not feel pressured into engaging, embarrassed, or made to feel a failure (Wright et al., 2006). The evidence emphasised the need to acknowledge that children and young people are more than just experts by experience; they have lives, interests, and responsibilities (Factor and Ackerley, 2019).

5.3 Culture, structure and attitudes

One of the main themes emerging the literature was the need for public services to create the culture and structure to support and promote co-production (Social Care Institute of Excellence, 2015; Wright et al., 2006). According to Hart et al. (2011:336),

> *Engaging children as 'stakeholders' in development thus requires consideration of and changes to both the values, beliefs, and assumptions ('culture') and the procedures, systems, and practices ('structure') of an organisation.*

This means developing a co-production strategy that clearly identifies the aims and outlines what services and service users to include (Campanale et al., 2020). This strategy must then be translated into policies and procedures that can be embedded within the service. In addition, public services must adopt a shared culture where practitioners engage in ongoing conversations with service users rather than a one-off standalone consultation (Kozak, 2019; Vis, Holtan and Thomas; 2012; Wright et al., 2006). Findings from a systematic literature review of co-production with the general community, found that organisations must both accept community members as assets and believe that service provision can be improved through co-productive practice (Voorberg et al., 2015). For example, the Serious Youth Violence Strategy for South Wales (Violence Prevention Unit, 2020) states that,

> *Violence prevention interventions should be co-produced with communities and individuals with lived experience of violence. If violence is an expression of power, then we must genuinely power share with communities and individuals at risk of or with lived experience of violence if we are ever to successfully prevent violence.*

This requires change across multiple levels of public services as well as staff commitment. Where services both recognise the need for co-productive practice and change structures to accommodate it, co-production becomes transformative. For example, in Burns (2019) evaluation of the Youth Commission, findings demonstrated that the creation of a dedicated police officer role facilitated co-productive practice and supported its sustainability beyond the project. Where multiple organisations are involved, Sicilia et al. (2019) identified the need for measures that counteract siloed approaches within public services. This included techniques that enhanced inclusion, for example, involving a range of organisations across the public and third sector.

For practitioners, readiness, and willingness to engage and hear the views of children and young people are a necessary prerequisite for co-production. Findings from Burns (2019) in relation to the police, highlighted the need to challenge existing negative stereotypes of young people before joint working could occur. Even where police officers expressed willingness to co-produce and improve practice, Factor and Ackerley (2019) observed some police officers used the opportunities afforded by co-production to speak to the changes already made, rather than engaging in two-way responsive dialogue. Such findings are not confined to policing however, a young person in MacPherson's (2008) research on Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIP) in Scotland illustrated the importance of the practitioner,

> *When we've been at things with the others [adult partners in SIP], they've come in and sat and not spoken to us, and we sit over the other side.... How am I supposed to speak to someone in a meeting who won't say hello to me five minutes before? [Youth worker] is totally different, we see her all the time here [at youth project] and just around ... in Greggs n'that. They listen to her 'cos she's right in there saying what's what.... (Glenlogan, young person in MacPherson, 2008:374).*

The significance of relationship building and role of youth workers has been demonstrated in a previous report relating to youth violence (Maxwell and Corliss, 2020).

Finally, as noted, findings emphasised that public services need evaluative tools to determine the extent to which services have been co-produced. According to Wright et al.'s (2006) guide for participation with children and young people in social care, services must consider the extent to which children and young people's views have been involved in co-production, what has changed because of this practice and how children have been informed of these outcomes.

5.4 Recruitment and engagement

Attracting children and young people to participate in co-production is challenging (Sicilia et al., 2019). Five main themes emerged in relation to recruitment and engagement. First, self-selection bias where co-production attracts the more able children and young people, rather than those with communication issues and/or poor literacy (Coates and Howe, 2016; Clinks, 2016; MacPherson, 2008; Vis et al, 2012). Children and young people may also be reluctant to engage due to lack of trust and/or negative experiences with public services, fear of repercussions, lack of motivation and/or cynicism that engagement will lead to service change (Factor and Ackerley, 2019). However, findings from the Barnardo's Disabled Children and Young People's Participation Project suggested that the development of appropriate participation tools including specialist IT, music. Drama and digital media, and allocating sufficient time to co-production can mitigate against these challenges (Murray, 2012, 2015). Second, social inequalities emerged with some young people inundated with queries to participate, whereas others were not considered as potential co-producers (Coates and Howe, 2016; Tisdall, 2017). Inequalities also emerged in relation to age, with young children less likely to be included (Hill et al., 2004; Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2012). Such biases are aligned with findings around adult perceptions, and mediation of which children have the capacity and ability to co-produce (Bussu and Galanti, 2018; McNeilly et al., 2015). This places impetus on establishing a rationale for why certain groups are included or excluded, as well as ensuring that co-production messages are appropriately framed and advertised (Wright et al., 2006). Indeed, Sicilia et al.'s (2019) systematic review of the literature found that young people were more likely to engage when they perceived the need for service improvements. Therefore, attempts at engaging socially excluded young people should focus messages on children's positive engagement in decision making, as opposed to emphasising their problematic behaviours (MacPherson, 2008). Regarding care leavers, young people in Dixon and Baker's evaluation expressed frustration,

> *about the current configuration ... it is often the same young people who come along and feeling that no one knows about us despite attempts by participation workers and themselves to increase recruitment through visiting children homes, contacting foster carers and speaking to social worker teams as well as other young people they knew (Young person focus group in Dixon and Baker, 2016:56).*

As the above quote demonstrates, recruiting young people through existing contacts and projects emerged as a strategy for engaging disadvantaged or marginalised young people (Dixon and Baker, 2016; Factor and Ackerley, 2019). Social media emerged as a useful tool for communicating with young people (Dixon and Baker, 2016; Sicilia et al., 2019). For example, the Fernhill Youth Project

in Rhondda Cynon Taff (2016) uses a cybercafé as a drop-in facility to engage with disadvantaged children and young people. This peer-led project has been operating for more than a decade providing children and young people with education, employability, and personal support. To date, youth members have sat on the Junior Health Board, contributed to the local Crime Prevention Panel and worked with sexual health clinics to develop their own materials which they deliver to local schools (Wright et al., 2006).

In addition to self-selection bias and social inequalities, the third theme in relation to recruitment and engagement was the need for feedback loops. Findings revealed that young people may feel demotivated when they are not informed as to how their engagement has influenced service provision and/or where they feel used by practitioners (Clinks, 2016; Dixon and Baker, 2016; Wright et al,. 2006). This can be mitigated by managing young people's expectations of co-production. Techniques included the provision of age appropriate information regarding the aims of co-production, the extent to which their efforts would influence service change and the anticipated timeframes (Dixon and Baker, 2016; Tisdall, 2013). For example, the creation of role descriptions for children and young people that outline role expectations, required skills, tasks, meeting frequency, overall duration, and any associated remuneration (Clinks, 2016).

Fourth, recruitment and engagement can be fostered by considering the added value of engagement for young people. This may include training, work experience opportunities, qualifications and/or awards as well as remuneration or other rewards (Clinks, 2016). For example, the Lambeth Youth Council (2020) provides training and accreditation for young people in return for their co-production activities in relation to improving local services (Wright et al., 2006). According to the Clinks co-production guide (2016) for working with offenders and ex-offenders, practitioners should ask service users what support they would like. This follows Dixon and Baker's (2016) findings that some young people felt insulted at the assumption they required training whereas others stated,

> I feel like I'm quite young and I could have done with some training – if had, I could have got more from it (Panellist focus group in Dixon and Baker, 2016:70).

Where children and young people express the need for further training, this may include practitioner or peer mentoring, supervision, vocational training and/or confidence building (Clinks, 2016). In relation to remuneration, findings were mixed (Clinks, 2016; Coates and Howe, 2016; Bussu and Galanti, 2018). According to Coates and Howe (2016) appropriate remuneration (that goes beyond the repayment of expenses) fostered meaningful participation whereas findings from Clinks (2016) suggested that young people may engage due to an interest in sharing their views and experiences in order to help services to improve. Nevertheless, time banking emerged as a popular method of remuneration. For example, Spice Innovate, a social enterprise in South Wales gives young people one credit for every hour they participate in a youth group. Time credits are a form of community currency that can be spent on a range of trips and activities (Aked and Stephens, 2009; Burgess and Durrant, 2019). Taff Housing is another example where residents receive credits to spend on leisure activities in return for their help with service delivery (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Bussu and Galanti, 2018).

Fifth, in support of co-elaboration (Capanale et al., 2020), youth engagement can be enhanced by ensuring that there is clarity around the aims, purpose, and processes of co-production, and that

this is determined through dialogue between parties (Head, 2011). For example, Factor and Ackerley (2019) found that the co-creation of solutions to police responses to young people affected by sexual violence was facilitated by shared goal setting. Having commonly agreed goals helped both police officers and young people to maintain their commitment and focus. Further, Trischler et al. (2019) suggest that children and young people engage in a sensitisation step that enables them to reflect upon the desired topic. The sensitisation step involves engaging in a range of activities such as playing games, fun exercises or watching videos. According to Trischler et al. (2019) this highlights to children and young people that they are experts of their experience initiating feelings of empowerment and how they can contribute to the process. In addition, sensitisation exercises support relationship building between practitioners and young people.

In terms of the co-production process, activities tended to be adopted from youth work with consideration given to power, group cohesion and dynamics (Factor and Ackerley, 2019). In this regard, less engaged group members can adversely affect the overall motivation of the group, while group members with different values or inappropriate behaviours can impact group cohesion (Sicilia et al., 2019). This highlights the significance of skilled practitioners to facilitate the group, foster engagement and build trust and respect (Sicilia et al., 2019).

Findings highlighted the importance of the relationship between practitioners and children and young people on the co-productive process and associated outcomes. Thomas (2012:463) notes that there can be the misconception that 'all will be well' if children and adults talk with each other, discounting the imbalance between their equality in the process. However, power imbalances must be addressed by developing trusting, respectful, non-judgemental, and reciprocal relationships (Wright et al., 2006). Deliberative dialogue was found to be effective in addressing power imbalances in Mulvale et al.'s (2019) study of three co-designed projects for 16 to 24 year olds. In this study, conversation was used as a way of mutually considering different perspectives in a non-invasive or non-confrontational manner (Davidson, 2007; Wright et al., 2006). In doing so, co-production required the allocation of sufficient time to build relationships and trust, as well as readiness and openness to sharing different perspectives but within a set time so that solutions are created (Mulvale et al., 2019; Percy-Smith, 2015).

In relation to age and maturity, appropriate activity selection can be used to maintain interest or foster understanding as this practitioner states,

> If you fail to understand them, it doesn't mean that you're not going to understand them, it just means you have to try another way. That might mean using a video, bringing a photo in or using a toy which they enjoy … anything to stimulate their interaction (Practitioner from Wright et al., 2006:36).

Other activities included the use of story boards and collages to initiate conversations. For example, the Revolving Doors charity who work with individuals caught in a cycle of homelessness, crime, and mental health problems, used collages so that service users could depict their perception of a good life. In doing so, service users were able to chat about their pictures rather than being asked to discuss difficult issues in interview settings. As this service user observed,

> *Using pictures definitely made it easier to talk about certain issues rather than filling out questionnaires or talking in groups – which is usually how we are*

asked to talk about services. (Service user cited in Revolving Doors Agency, 2015).

Other activities included youth forums, consultation groups and inviting children and young people speak at meetings, conferences or deliver practitioner training (Clinks, 2016; Wright et al., 2006). With specific reference to the Youth Commission and policing (Burns, 2019), children and young people engaged in a range of activities including police campaigns, police training, involvement in evidence panels and the creation of a film depicting how the police respond where young people are suspected of having committed a crime. Young people also established a local youth community support group. Children and young people may also be actively involved in recruitment activities, so that they can ensure that practitioners are open and ready to engage in co-production. For example, in Surrey young users of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have a mandatory presence in staff recruitment interviews with their views having equal weight to practitioners (Keenan, 2018).

6.0 Conclusion

Despite widespread interest in co-production there is currently a lack of evidence relating to its overall effectiveness. This is compounded by the lack of an agreed definition. Consequently, co-production is often used as an umbrella term for a range of activities with differing levels of youth engagement (Booth, 2019; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). Nevertheless, in light of the increase of wicked problems involving children and young people, such as youth violence, child criminal and sexual exploitation there appears to be an intuitive logic to including children in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services aimed at tackling these issues Bell and Pahl, 2018; Dudau et al., 2019). The advent of contextual safeguarding approaches (Firmin, 2019) further advocates for the involvement of children and young people so that practitioners may understand their lives, experiences, and the physical spaces they occupy. Co-production also provides a vehicle by which children can exercise their right to have their voices heard in matters that affect them, as under the UNCRC.

The literature highlighted direct and indirect benefits from children's engagement. Direct benefits included youth empowerment that emanates from being valued as assets and legitimate actors in their own lives (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012). Children gained confidence and self-esteem from their active involvement in the design and delivery of services. The evidence suggested that many children and young people benefit from the receipt of tangible rewards such as education, training and the development of vocational skills that can be used to obtain employment (Clinks, 2016; Wright et al., 2006). Children and young people also benefited indirectly from having their voices heard and knowing that they were helping to improve services for their peers. For public services, findings revealed that co-production aided the development of services that meet children and young people's needs. This can lead to improved, more efficient, and better services that are staffed by practitioners equipped with greater knowledge and understanding of children's lives and needs. Practitioners also benefited from increased access to training in working with children and young people and job satisfaction derived from knowing that their work was making a difference to the lives of children and young people (Co-production Wales, 2013).

In practice, findings suggest that co-production activities are adopted in line with considerations of the risks and benefits of adopting this practice. This may include assessment of resourcing, practitioner and service capacity, and the safeguarding needs of the child. Indeed, it would be remiss not to mention the challenges of co-production. Findings demonstrated that co-production has a dark side where social inequalities may be increased through the exclusion of certain groups of children and where particular activities give rise to tokenistic or manipulative engagement (Loeffler and Bovaird, 2020). With such a wide range of co-productive practice it appears easy for public services to say that they are co-producing services simply by involving young people. In light of Covid-19 and the anticipated austerity to follow, it is also worth noting that co-production can be used to promote and/or justify service cuts. Therefore, in terms of how best to implement co-productive practice, co-production is dependent upon commitment across multiple levels of local government, public services, and young people. For local government this includes commitment from politicians and policy makers in setting the strategic direction and allocating the necessary funding that enables public services to adopt co-productive practice. For public services, commitment is needed from senior management demonstrated through the creation of service policies and procedures that establish a co-production culture throughout the service along with

the necessary structure to facilitate it. Moreover, practitioners require the time and resourcing to develop relationships with children and young people in order to foster their active involvement to develop, deliver and evaluate service solutions. For practitioners, commitment is required in their readiness and openness to doing with rather than doing to approaches (Munro, 2011). There also needs to be acceptance across the service of increased accountability to the children and young people they are working with. This denotes a shift from children and young people as passive recipients of services to being actively involved as hidden resources (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Booth, 2019). Findings revealed a range of strategies that can be used to facilitate youth engagement. These included clarity around the purpose of co-production, setting realistic expectations as to resultant change and ensuring that children and young people are provided with feedback. In addition, consideration must be given to ensuring that messages to children and young people are framed appropriately. It is through these messages that hard to reach and/or disadvantaged groups may be recruited and engaged in co-productive practice. Specific examples included the use of social media, cybercafés, and time credit initiatives. Moreover, the success of co-production is dependent upon the belief that children and young people can add value to public service outputs and outcomes.

7.0 References

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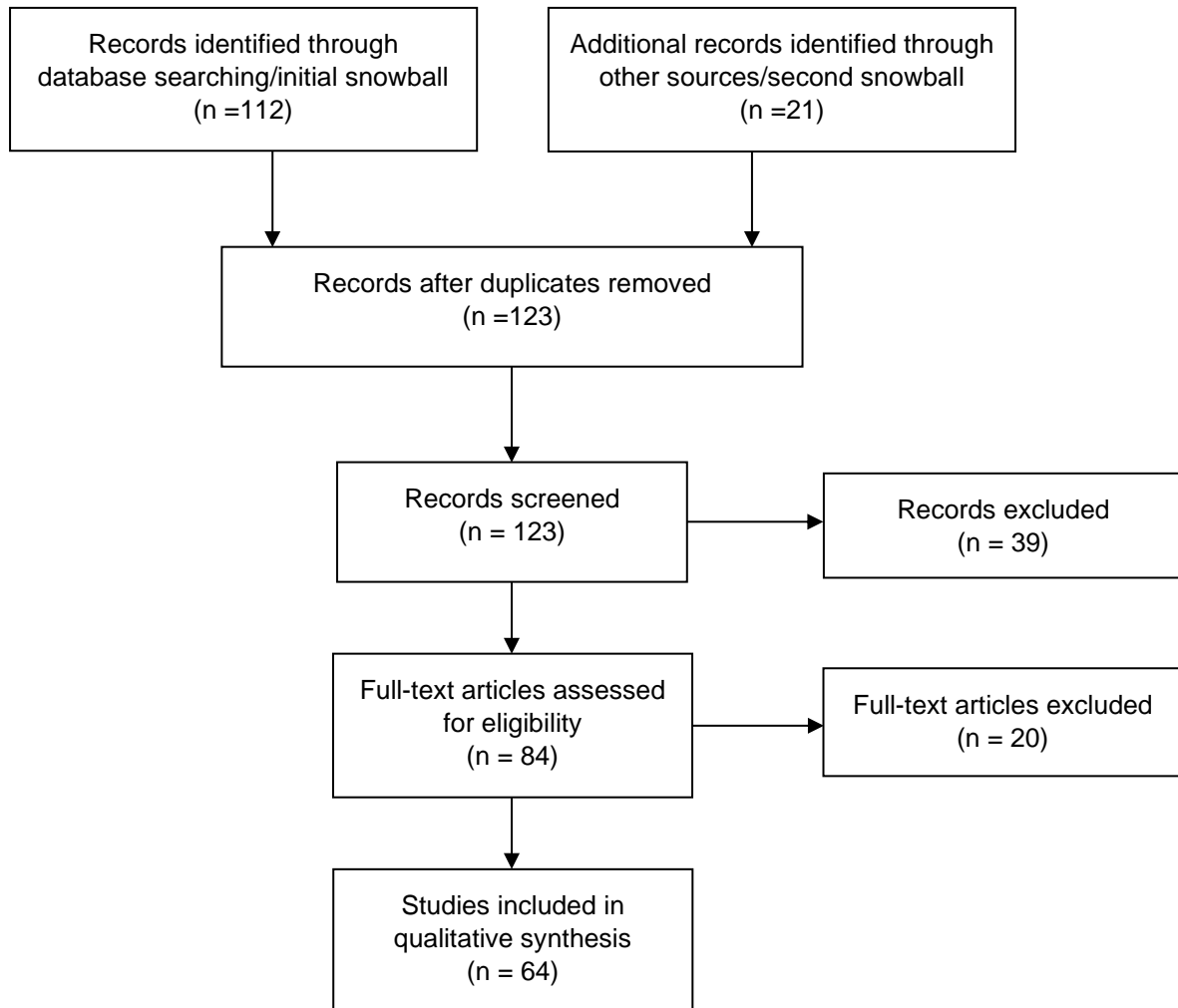
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Appendix A: PRISMA diagram

Records identified through
database searching/initial snowball
(n =112)

Additional records identified through
other sources/second snowball
(n =21)

Records after duplicates removed
(n =123)

Records screened
(n = 123)

Records excluded
(n = 39)

Full-text articles assessed
for eligibility
(n = 84)

Full-text articles excluded
(n = 20)

Studies included in
qualitative synthesis
(n = 64)

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