1

Children and Young People's Services in Context

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Chapter Overview

This chapter examines the concept of policy and discusses how national social and educational policy impacts on the shape and direction of the work done with children and young people, with a particular focus on recent years. The chapter aims to provide an overview of current policy and its impact on service provision as well as providing an introduction to the understanding and critiquing of policy discourse. Overall themes and trends, such as the move towards targeted and integrated services, are also considered.

By reading and engaging with the activities in this chapter, you will:

- become aware of the range of policies and service development initiatives which have shaped children and young people's services in recent years;
- develop your understanding on how these policies and service developments reflect values, priorities and thinking about children and young people;
- reflect on possible future developments in children and young people's services, especially related to learning and development, and the likely impact on delivery of provision.

What is policy?

Policy is a plan or course of action defined by a government, political party, or organisation, intended to influence and determine decisions and actions. Policy refers to organisational or governmental statements of vision and intent which seek to provide a direction, framework and impetus for practice. Policy may be:

- **aspirational** – presenting a statement of intent or planned direction; these are often presented as 'green papers' (a preliminary report of government proposals to stimulate discussion). Green papers may be followed by 'white papers' (an authoritative report or guide that seeks to solve a problem and which serves as a prelude to legislation);

- **strategic** – setting out a series of planned actions, including (possibly) funding commitments, e.g. *Aiming High for Young People* (DCSF, 2007);

- **legislative** – law enshrined in an Act of Parliament, e.g. Education Reform Act, 1988.

The policies which governments use for education, health, welfare and social care to direct the practice and provision of a range of institutions and social arrangements, have come together to form what is termed 'the welfare state'. In thinking about how policy directs our practice, a good starting point would be the emergence of the welfare state during war-time Britain in the 1940s, the key architect of which was the economist William Beveridge. The Beveridge Report (1942) identified 'five evils' it wished to address in British society – *squalor, ignorance, want, idleness* and *disease* – and the creation of the welfare state was a contribution to building a fairer, more equitable society in Britain in the post-war years.

Much social policy and welfare provision continues to aim to address the impacts of social inequality. This is not just because of moral arguments related to the principle of social justice but because, increasingly, social inequality is recognised as being associated with, if not the cause of, social problems. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), for example, have shown that societies which are more unequal (in terms of income and wealth distribution) tend to have not just more poverty, but less social mobility and

poorer educational attainment, amongst other social ills. However, whilst welfare provision is often targeted at the poor to provide a 'safety net', it does not necessarily make society more 'equal'. For example, the recent Hills report (National Equality Panel, 2010) showed that income inequality in the UK declined steadily from the 1930s to the mid-1970s but since then has increased, and is now back to levels comparable to the 1930s. There also continues to be systematic differences in educational attainment across social groups.

The main inequalities in society (relevant to those working with children and young people) identified by a number of analysts (e.g. Cole, 2006) relate to gender, 'race' and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and social class. The recent Equality Act (2010) brings many of these together under a single overarching legislative framework for businesses and public services. The associated Equality Duty came into effect in 2011 replacing the three previous duties on race, disability and gender, now extended to include sexual orientation, religion or belief, and gender reassignment.

Policy does not just exist at a national, governmental level. International policy-makers, such as UNICEF, can be seen to directly influence our work with children and young people, through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). The UNCRC, via 54 articles and two optional protocols, sets out a global framework to protect the fundamental rights of all children and young people to survival; to develop to their full potential; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. At the time of writing, every country in the world has ratified or acceded to this legally binding Convention, with the exception of Somalia and the United States of America.

The UNCRC influences work with children and young people in Britain. For example, Article 12 states 'When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account'. This article supports and reinforces practices relating to children and young people's voice and participation, from school councils and the UK Youth Parliament, through to representation on policy formation and staff appointment processes and related procedures now followed by many employers.

Why is policy important?

Think for a moment about the working policies and practices we have taken for granted in recent years – the National Curriculum, Sure Start, *Every Child Matters*, etc. These have become embedded in education, learning and development provision, but they too will change and be replaced by newer policy initiatives, for example, academies and free schools, 'the Big Society', all of which will have a direct impact on practice.

Individual nurseries, schools, play organisations and youth services will have their own policies which relate to an individual organisation's own vision, priorities and services and/or reflect or interpret broader government policy. For example, the Equality Act (2010) places a duty on public bodies to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment. An individual school or local authority will then have its own policies relating directly to its localised responses to this duty.

Understanding policy is helped by having some understanding of its historical development, and some key points of policy affecting children and young people over the last 30 years are outlined in the chronology below.

A chronology of policy relating to children and young people 1981–2011

Conservative government: 1979–1997

Prime Ministers: Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990); John Major (1990–1997)

1981   The **1981 Education Act** sets the first duty of LEAs to educate disabled children in mainstream schools, taking account of parents' wishes and establishing three conditions that were to be met before it could happen. These conditions are: that the disabled child can be educated in the ordinary school; that other children's education will not be adversely affected; and that there is an efficient use of resources.

The Act comes into force in April 1983 and one of the direct consequences of this legislation is the increasing use of teaching assistants and learning

support assistants to support the learning of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

1988   The **Education Reform Act 1988** restates the functions of LEAs in respect of Further and Higher Education. It introduces the National Curriculum, intended to be in operation in all schools by September 1992. Four age-related Key Stages are defined, incorporating all pupils of a particular age at the beginning of each academic year. Citizenship is designated as one of a set of five 'cross-curricular themes'. Parents have the right to vote a school out of local authority control. The Act provides for greater delegation of budgets to newly constituted governing bodies for FE colleges that from 1989 become corporate bodies.

The **Youth Training Guarantee** is introduced. It decrees that no sixteen/seventeen-year-old is to be without education, employment or training.

1989   The **1989 Children Act** gives every child the right to protection from abuse and exploitation and the right to inquiries to safeguard their welfare. Its central tenet is that children are usually best looked after within their family. The Act comes into force in England and Wales in 1991 and (with some differences) in Northern Ireland in 1996.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere should have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are: non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil and social services.

1991   The **Parents' Charter** gives parents the right to information about the school and its performance (updated in 1994). This leads to the introduction of **school league tables** in 1992 with the stated aim to give parents the consumer information they need to create a free market in school choice. Staff guidance on working together under the **Children Act** require **Area Child Protection Committees and Child Protection Panels** (ACPCs) to conduct an investigation to establish whether child protection procedures were followed when child abuse is suspected or confirmed to be the cause of a child's death.

The **UK ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC), accepting responsibility for the obligations in it.

1992   Concern about variable local inspection regimes leads government to introduce a national scheme of inspections though a reconstituted Her Majesty's Inspectorale (HMI), This becomes known as the **Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)**. Schools judged by Ofsted to be failing can be put in 'special measures' or closed if they fail to improve.

1996 The **1996 Education Act** consolidates all the Education Acts concerning schools since 1944. Under the legislation for a National Curriculum, children are entitled to an education which is broad and balanced and which prepares them for further education (FE) and training or the job market. Compulsory school starting age is defined at five years, as amended by the Education Act 1997. The Act also restates the principle that pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents and provides for parental choice of school.

Labour government: 1997–2010

Prime Ministers: Tony Blair (1997–2007); Gordon Brown (2007–2010)

1998 The **National Childcare Strategy** green paper, 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge', is launched while the Nursery Education Voucher scheme is abolished. **Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP)** are introduced, composed of the key local groups in the early years and childcare with a remit of planning early years provision. Over 150 Partnerships in England are now in operation.

Sure Start local programmes are introduced but these are limited to disadvantaged areas. Initial districts for Sure Start development are selected 'according to the levels of deprivation within their areas'. **Sure Start** is set up as a cross-departmental strategy to improve services for younger children and families based on the government's belief that investment in early childhood can help later performance at school, prevent truancy and reduce the risk of unemployment, drug abuse and crime. Its goal will be to ensure that all children are ready to learn when they arrive at school. It is targeted at children under four and their families in areas of need.

Education Action Zones are launched. These are geographical areas in which group of schools work together to meet educational targets for improvement. They receive extra funding for three to five years and are run not by the LEA, but by a forum including businesses, parents and community organisations (in 2005 these become 'Excellence Clusters').

1999 The **Protection of Children Act 1999** is passed, aiming to prevent paedophiles from working with children. It requires childcare organisations in England and Wales to inform the Department of Health about anyone known to them who is suspected of harming children or putting them at risk.

2000 The **Learning and Skills Act** 2000 introduces '**city academies**' (later termed 'academies') which are publicly funded with some private sponsorship and independent of LEA control.

2001 The first wave of **Connexions** partnerships begins with the aim of every young person aged thirteen to nineteen having access to the Connexions service by 2004. The role of **Personal Adviser** is created.

In September 2001, **HMI and Ofsted** become responsible for the registration and **inspection of day care and childminding in England** (previously this had been done by local authorities).

In November 2001, a new **Special Educational Needs Code of Practice** (DE, 2001) replaces the previous Code of Practice (1994). It reflects legislation introduced early in the year in the form of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) and redefines assessment processes and provision of support.

2002 Citizenship becomes a **Foundation Subject of the National Curriculum** in secondary schools, giving Citizenship statutory status for the first time. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) begins to actively promote the concept of '**extended schools**', initially through some demonstration projects and then by sponsoring 25 LEAs to develop extended schools pathfinder projects.

The Department for Education and Skills publishes **Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services**, designed to inform Ofsted's Inspection Framework for Youth Work. The specification states that local youth services must develop a curriculum related to the overall goals of the Connexions service.

2003   Lord Laming's report into the death of child abuse victim Victoria Climbié, finds that health, police and social services missed numerous opportunities to save her. This gives impetus for the government green paper, **Every Child Matters**. The paper proposes an electronic tracking system for England's children; the creation of 150 children's trusts to be set up by 2006, amalgamating health, education and social services; a children's director to oversee local services; statutory local safeguarding children boards; and a children's commissioner for England.

A **national agreement on raising standards and tackling workload** is signed by government, employers and school workforce unions. The agreement acknowledges the pressure on schools to raise standards and tackle teacher workload, and introduces a series of significant changes to teachers' conditions of service. This leads to the establishment of **higher level teaching assistants (HLTA)** (and associated standards). The agreement also helps create other new roles that support teachers' work and pupils' learning and wider workforce reform.

2004   The **Children Act 2004**, which pushes forward the main proposals of the *Every Child Matters* green paper is passed by parliament. It allows local authorities more flexibility in organising their children's services, with the amalgamation of education and social services not mandatory. Councils are given two years to set up children's trusts. It introduces switch from Sure Start local programmes to Sure Start Children's Centres, controlled by local authorities, and provided not just in the most disadvantaged areas.

'**Extended schools**' becomes a manifestation of the 'joined-up' work of children's trusts. The desire that all schools become extended schools

forms part of the government's **Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners** (DfES, 2004a).

2005   England's first children's commissioner (Professor Al Aynsley Green) is appointed. The **Children's Workforce Development Council** (CWDC) is created to support the implementation of the government's *Every Child Matters* strategy. Amongst other things, the CWDC is responsible for introducing Early Years Professional Status, as part of the government's aim to professionalise the early years workforce.

The CWDC steers through the development of the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce (DfES, 2005), a framework later revised in 2010, aimed at enabling all professionals, practitioners and volunteers working with children, young people and their carers and families to develop a shared language and understanding across services and provision and so facilitate inter-professional and multi-agency working.

2006   The **Parent Support Adviser** (PSA) pilot is introduced. This is a government-funded initiative to support 20 local authorities (LAs) to introduce PSAs into their workforce in over 600 schools.

2007   Early Years Professional Status is introduced. It is the government's aim to have an early years professional in every daycare setting by 2015 (DfES, 2007c). This will require 20,000 EYPs.

Ofsted is merged with the **Adult Learning Inspectorate** (ALI) to provide an inspection service which includes all *post-16 government funded education* (except *Higher Education Institutes and Universities*). Ofsted also takes on responsibility for the registration and inspection of social care services for children, and the welfare inspection of independent and maintained boarding schools to become the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

Aiming High for Young People: A Ten-year Strategy for Positive Activities is published (DCSF, 2007). The strategy includes 55 commitments intended to increase young people's participation in constructive leisure-time activities and includes the proposed creation of 'Youth Professional Status' (with associated degree qualification requirement).

Every Parent Matters (DfES, 2007a) introduces a number of initiatives to support parenting, including models of good practice in early intervention and preventative support for parents developed in the Parent Support Advisor pilot.

2008   Statutory framework for the **Early Years Foundation Stage** becomes mandatory for all schools and early years providers in Ofsted registered settings attended by young children (0–5 years). An Early Years Register of childcare providers registered with Ofsted is established.

As part of the commitment from the Children's Plan, the **National Play Strategy** (DCSF, 2008) is launched in which the government sets out a plan and a budget to improve play opportunities for children and young people.

2010   The **Equality Act (2010)** enters the statute book in the last weeks of the Labour government. It harmonises a range of existing legislation relating to specific employer responsibilities and duties under a single legislative framework and also seeks to strengthen protection and rights against discrimination and harassment.

Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition government 2010–?

Prime Minister: David Cameron (2010–?); Deputy Prime Minister: Nick Clegg (2010– ?)

2010   The Big Society is the flagship policy of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement. The stated priorities are: to give communities more powers (localism and devolution); to encourage people to take an active role in their communities (volunteerism); to transfer power from central to local government; to support co-operatives, mutuals, charities and social enterprises; and to promote open/transparent government.

National Citizen Service (NCS) is introduced. This is a two-month summer programme for sixteen-year-olds, involving both residential and at-home components, to be delivered by independent charities, social enterprises and businesses.

The Coalition government's policy agenda is dominated by the aim of cutting public sector spending and the 2010 **Comprehensive Spending Review** represents the largest sustained fall in public expenditure since 1922. It affects many bodies associated with children and young people (for example, the Children's Workforce Development Council, the Training and Development Agency for Schools, the Young People's Learning Agency), with significant cuts in budgets.

The tight financial settlement also includes significant cuts to Local Authority Grants, resulting in **cuts to local public sector jobs and services**.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is renamed the **Department for Education**.

The **Academies Act** enables more schools in England to become academies funded at a comparable level to maintained schools but able to get the share of central funding that local authorities used to spend on their behalf. Schools that apply to become academies will be allowed to keep any surplus balances that they hold.

2011   The Education Act provides for the introduction of targeted free early years care for children under compulsory school age; makes changes to provisions on school discipline and places restrictions on the public reporting of allegations made against teachers; makes changes to the

arrangements for setting up new schools; and amends the Academies Act 2010 to make provision for sixteen to nineteen academies and alternative provision academies.

Early indications are that **youth services and children's centres are worst hit** by local authority spending cuts (Higgs, 2011).

The **Special Educational Needs green paper** ('Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability') proposes that a simplified assessment process is introduced resulting in an *Education, Health and Care Plan* and re-introduces an emphasis on special schools as an alternative to mainstream school inclusion.

The **Tickell Review** (2011) of the Early Years Foundation Phase seeks to reinforce developments in early years provision by emphasising the role of parents and carers as partners in their children's learning, and simplifying and streamlining early learning goals.

Workplace activity

What are the workplace policies which govern your practice? How do they relate to government policy? Can you find examples of workplace policies which are clearly about implementing government policy? Discuss with colleagues how the national policy changes outlined have impacted on you and your setting?

What does this chronology tell us? What conclusions can we draw from it? Bear in mind that it only presents a selection of policy relating to children and young people over this period. Clearly, in this time, as Paul Spicker (2010) has argued:

> Education has been particularly significant as an instrument of social policy, in the sense not only of policies for welfare but also as policies intended to deal with the structure of society.

Spicker (2010) is careful to clarify here that:

> 'Education' is principally identified with schooling, though in theory it extends far beyond this, being concerned with intellectual and social development. The main emphasis is on children, though there is clearly scope for education for all and 'lifelong learning'.

Spicker goes on to say that the aims of education include:

- Liberal education: the development of each individual intellectually and socially to that person's fullest potential.

- Socialisation: education is a method of transmission of social norms and values. This is also sometimes seen as a form of social control.

- Education as 'handmaiden': the education system serves the industrial process and the economy by producing a trained workforce, and by providing childminding services.

- Social change (or 'social engineering'). The education system has been seen as a means of bringing about social change. (Spicker, 2010)

We can see these different aims for education present in the policies outlined in the chronology. But although there may be consensus that the purpose of social policy is to help to create the 'good society' and to 'fix' perceived social problems, there are differences of opinion as to what constitutes the 'good society' and even less agreement as to the best ways of achieving it.

There are also differences in beliefs about the causes of social problems and therefore how these can be fixed. Such beliefs are often based on 'ideology' (an overarching general view of how the world functions and how the world should be) and thus the distinction can be made between ideological policy-making and 'evidence-based' policy-making. John Maynard Keynes, a very influential economist, once famously quipped, 'There is nothing a government hates more than to be well-informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult' (Keynes, 1937, cited in Skidelski, 1992: 630).

Evidence-based policy has been defined as an approach that 'helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation' (Davies, 2004: 3). This approach is now well established in the UK (see, for example, The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre), part of the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London). However, there are problems with the notion of evidence-based policy-making. It may pose problems for policy in very new areas in which an evidence base has not been developed. The proof sought for evidence-based policy is modelled on the medical evidence base of big randomised trials. Yet as we saw in the Introduction, this scientific approach to research into social issues is problematic and the evidence base, in terms of research data, may be weak or contradictory.

For this reason, opinions and beliefs remain central to policy-making. We can see social problems and solutions to those problems as articulated within 'narratives' or 'discourse' which policy-makers adopt.

Understanding policy discourse

The idea of 'narrative' or 'discourse' relates not just to the surface of what is said but to the underlying assumptions and beliefs. For example, a dominant discourse adopted by both the previous Conservative and Labour governments over the past 30 years, relates to the idea of a dangerous 'moral underclass' within society – unruly and dysfunctional families living in areas of high deprivation – being the source of social unrest and challenging the notion of good 'citizenship'. This narrative is reflected in key policies, such as the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, which saw the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders or ASBOs. An alternative narrative or discourse of the 'underclass' (itself, a contested term) could be one that is underpinned by analysis of the impact of poverty and which sees the poor as victims of such disadvantage. In contrast to the 'control' policy response outlined above, such a discourse leads to and justifies policies designed to provide support to disadvantaged communities. An example of such policy is the Sure Start programme which was introduced in 1998 and aimed to reduce child poverty.

Ball (2008: 5) described the way that such narratives may become accepted 'truths', suggesting that governments:

> organise their own specific rationalities, making particular sets of ideas obvious, common sense and 'true'... the ways in which policies are spoken and spoken about, their vocabularies, are part of the creation of their conditions of acceptance and enactment. They construct the inevitable and the necessary.

We can see this very clearly in the 'there is no alternative' (to budgetary restraint and public sector spending cuts) discourse of the 2010 Coalition government. Gee (1996: 10) has observed that: 'Discourses create "social positions" (perspectives) from which people are "invited" ("summoned") to speak, listen, act, read and write, think, feel, believe and value'.

For example, a policy discourse may create or confirm the social position or category of 'benefit scrounger' or 'school refuser'. These terms present reality in a particular way, people on benefit are (often) lazy, feckless and fiddling the system for their own gain, the persistent truant is choosing to opt out of education. Both of these imply that the problem is with the individual and exclude consideration of the way in which economic and social factors (in the case of 'benefit scroungers') and school, family, and other social factors (in the case

of the 'school refuser') are contributing to the issue. Identifying the way in which discourse shapes the particular view of reality is termed 'discourse analysis'.

An approach to discourse analysis which summarises this is exemplified by Ruth Levitas (2005), who developed a useful framework for interrogating New Labour's social exclusion policy. Levitas identified three broad narratives in relation to the Labour government's policies to address social exclusion:

- the **redistribution discourse** ('RED') – where the cause of exclusion is seen to relate to poverty, and so to address this, resources and funding should be redistributed to areas of need (an example of such a policy was the Sure Start programme);

- the **social integration discourse** ('SID') – where the cause of exclusion relates to lack of paid work and the way to support social integration is through engagement in the mechanisms of employment and steps towards it provided by education and training (an example of such a policy was the Connexions strategy for young people);

- the **moral underclass discourse** ('MUD') – where the cause of social exclusion relates to the actions and behaviour of particular groups, such as workless, criminally active young men and lone parents, and the policy response based on this discourse tends to involve controlling the behaviour of these groups (an example of which was the introduction of ASBOs).

In considering Levitas's model, it is important to note that policy can encompass different discourses, emphasising issues of both individual moral and social responsibility, and at the same time acknowledging wider social, community and collective issues.

Policy discourse and narrative, especially that of political parties, contribute to what Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political theorist, referred to as 'hegemony' – the way that dominant ideology goes unchallenged and results in conformity through uncritical consensus. In the next chapter we look at professionalism, which we argue includes a critical perspective on policy and a recognition of the difference between what a policy claims to do and its real impact.

In the chronology, we can see the individual policies in terms of key trends which have emerged over this period. One key trend has been

the changing role of the state from provider to commissioner of services through the creation of 'markets' for and privatisation of services. Associated with this has been increasing differentiation of provision and a shift from universal provision to targeted provision. In relation to the children and young people's workforce, another trend has been increasing managerialism, auditing and accountability of professional roles, as well as the 'modernisation' of the workforce, creating many new 'associate professional' roles.

Reflection point

Think about a local or national policy which relates directly to your everyday practice: what is the nature of the 'issue' or in some cases 'problem' that the policy seeks to address? What does the policy tell us about how the government regards the underpinning issues and factors – what is the discourse?

Do you think the overall conception of the policy is reasonable and is it likely to be successful?

Summary

In this chapter we have provided a chronology of some of the key policy developments relating to children and young people of the last 30 years. This is not an exhaustive list but clearly shows the importance of this area for government policy. We have argued that policy needs to be seen as arising out of fundamental understandings of social problems and have related this to notions of policy discourse. Ultimately, all policies are subject to change and practitioners have an important role to play in the implementation and evaluation of policies which can inform such change.

Further reading

Action For Children (2008) *As Long As It Takes: A New Politics for Children.* London: Action for Children. This comprehensive report examines 21 years of policy affecting vulnerable children and young people in the UK.

Children and Young People Now: http://www.cypnow.co.uk/go/policywatch_england/ Includes a useful 'Policy watch' page through which you can keep up to date with policy relating to children and young people.

EPPI-Centre: http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=63&language=en-US The EPPI-Centre conducts systematic reviews of the evidence available across a range of topics including: Education, Health Promotion, Employment, Social Care, Crime and Justice.

Spicker, P. (2010) 'An introduction to social policy', Aberdeen, The Robert Gordon University: http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/publicpolicy/introduction This website provides an accessible and comprehensive introduction to the topic of social policy.

UNICEF: Convention on the Rights of the Child: http://www.unicef.org/crc/ This website provides excellent background information and discussion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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