Engaging children as capable contributors: Practising, Thinking and Acting Differently for Children

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Child Aware Approaches
May 2015
Overview

- Background to supporting children’s participation – theory and practice
- Windermere, Engaging children as capable contributors: Consulting in practice settings
- Good Beginnings Australia Connect with Children: Consulting as an Organisation
- Ethical considerations for practice.
Influences

- Sociology
- Democratic education
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)
Sociology

- Youth area consultations and engagement - connect young people with society be active members of a cohesive and peaceful society (Wyn, 2015).

- Shifting understandings of the young child as ‘only’ innocent and in need of protection competent meaning maker with valid and important knowledge about the world.

- Children live in not outside the adult world.

Disneyfication or romanticising of childhood fails to recognize the lived realities of children and limits children’s opportunities to talk about their worlds and the ‘real’ knowledge, issues and concerns they have.
Democratic education

- Democracy is more than government or institutional philosophy but democratic communities where children actively participate in daily life and civics (Dewey, 1916).

- Democratic practice encourages and supports children to participate alongside adults in planning, developing and evaluating their world.
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)

- the right to express their views on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously (Article 12)

- the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds through any media they choose (Article 13)

- the right to education that promotes children’s emotional, intellectual and physical development; that fosters awareness and understanding of parents’ roles and of the importance of cultural identity, language and values; and that prepares children for a responsible life in society (Article 29).
United Nations General Comment (No. 7) on ‘Implementing child rights in early childhood’

- The young child’s right to express their views and feelings should be taken into account in ‘the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations’ (OHCHR, 2005, p. 7) and it stresses that these are the rights of all children, irrespective of their age.
Practice case study: Windermere’s children’s feedback session

Objectives

- Discover what children think about our service
- Explore children’s view of their family outcomes
- Increase child participation at family and service level

What does success look like?

- At least 5 children participate in sessions
- At least 2 changes are implemented as a result
What would you like the worker to do with you?!

Jelly to help mum to get better and a treehouse.
Planning

- Determine budget (ours was $2500 but we ended up spending $312 plus staff wages)
- List objectives and make basic session plans
- Choose a date – picked the end of the school holidays hoping families would appreciate a free fun day out
- Search for venue – important that it was family friendly, fun, local, well priced, with onsite catering
- Undertake risk assessment (including ethics)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF RISK</th>
<th>COMPONENTS (Plan)</th>
<th>IMPACT/PROBABILITY</th>
<th>SYSTEMS FOR MITIGATION (Do)</th>
<th>ADVERSE EVENT ACTION PLAN (Check/Act)</th>
<th>AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (Do)</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contagious infections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Vaccinations provided by Windermere Antibacterial gel &amp; wipes in cars When conducting the last RSVPs discourage families with infectious diseases from attending.</td>
<td>Staff members can join children in to 2 groups to leave a worker free</td>
<td>All Lollipops supervisors are first aid qualified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent or caregiver becomes unwell or unable to care for children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Have adequate staff on hand to assist parent and care for children. Call parent’s emergency contact or ambulance if necessary.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If someone is hurt</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>Playcentre is first aid qualified. Call ambulance if necessary. Children are ultimately the responsibility of their parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If a child leaves the premises</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>Playcentre has child proof gating. Children are ultimately the responsibility of their parents. Sufficient staffing ratio so staff can assist parents in locating their child.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 staff in attendance X2 back up staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff member/s unable to attend</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Have back-up staff members on call to attend.</td>
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</table>
Advertising

- Target families near closure to ensure fresh memories and significant agency involvement
- Design a colourful flyer and write a paragraph about the Feedback Day in families’ closure letters
- Case workers hand out closure letter and flyer 3 months before the Feedback Day date
- Add interested families’ names to attendance register
- Prospective attendees given a reminder call a week prior
We are running a community feedback session during the January school holidays to listen to the thoughts and opinions of families who have used our services. Your input will help us improve the services we deliver to local families.

**Event Info:**
- Arrive at 10am to give the children time for free play before we start their supervised feedback games and the adult feedback group.
- A delicious lunch will be provided after the sessions and children are welcome to continue playing in the centre under your supervision.
- Help improve your local services
- Share your thoughts and ideas
- Meet local families
- Free holiday entertainment for your children

**For:**
Current and previous clients of Windermere's Family Services

**Dates:**
Thursday 23rd January 2014

**Time:**
10:00am - 12:45pm
(We cannot accommodate families after 10:30am as the activities will be underway)

**Venue:**
Lollipops Playland & Cafe, Brechin Drive
352 Princess Hwy, Narrabeen

Please secure your place by booking with Leanne Kelly by December 10th on 9705 3237 or email leanne.kelly@windermere.org.au
Organising

- Plan agenda – free play, sessions, lunch, free play.
- Times – morning, not too early, sessions completed prior to lunch
- Design consent forms
- Research what works well in children’s focus groups – small group size, close age ranges, fun, informality – see article in Developing Practice, No.36 Spring 2013: 78
CHILDREN’S CONSENT FORM

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in our feedback activities. Their suggestions will help us improve our services for children.

All recordings and photographs will be de-identified.
Handling of the data will be in compliance with the Information Privacy Act.

I agree to allow my child to participate in Windermere’s service feedback activities.
I agree to allow Windermere to record my child’s voice and photograph their de-identified artwork.

Signature ____________________ Date __________

Name in full _______________________________
## Family Services Community Feedback Agenda
### Lollipops Playland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival &amp; quick play</td>
<td>10am (30mins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning tea served in the focus rooms</td>
<td>10:30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Groups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Adult focus group</td>
<td>10:30 - 12 (90mins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Children hip hop</td>
<td>(30mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children art activity</td>
<td>(30mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children drama activity</td>
<td>(30mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Younger children supervised in &lt;5’s play area</td>
<td>(90mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children broken into ages</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 8, 9 - 12, 13 - 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Older teens could have the choice to join the adult focus groups or go with the eldest children).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The three children’s groups rotate through the three children’s activities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole group lunch in the main area</td>
<td>12:00-12:45 (45mins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free play time available until the playcentre closes</td>
<td>12:45 - 5pm</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Staff

- We had three children’s sessions and needed a staff member for each group
- We also ran a concurrent adult focus group so required an extra staff member to watch the very young children
- We asked two staff members to be on standby in case allocated workers were unwell on the day
Activities

- Kinetic drawing – children draw their house and family engaging in an activity to show family dynamics and relationships.

- Puppetry – basic cardboard cutouts on paddlepop sticks that children decorate. Suitable for younger children.

- Hip hop – children learn hip hop while taking turns to shout out answers. Need skilled staff and CD player.
Questions for children

- What has changed in your family (kinetic drawing)
  - What it was like before and how did you feel? What it is like now and how you feel?

- How did the worker act (puppetry)
  - Do you remember having a worker come to your house to work with your family? What did the worker do? Did you see or talk to them? How did you feel about them?

- How could we increase your participation (hip hop)
  - What activities would you like to do with your family worker? Would you like to be more involved in family discussions and planning?
Facilitating

- Note taking – transcribe everything even if it seems unimportant (include paralinguistics)
- Be friendly, fun and informal
- Reword and paraphrase questions when necessary to reach the child’s level
- Use film, dictaphone or camera when appropriate
- Annotate and photograph artwork (get consent!)
Report writing

- Introduce objectives and methodology
- Present results
- Analyse results and determine how they can be used
- Translate results into meaningful actions using an action plan with SMART goals, timelines and assigned responsibilities
- Use the report! Disseminate to team and use for funding and service improvements
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collect ongoing children’s service feedback</td>
<td>Add a bulletpoint to the pre and post scaling asking child’s perspective on the service or on whether anything has changed in their family since having a case worker</td>
<td>R &amp; D worker to organise and evaluate – team to implement</td>
<td>Monitor and evaluate biannually in July and January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMs do more activities with children and give children choice</td>
<td>Create a flyer with the kid’s activity ideas plus team’s suggestions to give CMs some ideas of where to take kids or to take on HVs to give kid’s choice</td>
<td>R &amp; D worker to organise with team input – team to implement</td>
<td>Working document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically speaking to the children at any opportunity during case lifetime</td>
<td>Case note. Maybe a section on BIA eg ‘Have spoken with child 1, 2, 3’ etc and a tick box</td>
<td>Admin Group (record what is currently being done)</td>
<td>Occurring, but in discussion as how to capture this in documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve children in goal setting</td>
<td>Create tick box on action plan or get them to write their name on it to say if children were involved with AP when appropriate</td>
<td>Admin Group</td>
<td>Occurring, but in discussion as how to capture this in documentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learnings

- Include more questions and probe for deeper results - children were highly responsive
- Film the puppet show to capture paralinguistics
- Double-stress the importance of facilitators noting all comments
- Include more families – we could have catered for up to 30 children with the staff ratio
- Be prepared and organised but also flexible and able to adapt
Case study conclusions

- The day was successful

- We met the participant success metrics by interviewing 10 children (our target was a minimum of 5 children)

- We met the improvement success metrics by implementing 4 service improvements as a result of children’s suggestions (our target was a minimum of 2 changes)
Good Beginnings’ Connect with Children: Background

Objectives
- involve children in evaluation and consultation of services;
- increase staff and organisational capacity to consult and involve children; and
- embed a national approach to involving children in service design and evaluation, documenting:
  - What children said when we listened?
  - What we did and how it went?

Two broad questions guided the consultation:
- What is important to children and young people?
- What do they think about the service they receive?
Planning

- Survey to staff ask about their relevant experience and skills in consulting with children

- Staff reference group - planning and designing the consultation guidelines, tools and activities in response to the survey results

- Sites could also design or utilise their own or other tools, activities or questions.
Implementation
Findings

REACH

Connect with Children activities were conducted in eleven sites across Australia and reached a total of 256 children. This represents an increase of 48% in reach when compared to last year’s consultation. The age breakdown is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-6 months:</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>six to twelve months old:</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one year olds:</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two year olds:</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three year olds:</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four year olds:</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five year olds:</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>six to eight years old:</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eight to twelve years old:</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twelve to eighteen years old:</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process has shown that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>So…</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships and interactions are most important to children in helping them to <strong>feel loved and safe</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
<td>support children to develop relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and shelter in a family environment are most important for children in supporting access to <strong>material basics</strong> (other possessions contributed to their security but were secondary to food and shelter).</td>
<td></td>
<td>meet basic material needs in the context of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children want to be active—supporting children to access a wide range of physical activity is most important for children when it comes to being <strong>healthy</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
<td>get active with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are participating in <strong>learning</strong> through activity or play based learning. It was also evident in children’s responses that engagement in traditional ‘literacy’ activities was low.</td>
<td></td>
<td>wrap opportunities for learning skill development around children’s play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children were <strong>participating</strong> in spaces in their community and highlighted activities that they were involved in - there are fewer examples of participation in decision making.</td>
<td></td>
<td>get children involved in making decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reporting
Reporting back to children

This is a story about children from all around Australia...

These children were not all the same; they had different ideas and different faces.

They were speaking many different languages; they came from lots of different places.

Some were born in Australia; some were born overseas.

They lived in many types of houses with different kinds of families.

They loved their families and friends and the things they do and say.

Like hugs from dad or singing with mum and all the games they play.

They didn’t like to say goodbye and not see their friends or families.

It made them sad if people would be mean to them or tease.

These people were special and helped children to feel loved and to feel safe; and that was important to them!
Embedding the approach

- Annual activity
- Embedding consultation in every day practice
- Challenge ourselves to act differently because of what we hear
Ethical engagement - *Why, What, How, and Who*

**Why**
- Why is this consultation occurring?
- What is the topic of consultation and why and who chose it?
- In whose best interest is this consultation? (Smith, 2003)

**What**
- What do we gain from this practice or consultation?

**How**
- Tools and strategies for consultation
- Places and spaces to consult
- Documentation and ownership
- Reporting back

**Who**
- Who will undertake the consultation?
- Who participated?
Ethical considerations in practice

**Physical environment:** Is the space free from disruptions with appropriate equipment available?

**Time:** Do you have adequate time to develop trust, listen to and demonstrate that you are listening to children and their responses?

**Consent:** Have children and parents/carers given consent to participate in the consultation and given permission to document their ideas?
- Consent can be non-verbal with young children—for example through their continued participation (and as negotiated with their parent or carer).

**Informed consent:** Has the consultation purpose and how their information will be used been explained?

**Involving families:** Are parents or carers available to assist children to participate and help to explain background and context information?

**Resources:** Do you have everything you need available?

**Documentation:** How will you record the consultation activities, will you take notes, photographs, video or audio recordings? Whatever method you chose ensure that this is communicated to participants.
Reflection and discussion

- How do we consciously consider the Why, What, How, and Who when consulting with children?

- What are the implications to timelines when we enact ethical engagement practices?

- What topics would we never consult children about and why?

- How do the images or understandings of childhood as innocent or idolized influence this?