


City of Madison  
Child Care Committee  
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**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS  
& VOICES IN  
CROSS-NATIONAL  
CONTEXTS**



**FRAMING QUESTIONS...**

- What does it mean to reframe social & educational policy, advocacy & planning in terms of **children's rights**?
- What can we learn from nations, municipalities, NGOs and child advocacy groups that emphasize **child participation and voice**?
- How can we apply these insights in our work for and with children who are **marginalized & work for their social inclusion and stronger voice?** [**Nothing about us, without us**]



**CROSS-NATIONAL STUDY OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS & VOICES IN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
2007 - PRESENT


**FOCAL COUNTRIES:**

- Australia
- Kenya
- South Africa
- Ireland
- Northern Ireland
- Greece (Roma focus)



**U.N. CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC)**

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted by UN General Assembly 1989 and entered into force 1990)
- Most widely and universally ratified of all the United Nations instruments
- Legally binding on all countries who have ratified it (though not enforced in a court)
- Most comprehensive of treaties, covering social and economic as well as civil and political rights
- USA only nation which has **not** ratified the CRC



## RESEARCH AND PROGRAM PLANNING WITH CHILDREN

- Conducting research *with* children to explore their unmediated voices presents challenges, related to power and adult authority, informed consent, voluntary participation, child protection, developmentally and culturally sensitive interactions, and the need for flexible interview protocols
- Age is a significant factor, requiring flexible modification of interview and observation methods (e.g., mosaic approach, Smith et al approaches – [see handouts](#))
- Respecting young children's ability to communicate their needs and perspectives and valuing their ideas



## EXAMPLES OF CHILD CONSULTATION

- Models of child consultation involving young children in municipal and child care contexts in Melbourne, Australia and in schools in Belfast, Northern Ireland
- Applying child consultation (ages 6-8) in Arizona (USA) to the Family & Community Case Study [[Lacey Peters dissertation](#)]
- 5-nation Education Rights (Article 29) consultation (ages 8-10)
- First Relationships project with infants & toddlers



## "CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES" IN AUSTRALIA

- Involves all areas of local government; based on children's right to express views (participation) – [see handouts](#)
- Focus on health checks (shifting communication to child), library story time (shorten it), playgrounds (recycling), and public safety (children's drawings displayed at City Hall)
- "If some of the signs had pictures, I'd know what they said!" "If the walk light was longer I could cross the street."
- After actions taken, reported back to children
- Grounded in respect for children
- Changes under more conservative government



## CHILD CONSULTATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- Child consultation and participation in research (Laura Lundy, Queens University)
- Children *not* viewed as research subjects, but an expert group with direct influence
- A goal is to build children's research capacity
- "What helps you come to school ready to learn?" (easier for children to address what makes them *not* ready to learn)
- Children helped interpret findings & made recommendations (stop bullying, "help parents help children learn") & their input changed emphases of project



## WHAT CHILDREN TOLD US...



- 5-year-olds describe living in their communities: they enjoy going to parks, museums, when friends live nearby; "My neighbors are not like neighbors. When I wave, they just stare at me. They never wave back."
- Kindergarten children discuss preschool: "We could draw, now we don't have art and mostly write;" "In preschool we get to draw pictures, and we're free."
- Kindergarten children discuss kindergarten: "We have to do work for days!" "Well I'm nervous about learning how to write the lowercase letter A. I don't really know how to write that letter."

## MAKING SENSE OF MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN KINDERGARTEN

- Child - "You try to get greens and sometimes you get reds, yellow, blue or take away colors, and you don't color this one. Then you have to go to jail."
- Interviewer: "What happens in jail?"
- Child: "You go to the principal's when you have no colors and then the principal calls the policeman and then you go to jail."

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## WHAT CHILDREN TOLD US ABOUT KINDERGARTEN ROUTINES

- Child - "The first in the morning I always do work, lots of work, and then we go out for recess."
- Child - "We're bringing a book home, and starting to read to our mothers and fathers - the book that we get from our reading group."

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## KINDERGARTEN ROUTINES & ADULT POWER

- Interviewer: "What else do you like to do?"
- Paint, draw and paint. Well, painting is something that I mostly *don't* do much at school."
- Interviewer: "Why do you think that is?"
- Child: "I don't know. Well, it's just what my teachers think."

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HOW CAN WE TRANSFORM OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN TO CREATE GREATER RECIPROCIDY AND RESPECT?

- "African – **and other children at the margins** – are typically depicted as victims – of famine, war, bad governance, and oppression...
- Yet, they are also powerful!
- They are courageous!
- They are spiritual!
- They are creative and resilient in the face of many difficult circumstances.
- **They deserve our respect."**

John N'gasike (2007)



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