

City of Madison
Child Care Committee
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Beth Blue Swadener
Arizona State University

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

A RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

In our research, children's rights, as defined by the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC), are examined in all their ramifications:

- as discourse,
- as law,
- as a set of policies and services that impact the everyday life experiences of children, including *inseparable* rights to [protection](#), [provision](#) and [participation](#)



CHILDREN AS AGENTS



- Children viewed as **agents of their own lives**, democratizes the structures that serve them, and raises critical questions about issues of power (e.g., adultism), social agency, and voice in relation to children and youth
- CRC affirms children as independent **rights-bearers** and calls for the expansion of children's participation in policies that affect their lives
- Assumes children **deserve our respect in their own right**, versus more typical instrumental terms of investment, cost-benefit analysis, etc.
- Adults are **duty-bearers**

EXISTENTIAL VS. INSTRUMENTAL FRAMINGS OF CHILDHOOD



- Viewed **instrumentally**, children have no right to care, early education, health care, housing, or adequate nutrition (Polakow, 2007)
- **Cost-benefit analysis** dominates child advocacy discourse in US, enables **question of whether child care and early education is worth it**
- Investment discourse has also led to implicit question, **“are poor children cheap?”**
- Arizona now ranked 2nd from bottom in child poverty & **“war on the poor”** continues

INSTRUMENTAL VS. EXISTENTIAL FRAMINGS OF CHILDHOOD...

- How have you observed & experienced these discourses?
- What examples of “being vs. becoming” have you witnessed?
- How does the notion of “deferred citizenship” relate to policies & practices?

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**



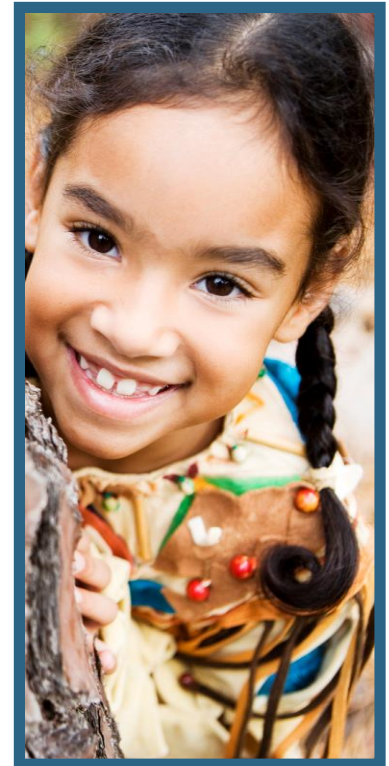
EXAMPLES OF CHILD CONSULTATION



- 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

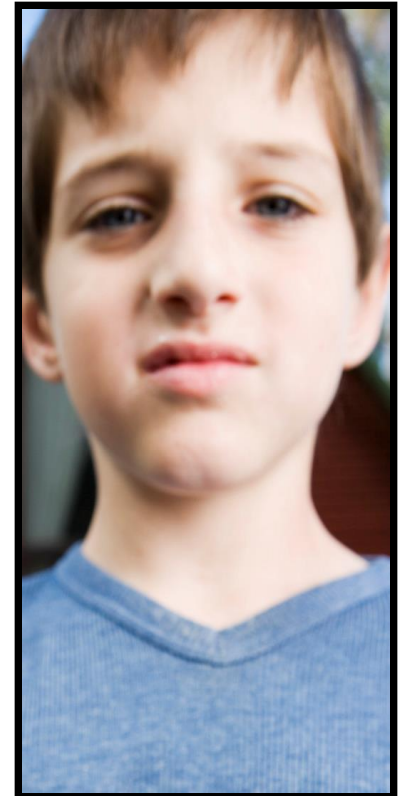
CONSULTATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 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



PLAYQUEST (NORTHERN IRELAND)

- Promotes/creates quality play (Article 31; 12 of CRC)
- “Play is a child-size form of citizenship”
- Action research with sustained child participation
- Letting children lead – children wanted access to more spaces, natural environments
- Children’s conference on lobbying/campaigning
- Questions included, “Why build houses with no playgrounds in new neighborhoods?”
“How can we talk to planning people?”



CHILDREN'S VOICES IN ARIZONA: FAMILY & COMMUNITY CASE STUDY



- Consulted with children in 1st-3rd grade about interview with over 4 and 5 year old children in contrasting Arizona communities
- Focused conversations with 110 children before and after they enter kindergarten (and parallel interviews with their parents/caregivers) as part of **Family & Community Case Study**
- Following children over time across many developmental domains [until funding cut]

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING FROM OUR YOUNG CONSULTANTS

- Children in primary grades were concerned about younger children's TV viewing, bedtime, what they are learning in preschool, and being able to do homework – also about what makes them laugh, their friendships, and their favorite things
- Primary children also told us that in order to make our interviews more fun we should bring toys, let kids play with play dough, have them draw or create sculptures, let older siblings help, tell jokes, and “give lots of praise”



WHAT YOUNG CONSULTANTS SUGGESTED WE ASK KINDERGARTENERS...

2. Do you think you would like school?

• What is your favorite thing to do?

• What do you like to do in your neighborhood?

3. What's your favorite color?

• What's your favorite shirt?

• What is your favorite type of shoes?

• What do you like to do in your freetime?

What time do you go to school?

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.”

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.”

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.”

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING AS WE WORK WITH CHILDREN?

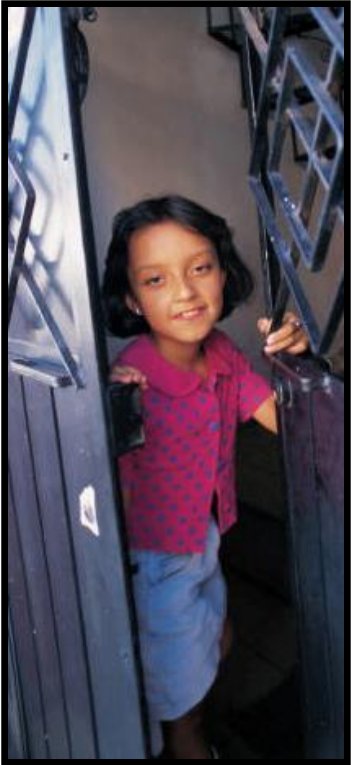
- Our work reinforces the notion children are eager to share their knowledge
- Child consultants shared insight on what we should be talking to kindergartners about, and helped us make interviews more fun
- Changes were made to each iteration of the protocol based on the constant feedback child participants provided during interviews

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD ADVOCACY

- Listen to children and share their stories with “trimtabs” (e.g. opinion shapers and policymakers)
- **Consult directly with children** when planning programs and framing policies affecting them
- In program planning, ask ourselves “**how might a child experience this?**”
- Expand events that encourage children’s civic engagement and voice (e.g., *Local to Global Justice* teach-in involving youth ages 3-17)
- “**Do what you do best and link to the rest!**” (Jeff Jarvis) since it does take a village to raise a child!



CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO CHILD CARE



- As rights bearers, children should be treated as “ends not means” (Polakow, 2007)
- CRC views children as having a “life to live, deserving both respect and resources”
- Children’s rights routinely violated in the U.S. where child care, health care, and family support are viewed as private responsibilities and not linked to the public good
- Mobilizing for early childhood services as a human right offers another strategy for our advocacy work

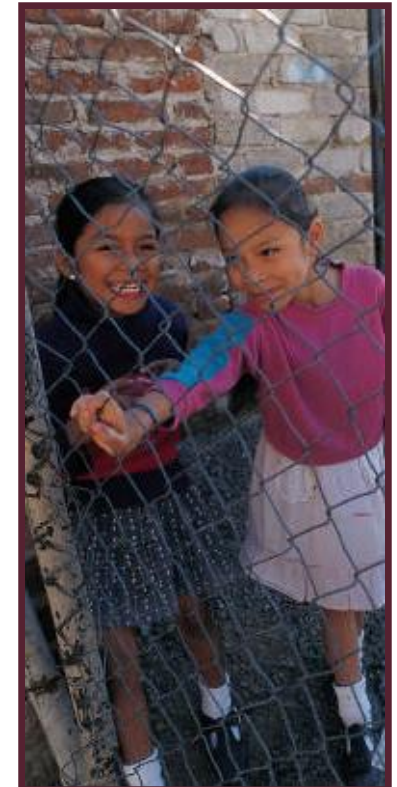
Your ideas & challenges?

- What are some of your **challenges** in honoring children and youth rights & voices?
- What are ways you have been an **ally** or enacted rights-based practices?
- What is your vision for Madison as a child-friendly city that honors and listens to younger human beings?

HOW CAN WE TRANSFORM OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN TO CREATE GREATER RECIPROCITY 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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Arizona State University
USA