

**Pedagogy, Culture & Politics of
Education: Dialogue for Inclusion
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CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS, VOICES &
ALLIES: LEARNING
GLOBALLY,
ACTING LOCALLY



FRAMING QUESTIONS...

- What does it mean to reframe social policy & child advocacy in terms of **children's rights**?
- What can we learn from other nations, municipalities, 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**?



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

2007 - PRESENT

FOCAL COUNTRIES:

- Australia
- Kenya
- South Africa
- Ireland
- Northern Ireland
- Canada



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
- 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 vulnerable 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.

WHERE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS MATTER PROJECT*

Viewing children as agents of their own lives democratizes the structures that serve them, and raises critical questions about issues of power, social agency, and voices in relation to vulnerable children and youth in schools and child care settings:

- ethnic-minority, immigrant, & refugee children
- trafficked children
- children in residential care and youth confinement

(*with Valerie Polakow)



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

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)
- 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 in [Arizona](#) to the Family & Community Case Study and to child advocacy in general

“CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES” IN AUSTRALIA

- Involves all areas of local government; based on children's right to express views
- 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



CHILD

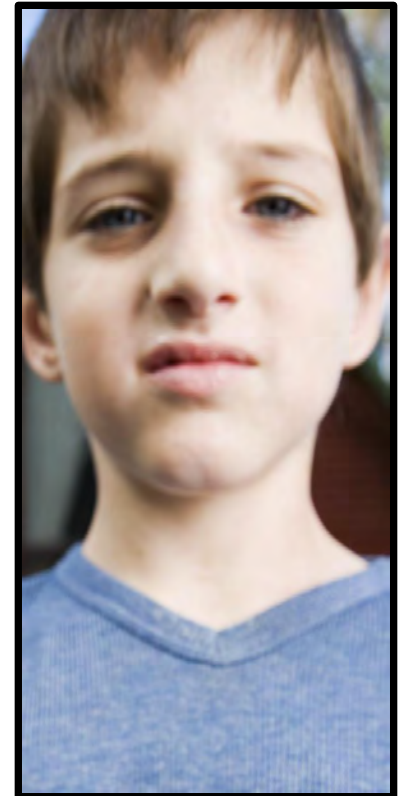
CONSULTATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- Child consultation and participation in research
- 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

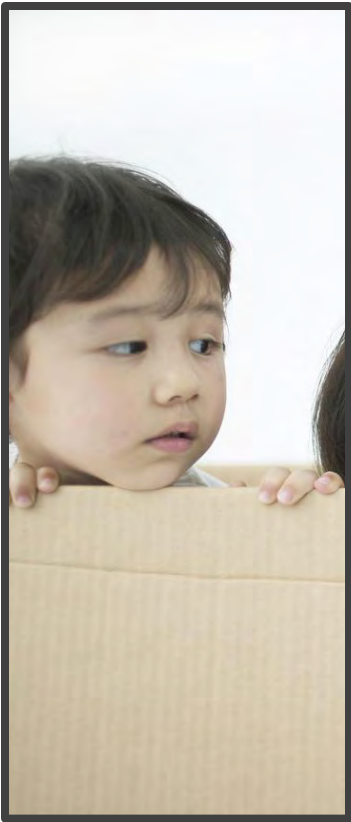


PLAYQUEST (NORTHERN IRELAND)

- 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 4 and 5 year old children in contrasting Arizona communities
- Focused conversations with 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

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 CHILDREN ARE TELLING US SO FAR...

- 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.”



IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD ADVOCACY

- Listen to children and share their stories with “trimtabs”
- 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

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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