Listening to Children’s Voices

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Overview

What is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)?

What impact does the UNCRC have on early childhood?

The mainstreaming of children’s rights in Australian

Implications for early childhood practice

Goodstart Early Learning - beginning to apply the UNCRC in practice
Australia ratified the UNCRC in December 1990.

The UNCRC is a human rights treaty which formally and explicitly outlines the rights of children in international law.

The UNCRC emphasises respect for the inherent human dignity of children.

Whilst the Convention is not incorporated, as a whole, into Australian and state law, by agreeing to comply with the UNCRC, its principles and provisions guide and inform Australian, state and territory legislation, policy, service provision and practice (Smith, 2007).
UNCRC – Articles and Guiding Principles

One way of looking at the rights identified in the UNCRC:
• protection;
• provision; and
• participation.

UN Committee advise four articles, when taken together, can be seen as guiding principles for the UNCRC:
• Right to life, survival and development (Article 6)
• Ensures rights to every child without discrimination (Article 2)
• Best interests of the child are a primary consideration (Article 3)
• The right to express their views and to be heard in all matters that affect them (Article 12) (Thomas, 2011).
What are Child Rights?

Unicef.org.au/downloads/Education/
What are Children’s Rights?
Once upon a time.....

...not so very long ago.
Grown ups realised children have special rights that need to be recognised and protected.
All children. Even the youngest of children (Article 1).
Children who are special in many different ways…. and you.
Goodstart Red Hill, Queensland.

Your family will help you with your rights (Article 5).
Goodstart Perth, Western Australia.

The right to eat healthy food (Article 24).
The right to an education (Article 28).

Goodstart Indooroopilly, Queensland.
The right to learn many things….. (Article 17)

Goodstart Salisbury, South Australia.
...through many sources (Article 17).
The right to be cared for and guided by your parents and your family (Article 23).

With my grandparents, Goodstart Belair, South Australia.
The right to choose your friends (Article 15).

Goodstart Paralowie Byron Bay Drive, South Australia.
The right to think for yourself (Article 14).

Goodstart Maryborough, Queensland.
The right to share your ideas and to be listened to (Article 12 & 13).

Goodstart Red Hill, Queensland.
The right to live and grow (Article 6).

Goodstart North Hobart, Tasmania.
The right to special care and support (Article 23).
The right to be treated fairly by everyone no matter what you believe (Article 2).

Goodstart Whyalla, South Australia.
The right to never be hurt by others (Article 19 & 34).

Goodstart Thornbury, Victoria.
The right to use and develop your talents and abilities (Article 29).
The right to play (Article 31).

Goodstart Mawson Lakes Avocet Drive, South Australia.
The right to rest (Article 31).
The right to privacy (Article 16).

Goodstart Red Hill, Queensland.
The right to practice your own culture, language ...(Article 30).

Goodstart Parafield Gardens, South Australia.
….religion and identity (Article 2 & 30).

Goodstart Prospect, South Australia.
The right to have adults do what is best for you (Article 17).

Goodstart Salisbury, South Australia.
How will you support children’s rights in practice at Goodstart Early Learning?
UNCRC – Articles and Guiding Principles

Consider which of the UNCRC articles you are more familiar with?

Which articles are generally more accepted in Australia and which are not?

Protection ?

Provision ?

Participation ?
Article 12

The child's right to express his or her views in all matters affecting the child and his or her wishes being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity.
Influences of United Nations on early childhood services

“Today’s generation of children (in OECD countries) are the first to spend the majority of their time, not in their own homes with their families, but in some form of child care. Almost 80 percent of three to six year olds in OECD countries are in some form of early childhood education and care setting and between 25 – 50 percent of under three year olds”.

(UNICEF, 2008)
Education and Care Services National Law (2010) and Regulations (2011)

Embeds the UNCRC into mainstream early childhood legislation:

• the rights and best interests of the child are paramount (Article 3);
• children are successful, competent and capable learners (UN General Comment No. 7, 2005);
• the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie this Law (Article 1);
• Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued (Article 30);
• role of parents and families is respected and supported (Article 5); and
• best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services (Article 28).
“Early childhood educators guided by the EYLF will reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states that all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. The Convention also recognises children’s right to play and be active participants in all matters affecting their lives”.

Belonging, Being and Becoming. Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009, p.5)
Quality Area 1

The knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests of your child should be incorporated into the program, with continuous assessment of your child’s learning and development

• Each child’s current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.
• The program, including routines, is organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child’s learning.
• Every child is supported to participate in the program.
• Each child’s agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and to influence events and their world.
• Critical reflection…
Concluding Observations (United Nations, 2012)

- commended the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care;

- promoted the inclusion of children’s voices and participation in decision making processes, and enabling greater opportunities to hear from children;

- identified further work was needed in relation to:
  - connections with family support services;
  - issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
  - domestic laws allowing corporal punishment;
  - rights education;
  - supporting children develop basic skills to be safe from harm.
Promoting children's participation in early childhood education and care settings

- developing the skills of staff working with children;
- providing children with an active voice;
- contributing the views of children to data collections; and
- empowering children.

(King, 2013)
The Early Years Learning Framework states that “educators who are attuned to children’s thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing. They positively interact with the young child in their learning”.
(Australian Government, 2009, p. 12)
Developing the skills of staff working with children
Goodstart Kambah NSW
Workshops - ‘Image of child’
Goodstart Red Hill Qld
Carla Rinaldi (2013) states that to listen or attune to children we need to be ‘present’.

An active attitude of listening between adults, children and the environment is the premise and context of every educational relationship.
(Rinaldi, 2013, p. 32)
Workshops - supporting educators to critically reflect on day to day practice

Workshop examples:

- Unpacking children’s rights documents and critically reflecting how these rights are upheld for each child;

- Unpacking a critical ritual (or daily routines) and critically reflecting on how children’s rights are upheld.
Workshops

- Ethical and legal issues in seeking children's consent
- Engaging in ethical consultations with children
Identification and development of key resources

The right to be heard

- Listening to children resources - Alison Clark, Pauline Harris, Maribrynong Council
- Relevant resources about UNCRC principles of engaging in ethical consultations with children
- Legal vs ethical issues of consent by young children
Children’s rights

You have the right to:

1. be treated fairly no matter what
2. have a say about decisions affecting you
3. live and grow up healthy
4. have people do what is best for you
5. know who you are and where you come from
6. believe what you want
7. privacy
8. find out information and express yourself
9. be safe no matter where you are
10. be cared for and have a home
11. education, play and cultural activities
12. help and protection if you need it

Adapted from the Convention on the Rights of the Child
For more information on children’s rights, go to www.humanrights.gov.au/childrensrights
To tell a story about your rights, go to www.storymyway.gov.au/photoborder


http://crc-indicators.earlylearning.ubc.ca/index.php/content/overview


Young Children’s Voices Network (United Kingdom)

Participation Works Partnership (United Kingdom)
Empowering children

• Invitations to express themselves;

• Supporting children to know and understand their rights and their responsibilities;

• Support children to become connected with and to contribute to their world.

Goodstart Red Hill Qld
Increasing evidence of our educators providing children with an active voice

Goodstart Kambah, NSW
Children welcoming children

Goodstart Indooroopilly, Qld

Goodstart Bellbird Park, Ipswich
Goodstart Red Hill, Qld
Playground design and risk assessment
Goodstart ACT
Goodstart Kingaroy, Qld
Goodstart Kingaroy, Qld
Goodstart Kingaroy, Qld
Goodstart Camira, Qld
Goodstart Camira, Qld
Other practice examples of children's input into decision making?
Listening to children‘s voices is an active process. That is, we do not only passively listen but respond to their views and let their voices influence research, policy, and practice.

Einarsdottir (2013)
Contributing children's voices to data sets

- A.C.T Commitment to Children and Young People
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Logan Child Friendly Cities Consortium
- National Commissioner for Children's Big Banter
The Ladder of Participation

1. Manipulation
2. Decoration
3. Tokenism
4. Assigned but informed
5. Consulted and informed
6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children
7. Child-initiated and directed
8. Child-initiated shared decisions with adults

Eight levels of young people's participation. The ladder metaphor is borrowed from Sherry Arnstein (1969); the categories are from Roger Hart.
Goodstart supported 543 children aged between 1–10 years to participate in the Big Banter in 2013.
What did the children say?

Life would be better for children and young people in Australia if …

- Children (25% or 137) identified that play is important to them
- Children (16% or 89) identified that their family are very important to them
• Children (12% or 67) identified having the freedom to express their imagination and ideas are important to them

• Children (5% or 25) raised issues about safety being important to them
“I think we have always listened to children’s voices but after their amazing and reflective responses for the Big Banter, I think we are now more aware of ‘hearing’ what they have to say, without expectations or judgement.

We all have an idea of what we think children will say but it’s about actually listening and being open to their ideas and thought processes. If allowed this freedom they will usually surprise us!

“Evidence of this (the impact of the Big Banter and listening to children) is in the construction of our centre philosophy. The director asked children for their voice and included it in the final copy. This reflected the importance of their voice.”

Kirstin Fifield, Educational Leader and Tanya Lamers, Centre Director
“Documentation is not the collection of data in a detached, objective, distant way. Rather it is the interpretation of close keen observation and attentive listening, gathered with a variety of tools by educators aware of contributing their different points of view”.

(Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001 in Fleet, et.al, 2011, p. 6)
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