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The voice of young children in the development of policy and services

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A Hub na nÓg multi-method approach to consult with 3-year-old children on what is important in their lives to inform policy decisions.

This good practice example outlines a multi-method approach to consulting with 3-year-old children on what's important in their lives to influence policy decisions being made by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

Hub na nÓg developed this methodology using good practice principles and approaches from this Toolkit and the Participation Framework. The consultation with 3-year-old children was conducted in an ELC service and facilitated by the ELC educators over the course of a week. This approach was adopted because of the importance of the relationship between children and ELC educators and of children feeling comfortable, safe and secure. Consent was sought from parents and guardians, and assent was sought from children. The children could choose to stop being involved in the consultation at any time.

Materials for the consultation:

- A puppet
- A4 coloured card
- Markers
- Instant cameras
- A pile of puppet photo tokens (to be made by the educator in advance)
- Building bricks
- Playdough
- Drawing materials
- Large wall space (on which the educator will create a 'Wall of Wonder')

Multiple methods to get children's views:

1. Group conference
2. A puppet (who photographs what children like)
3. Photographs
4. Building bricks
5. Playdough
6. Children's drawings
7. One to one discussion
8. Educators' notes and observations



Below is a description of how the consultation was carried out.

1. Group conference – using a puppet to discover things that children like

a. The educators introduced the topic to the children using a puppet, who arrived in a box:

- “This is ... (puppet), who has come to visit us for the week to find out all the things children like.”
- The educators explained the following to the children: “The puppet will send a list of the things children like to a writer, who will put them in a book. This book will be shared with adults/grownups who will make a plan about things children like. After the adults/grownups have made their plan, the puppet will come back and tell you what’s in their plan and what will happen about the things children like.”
- The educators checked that children understand what was explained.
- The educators asked the children: “Would anyone like to ask any questions?”

b. The educators explained that the puppet is from a magical land and knows nothing about children in Ireland. The puppet is full of wonder and has a camera to take photos of all the things that children like.

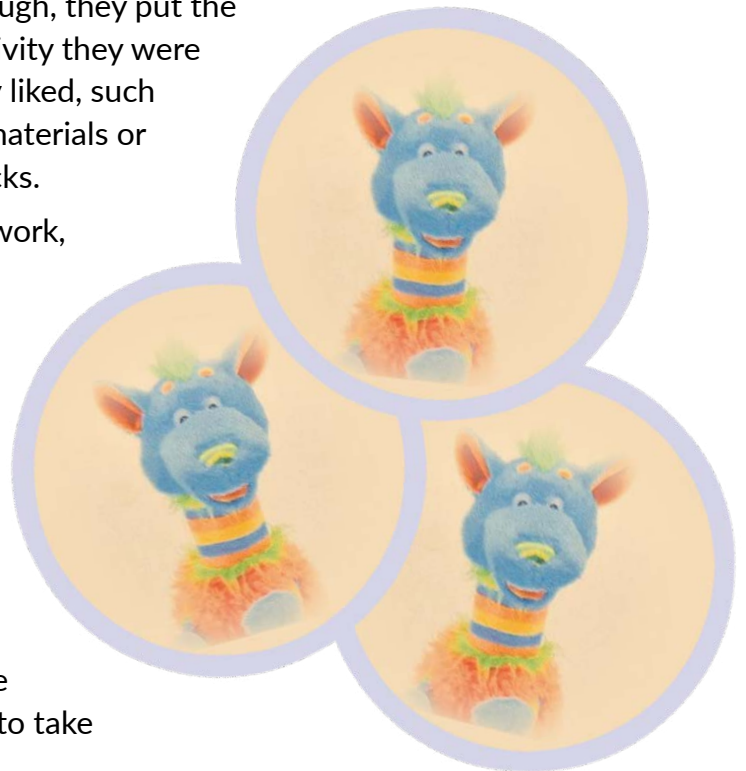
- Then educators asked the children: “Would anyone like to tell the puppet about something they like to do, to see, to play or to go to?” The educators used the puppet to ask the children the following questions:
 - I wonder what do you like?
 - I wonder what you like to do?
 - I wonder where you like to go?
 - I wonder what you like to play?
 - I wonder what’s your favourite thing?
- Educators took notes of what children said and of the themes they brought up, such as food, pets, or toys or whatever the children say that they like and want to tell the puppet about. They also kept a record of when children moved away from themes and started talking about new themes – for example, children started talking about food but then moved on to talking about toys. Educators wrote all the themes on individual-coloured cards, which were used later in the process.

2. Circle time

- Educators explained that every day for the rest of the week, the puppet would take photos of the things that the children like.
- They showed the children a pile of puppet photo tokens and explained that the children could use tokens to show the puppet the things they like by taking a token and putting the token beside something that they would like to show the puppet.
- Educators explained that the puppet had a camera and could take a photo of the things that children like, or they could tell the puppet about the things that they like.
- Educators put the puppet photo tokens on an easily accessible shelf.
- They explained to the children that on the last day of the puppet’s visit, all their photos and things they tell the puppet would be put on a Wall of Wonder.

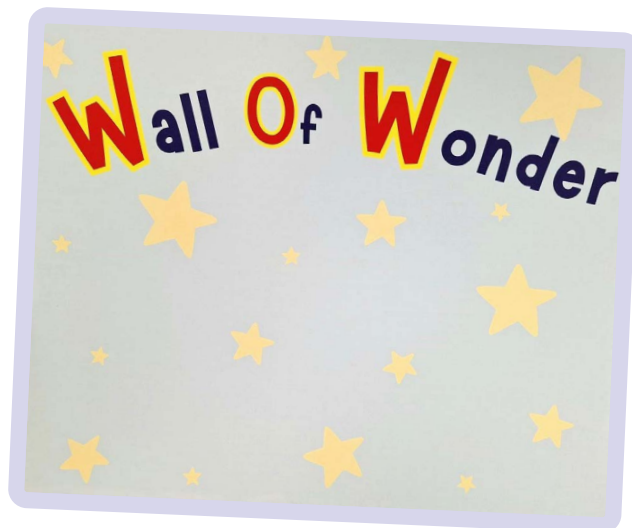
3. Activities throughout the week

- Educators provided the children with access to playdough, building bricks, and drawing materials.
- They invited the children to choose whatever activities they like to show the puppet the things that they like.
- They invited the children to show the puppet the activities they liked doing by placing a token beside it.
- For example, if they liked the playdough, they put the token beside it, or they used the activity they were doing to show the puppet what they liked, such as drawing a dog with the drawing materials or building a park with the building bricks.
- If there was a token beside a child's work, game or activity, the puppet took a photo with the help of an educator.
- Educators invited the children to tell the educator or puppet what they made or drew or what they would like to show the puppet.
- The children were invited to talk to the puppet at any time during the day to tell them about the things they liked through one-to-one discussion. The children didn't have to take a puppet token if they chose not to.
- Educators offered the children support in choosing activities and using the tokens.
- Educators kept verbatim notes and descriptions of what children drew, built, and asked to take a photo of.
- They also asked children to give descriptions of what they drew, built or asked to take a photo of and any other information they wanted the puppet to know. (This was done writing the children's descriptions on post its and stapling the post its onto the back of each photo and drawing.)
- Educators used observation and translated the views of children through non-speaking communication to ensure different ways for communication were accommodated.



4. Wall of Wonder (WOW)

- On the last day of the consultation week, the educators created a space on the wall and made a sign called Wall of Wonder.
- They stuck the A4 coloured cards with the names of the themes identified by children on the Wall of Wonder with accompanying pictures/images representing each theme.
- They also stuck the children's photos on the Wall of Wonder.
- The children were invited to decide where they want to put their photos on the Wall of Wonder. They were asked to place their photos under the themes and the educators supported them with this. They also invited the children to put the photographs somewhere else on the board if they preferred.



5. When the week was over, the educators explained that the puppet would send the wall of wonder and all the photographs and notes about the things the children like to the adults making the plan. The educators explained that adults who will make the plan will look at everything the puppet sent them before they make the plan. After the adults have finished making their plan, the puppet will come back and tell the children what they put into their plan and what they didn't put into their plan. The puppet will explain the reasons why some of the things children like could not be put in the plan.

In this example, the DCEDIY commissioned a report writer to compile an objective record of all the things that the children like. All the notes recorded by the educators and the children's photographs were gathered and sent to the report writer.

How the children will be given Space, Voice, Audience and Influence

Space

- The children were heard in a safe and familiar space.
- Educators listened to and recorded children's views through various consultation methods throughout the day.
- Educators made sure that all children were heard by having a variety of ways for them to communicate and by observing and recording what children did and said.

Voice

- Educators provided support for children to take part in the methods to make sure they were heard.
- Children were invited to take part in any activities they wanted and to choose the activities on which they wanted to put tokens.
- Educators provided a range of methods for children to give their views and share their likes (group conference, photographs, playdough, building bricks, drawings, wall of wonder, observation and translation).

Audience

- Educators told the children verbally and showed them by their actions how they and the puppet were ready and willing to always listen to them.
- The educators explained to the children that their views would be put in a book to be given to adults to make a plan about what children like.

Influence

- The children knew how much influence they had because all the things they liked were photographed by the puppet or recorded in educator notes and sent to the policymakers to inform the development of a report.
- The children will be given feedback when the puppet returns to tell them what's in the report of the policymakers about children's likes.
- The puppet will tell them what the adults intend to do with all the things they said they like.
- The puppet will tell the children what they put into their plan and what they didn't put into their plan and explain the reasons why some of the things children like could not be put in the plan.