

The voice of children in a pre-school project

Creative Kids & Co.

At Creative Kids & Co., the most important aspect of our work is children's participation in decision-making in their own learning. The children feel safe and are confident in telling us their views because we include them in decisions daily and they know we take their opinions seriously.

In the pre-school, we had been looking at famous buildings around the world. We asked families to discuss with the children what their favourite building is. Cillian's mother emailed us that his favourite building was the house where his granny was born, No. 4 Castle Street, Dublin, a Georgian building.

During circle time, we asked if anyone knew anything about Georgian buildings and Cillian replied: "I know that everyone in Castle Street had to live in the same room." We showed the children a photo of No.4 while talking to them about Cillian's connection to the house. Over the next few days, we spoke with the children about Georgian architecture and Dublin tenement life. We asked the children if they would like to meet Cillian's granny to learn more about life in Castle Street. They were very keen, so we arranged a visit.

Nanny Maureen came to the pre-school and told the children what life was like in No. 4 when she lived there. "We all lived in the one room," she told the children, "and our toilet was outside!" To which Nathan replied, "WHY?"

We asked the children if they had any questions for Nanny Maureen.

"Did you have a car?" asked Rajaharish.

"No," replied Maureen.

"How did you travel then?" responded Noah in shock.

"We travelled by bus or by bike, you had to be very rich to have a car," answered Maureen with a giggle.

Nanny Maureen answered all the questions the children had. At the end of her visit, we asked if they would like to visit Maureen's first home. They were very enthusiastic about the idea. We talked about how we could get there: "We could get there on a bus, does anyone's dad drive a bus?"

"MINE DOES, MY DAD DOES," shouted Michael. We asked Michael's dad if he could arrange for a bus to bring the children and staff to the house and he agreed to help.

We also contacted the tenants in No. 4 Castle Street and they were delighted for the children to visit the building.

Finally, the day arrived for our big trip, and armed with high-viz jackets, some very helpful parents and our guest of honour Nanny Maureen, we walked out to the bus where John was waiting for us. Michael almost exploded with pride.

John parked near the ancient walls of Dublin Castle and we walked to No. 4. The highlight of the tour was visiting the first floor room where Maureen lived with her family when she was the same age as Cillian. As we entered the room Maureen exclaimed, "I'm home."

"This is where Nanny slept and lived," announced a very proud Cillian.

We made sure that the children's voices were heard throughout the visit by encouraging them to ask questions and make suggestions about the things they wanted to see in the building.

All the way through this journey, we constantly consulted with the children in large groups, small groups and at individual level – we listened carefully, took notes, and spoke to them honestly about what would work and what might not. This made it possible for the children to make most of the decisions for themselves.

Our visit to No. 4 Castle Street was amazing, and it all started with a child's favourite building. This project confirmed for us that when children are listened to and facilitated to participate in decision-making, they drive their own learning.

How the children were ensured SPACE, VOICE, AUDIENCE and INFLUENCE

SPACE

- The children felt safe to express their views in the familiar setting of their pre-school.
- The decision-makers (pre-school practitioners) allowed time to listen to the children.
- The pre-school practitioners made sure that all the children were heard.

VOICE

- The children were asked to name their favourite buildings, which was something that mattered to them.
- The children were asked to talk about their buildings.
- The children were asked if they would like Nanny Maureen to visit them.
- The children were asked if they knew anyone who drives a bus.

AUDIENCE

- The pre-school practitioners asked the children to suggest their favourite buildings, showing them that they are ready and willing to listen to them.
- The pre-school practitioners made it clear that they were willing to do something about the children's views by engaging with other adult audiences (Nanny Maureen, the bus driver, the tenants of No. 4 Castle Street).

INFLUENCE

- The practitioners acted on the children's enthusiasm and views by taking them on a trip to No. 4 Castle Street.
- The children were able to see the impact of Cillian's pride in his favourite building by being brought there and hearing Nanny Maureen talk about living in one room; and Michael's pride in his dad being the bus driver who took them there.
- The children were able to make decisions about what they wanted to see in No. 4 Castle Street.
- The children were consulted in a variety of ways and supported to be the decision-makers at all stages.