Consultations with young children: Their impact on policy

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Overview of presentation

There are different levels of participation for different purposes.

Revisit Hart’s ladder,
- assess the extent to which consultations may offer a useful and necessary step on the way to more respectful and meaningful engagement with children.
- an important tool in accessing their views on policy issues of importance to them which help to ensure it is in the best interests of children.

The quality of the feedback given to children, dissemination, impact of their contribution are important in addressing the challenge of tokenism.
The child participation agenda

National public policy *National Children’s Strategy, 2000.* (Goal 1)

Minister & Dept. for Children and Youth Affairs in 2011

Participation Unit of the DCYA

Referendum to amend the Constitution - Article 42(A) “Children” in 2012.

*Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014)*
National outcome – ‘Children are respected, connected and contributing’

*National Strategy on children and young people’s participation in decision-making (2015).*
Child participation in policy

Growth of participatory activity with children with examples of creative and skilful facilitation.

**Benefits of children’s participation in consultations and research:**
- Helps to ground decision-making processes and policy in the lived reality of children’s worlds.
- Promotes children’s citizenship & active inclusion.  (Lansdown, 2005; Percy Smith, 2009; Kellett, 2010; Head, 2011; Perry-Hazan, 2016)

Increased research on children’s experiences of collective participation in local governance, youth and schools councils and children’s parliaments, advocacy campaigns, service delivery and policy consultations

Scant literature exploring children’s face-to-face participation in public decision-making (Perry-Hazan, 2016)

Lack of empirical evidence of the impact of children and young people’s general involvement in the policy process (Shier et al., 2014; Byrne and Lundy, 2015).
Children influencing public policy

Shier et al. (2014) outline that, in the case of children and young people influencing public policy, ‘influence’ occurs in many ways:

- Being a direct participant in a policy-making body;
- **Acting in an advisory or consultancy role to policymakers**;
- Meeting face-to-face with policy-makers, being listened to and taken seriously;
- Mobilising a large body of opinion to put pressure on policy-makers: marches, petitions, etc;
- Using the media effectively to give added force to your views.

The focus of this paper is one-off consultation exercises with children and young people where their views are gathered to be used in decision-making and policy.
Consultation as participation?

Consultation exercises often seen by children and young people as sterile and unsatisfactory & experienced as an event rather than a process (Cairns, 2001).

Middle rung of Hart’s (1997) ladder of participation.

Mainstream attempts to ‘involve youth’ in public affairs can be top-down, tokenistic and patronizing (Head, 2011; Vromen, 2003)

But, there are different levels of participation for different purposes & consultation can be an effective tool in child-proofing policy and making it more meaningful.

Successful processes do not have to imply the highest step on the ladder (Shier, 2001; Head, 2011)
Challenges related to children’s meaningful participation in policy-making

- Power gaps between children and policymakers – consultations can operate as a form of social control or ‘framed participation’ (Nir and Perry-Hazan, 2016)


- Separation of children’s participation platforms from those of adults - likely to be tokenistic and lack impact (Gal, 2015)

- Failure to integrate the results into policy/practice (Cele and van der Burgt, 2015).

- Lack of evaluation, monitoring and follow-up of impact (Shier et al., 2014).
Policy consultations and participative initiatives with children and young people

The DCYA provides opportunities for children and young people to contribute their views on issues of national and personal importance and is currently or has recently conducted the following consultations:

- After school care
- Cyber crime
- Living in the direct provision system
- Ireland 2016 National Commemorative Programme
- Development of the National Obesity Strategy
- Consultations with children and young people on the Universal Periodic Review
Consultations as child voice in policy

Participation by children and young people in decision-making will be a core objective of national strategies being developed (DCYA, 2015).
Consultation Methods

- Afterschool care consultations - 177 children and young people aged 5-12 years
- Healthy Lifestyles consultations - 82 children and young people aged 8-17 years
- Facilitated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2015 and 2016.
- Child-centred participatory methods employed.
- Strengths-based consultative approaches allowing children to identify and explore issues based on what they know and experience in their everyday lives.
- Ethical considerations – facilitators and researchers were vetted and all procedures adhered to national guidance on research with children (DCYA, 2012).
Timelines
Placemats and Body mapping
Ballot voting

- Sticky dot voting

- Ballot box voting
Afterschool Care consultation findings
5-7 year olds: What children like to do after school

Figure 1: ‘Timelines’ categories 5-7 year-olds

- Play
- Eating/food
- Relaxation
- Relatives
- Home
- Homework
- Friends
- Activities/outsings
- Rest/sleep
- Afterschool/club
- Self-care
- Pets

Handwritten notes:
- I play with my friends outside
- Put on my pj's
Findings 5 -7 year olds: What children do not like about after school

Figure 2: Voting on ‘Things I don’t like’ about after-school care 5-7 year-olds

- Homework: 27%
- Rules: 10%
- Other people in after-school/creche/childminders: 10%
- Inappropriate/limited toys: 8%
- Siblings: 9%
- Sleep: 5%
- Other: 2%
- Food: 5%
- Falling/getting hurt: 5%
- Rules (After-school/childminder): 4%
- Chores: 4%

Hand-drawn note: Homework is BORING

Hand-drawn note: Only some two types of food when I go
Findings 8-12 year olds: What children like to do after school

TIMELINES 8-12 YEAR OLDS

- Activities/Outings: 58
- Pets: 8
- Relax: 35
- Play: 164
- Friends: 63
- Eat: 74
- Sleep: 23
- Home: 67
- Homework: 56
- Afterschool: 16
- Self-care/Hygiene: 1
Findings: 8-12 year olds ‘where would you like to be cared for?’

Table 16: Ballot of 8–12 year-olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Waterford</th>
<th>Wicklow</th>
<th>Dublin</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crèche</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total = 96 children, aged 8-12 years

Figure 5: Pie chart results of ballot of 8–12 years
Overall Findings of Afterschool care consultations

- One of the key expectations of the after-school experience for children is play.
- A home-like environment was preferred, with outdoor and indoor play identified as a priority by children of all ages.
- Relationships with family, extended family, friends, childminders and other carers were noted as being very important to children.
- Children wanted to be able to relax and feel comfortable after school.
- Children expressed a dislike of being in structured environments with rules; not being treated appropriately for their age and a lack of food choice.
- 59% of 8-12 year old children would opt to be cared for at home after school.
Impact of consultations on policy

The Action Plan on School Age Childcare (2017) while still committed to the ‘use of schools and existing community facilities which have suitable environments available for SAC’ as outlined in the PG 2016,

- acknowledges that a home-like environment was preferred by many of the children consulted,
- commits to exploring the potential role of the youth sector, and
- ensuring quality standards in relation to the physical environment, adult/child ratios, appropriate food and nutrition, outdoor play, inclusion, and the health, well-being and protection of the child in all settings.

‘Newer schools, or schools with non-classroom spaces and access to outdoor facilities, provide a more suitable environment for such a service.’
Conclusions

Children’s right to participate in public decision-making is increasingly being translated into practice in Ireland.

We are only beginning to mine the potential of consultations as an aspect of child inclusion in public policymaking in Ireland.

Reflection on the implications of such consultation practices for policies and services, drawing on recent results and analyses, is apposite.

Consultations can be an important tool of the participation process.

**But**, real progress must be made in the areas of dissemination, impact and continuity in order to ensure that this is sustainable.

Need to embed consultations of the kind discussed as an integral part of policymaking, along with built in assessments of the long-term impact such views have on government delivery for children.