

An illustration of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a white shirt and blue tie, holding a young child on his shoulders. The child is holding a pen. They are both smiling. The background is a mix of yellow and blue washes.

NEW WORLD MADE BY KIDS

ADULT FIRST?

A GUIDEBOOK FOR CHILD-RELATED
PROFESSIONALS AND ADULTS TO LEARN ABOUT
CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION
&
HOW TO HEAR THE **VOICE OF CHILDREN** CLEARLY

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LIST OF CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

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ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Children's Rights Hand Book

"Adults First!" Leaflet

A Child's Eye View of the UNCRC

Kids' Adventure

*A Training Package on the Convention
on the Rights of the Child*

*The Hong Kong Chapter
UN Concluding Observations
under the Convention on the Rights of the Child*

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The background features a series of diagonal stripes in light yellow and light blue. Scattered across these stripes are watercolor-style spots in shades of yellow, orange, and blue, some with a textured, mottled appearance.

“To all adults who share the same vision
of building a better society for children”

• If you are a lawyer, judge, police, social worker, community worker,
• psychologist, caregiver, residential officer, prison officer,
• teacher, medical doctor, nurse, civil servant...

• or

• If you are working with, and for, children under the age of 18,

then this book is for you.

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Foreword

For over a decade, the Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights has been trying very hard to create space for children's participation in Hong Kong: We helped to establish Hong Kong's first child-led organization, Kids' Dream to promote children's rights with children's efforts. We cooperated with many children's groups supported by other non-governmental organizations in raising children's voice in the community through various channels. We also brought the voice of children into many important discussions in the local context, as well as in the regional and international arenas for a wide range of issues closely related to children.

While we witnessed the enthusiastic efforts of children to make their voice heard in the community, the efforts made by adults have been far less in comparison. We, however, do not wish to see the existence of such gap, as experiences tell us that children rely very much on the help of adults, in particular child-related professionals, in order to actualize their rights in the system. For this reason, we came up with the idea of publishing

ADULTS FIRST? By drawing from child participation international standards, steps and approaches, as well as real life stories collected in different settings, we hope to encourage adults and child-related professionals to find out more on how they can better listen to children in their work so as to find out their needs, challenges and expectation.

ADULTS FIRST? will not be made possible without the generous support of New World Group Charity Foundation. We are fortunate to have the renowned Foundation as both a partner and a sponsor in this project who shares the same vision on the importance of cultivating the younger generation for a better future of the society. We sincerely wish to see a more harmonious society that respects the different voices of citizens. Together, we believe we could build a more child friendly Hong Kong that our 1.1 million children has always called HOME.

Priscilla LUI, BBS | Chairperson | Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights

Message

Mutual respect and listening to the views of stakeholders are integral to building a diverse and inclusive metropolitan society like Hong Kong. In recent years, the Government has been making great strides in rolling out new measures to bolster youth development. However, the interests of children are still relatively under-represented amidst others' in our society.

In this day and age, Hong Kong people are faced with tremendous ideological challenges. The change is not only driven by older generations which have laid a solid foundation for our economic prosperity, but also the younger groups who were cultivated by universal education. Cognisant of the younger generation's eagerness to get involved with public affairs and reflect upon the core values of Hong Kong, I have become more determined to empower our future leaders in society.

Holding children development dearly to our heart, the New World Group has dedicated great efforts in fostering whole-person development by supporting education programmes that cultivate children in the five essential aspects of virtues, intellect, physical development, community engagement and appreciation of the arts. New World Group has been funding the New World Springboard programme in collaboration with various NGO partners since 2012, with an aim to develop unwavering determination and sportsmanship in the under-resourced youth through continuous sports training. A wide

array of activities has also been organised to enlighten the young minds, enable self-discovery and motivate them to seize opportunities to achieve upward social mobility. Complementing this effort is the New World New Youth Internship Programme, through which the New World Group has provided full sponsorship and job experience in Mainland China for nine consecutive years.

Children are a part of our society, as with adults, and therefore should be treated equally and with respect. We are pleased to sponsor the publication of **ADULT FIRST?**, which provides readers with knowledge and practices related to the inspiring vision of increasing children's participation in the civil society.

We, as adults, are the cornerstone of society. Let's start from ourselves and help prepare our children to be the leaders of tomorrow. This vision is reminiscent of my effort in championing The Artisanal Movement, a journey of expanding one's imagination and manifesting bespoke originality, in the New World Group in recent years. I hope to extend this artisanal spirit to the youth to develop their unique characters and inspire creativity. These efforts would lead to a heightened social awareness of engaging children, allow recognition of the social values brought by our children's participation, and a truly harmonious, inter-generational society built and contributed by different age groups.

Dr CHENG Chi-Kong, Adrian | Executive Vice-chairman & General Manager | New World Development Co. Ltd.

SHOOTING THE MYTHS

If you have ever learned swimming before, you would probably have swallowed at least a few mouthfuls of water and made yourself really uncomfortable before you could truly master the skill. And the fact is, in the long process of learning and growth, no one could really help you. All the swimming teacher could do was only to share with you his/her experience and accompany you as you tried again, again and again.

If we take this analogy, we can see that there is nothing really radical about child participation. Child participation is the realistic viewpoint that, *if children are expected to be independent individuals who have to bear the responsibility of their own decisions in the future, then they have to practice doing so from a young age.* This may mean that they have to face certain challenges. However, like swimming, they shall learn to face their own struggles in the process of growth. All the adults can do is to share their experience and support them in the process.

“Children are not mature enough to make rational and reasonable choices. They are not independent individuals, they need adults to make decisions for them”

The above statement is partially true. Even though children have the rights to participation, it doesn't mean that parents have to grant children every wish or request. Rather, parents (and other adults) should consider the relevance of the topic, maturity level of the child, and whether the topic is in the “best interest of the child”. Nonetheless, considerations regarding the maturity level of children should not be used as an excuse to deprive children of their rights to participation.

Children's participation in decision-making can increase the effectiveness of interventions (a) by making them more responsive to the child's wishes and expectations and (b) by including the child's agenda, so allowing more issues to be addressed and more realistic plans to be made. Likewise, participation helps to keep children safe by discovering and substantiating cases of abuse and neglect.

Svein Arild vis, Astrid Strandbu, Amy Holyan and Nigel Thomas, 2010



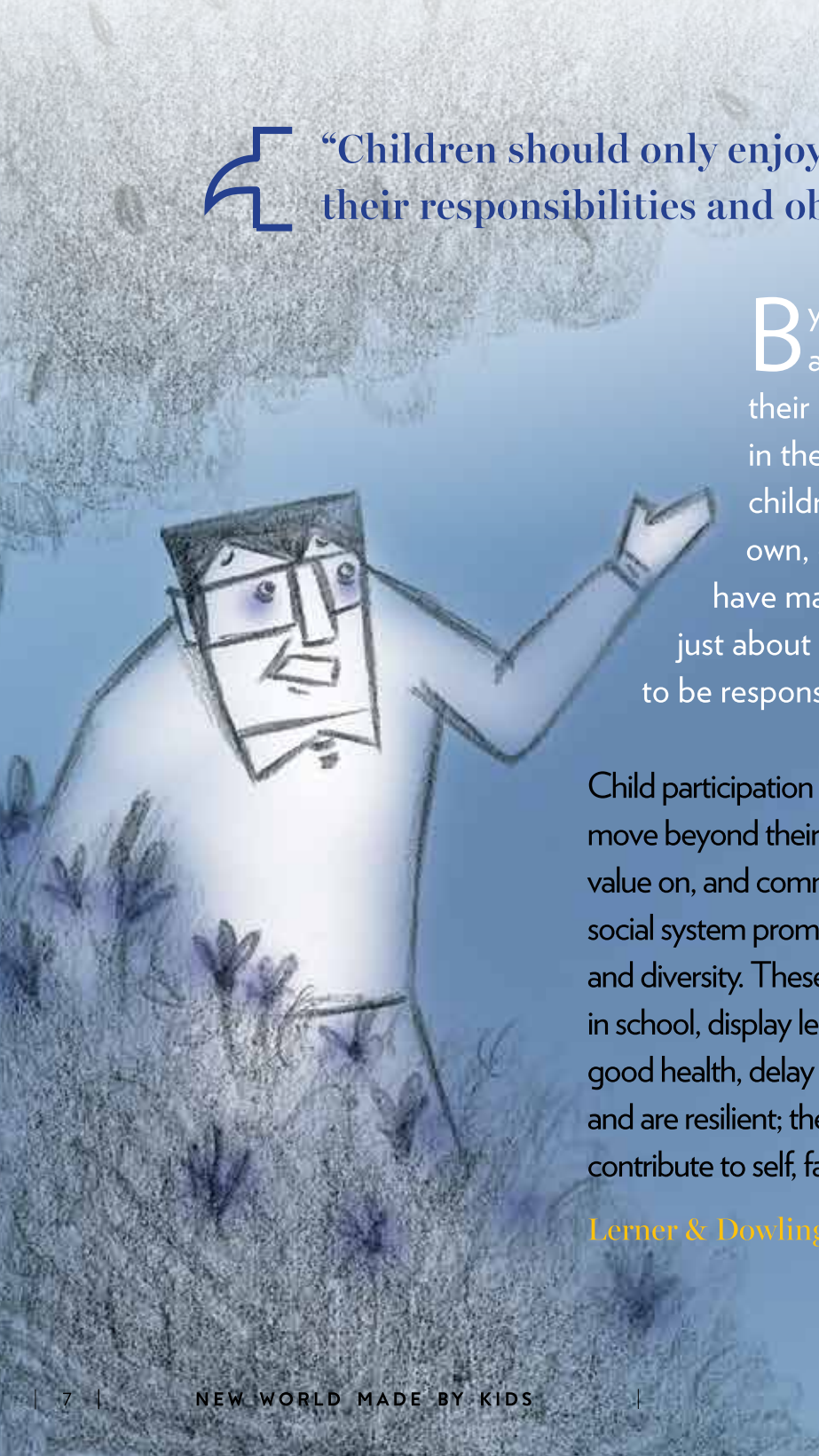
“If children are allowed to participate today,
they will rise against us tomorrow.”
“If children have rights, what about mine?”

The above statements express fear of oppositions between children and adults. The question is: “Is child participation the cause of oppositions, conflicts and chaos?”

Child participation encourages the involvement of children in the decision-making process of matters important to them. This involvement itself cannot be the cause of conflicts. At most, we can say that it allows hidden conflicts and differences in opinions to come to the surface. The real problem that leads to conflicts in fact lies in miscommunication which is precisely what child participation aims to address. Child participation is not just about giving children more freedom. It seeks to build a more equal and open relationship between children and adults. It advocates communication and cooperation. It is the belief that if we purposefully guide the children through the participation process and cooperate with them, then their process of achieving independence would not be a sudden outburst for rebellion. It would instead be a gradual process of growth guided with the help and accompaniment of experienced adults.

When participation for children is set-up as a process in which children are given information and explanations about what is going on and what the options are, when they receive help and support in expressing their feelings and are kept up to date on the progress of decision-making, this may have psychological benefits resulting in: (a) relationships with social workers, children’s advocates or family members may be strengthened; (b) successful participation may lead to an increase in self-esteem; and (c) participation is associated with increased sense of mastery and control. Participation may also increase children’s ability to reflect and deal with family relationships, if the social worker manages to establish a relationship with the child during investigation (Bell 2002). If, on the other hand, children are not informed or consulted, this is associated with a sense of losing control and with lowered self-esteem as well as feelings of helplessness and poor confidence.

Leeson quoted by Svein Arild vis, Astrid Strandbu,
Amy Holyan and Nigel Thomas, 2010



“Children should only enjoy welfare, but not human rights. They should fulfill their responsibilities and obligation before they can enjoy human rights.”

By the same logic, if children are expected to fulfill certain responsibilities and obligations, what are the reasons for excluding them from making their own decisions? Rights and responsibilities have always went together in the development of the modern society. It would only be meaningful for children to bear responsibilities if they are allowed to make decisions on their own, or else they would only be bearing responsibilities for the choices others have made for them. This also explains why child participation should not be just about giving children more freedom and choices. They also have to learn how to be responsible for their own actions and decisions.

Child participation can enable young people to move beyond their own self-interest and place value on, and commit to, action supportive of a social system promoting equality, social justice, and diversity. These children can generally do well in school, display leadership, help others, maintain good health, delay gratification, value diversity, and are resilient; they develop into citizens who contribute to self, family, community and society.

Lerner & Dowling quoted by Edmund, 2010

Child participation at an early age can lead to changed behavior that can be integrated into adult life. Thus an outcome of child participation is the development of a cohort of experienced citizens for future disaster risk reduction. Besides, child participation appears to have a protective and preventive effect for health-related problems.

Back, Cameron, and Tanner quoted by Yany Lopez, Jacqueline Hayden, Kathy Cologon and Fay Hadley, 2012



“The best way to protect our children is to give them the best and to make the best decision for them.”

Protecting children does not mean denying them the possibilities to learn to be a part of our world. Learning by doing, learning by participation instead of exclusion is a powerful tool to promote self-confidence, self-respect and a sense of control over one's own life.

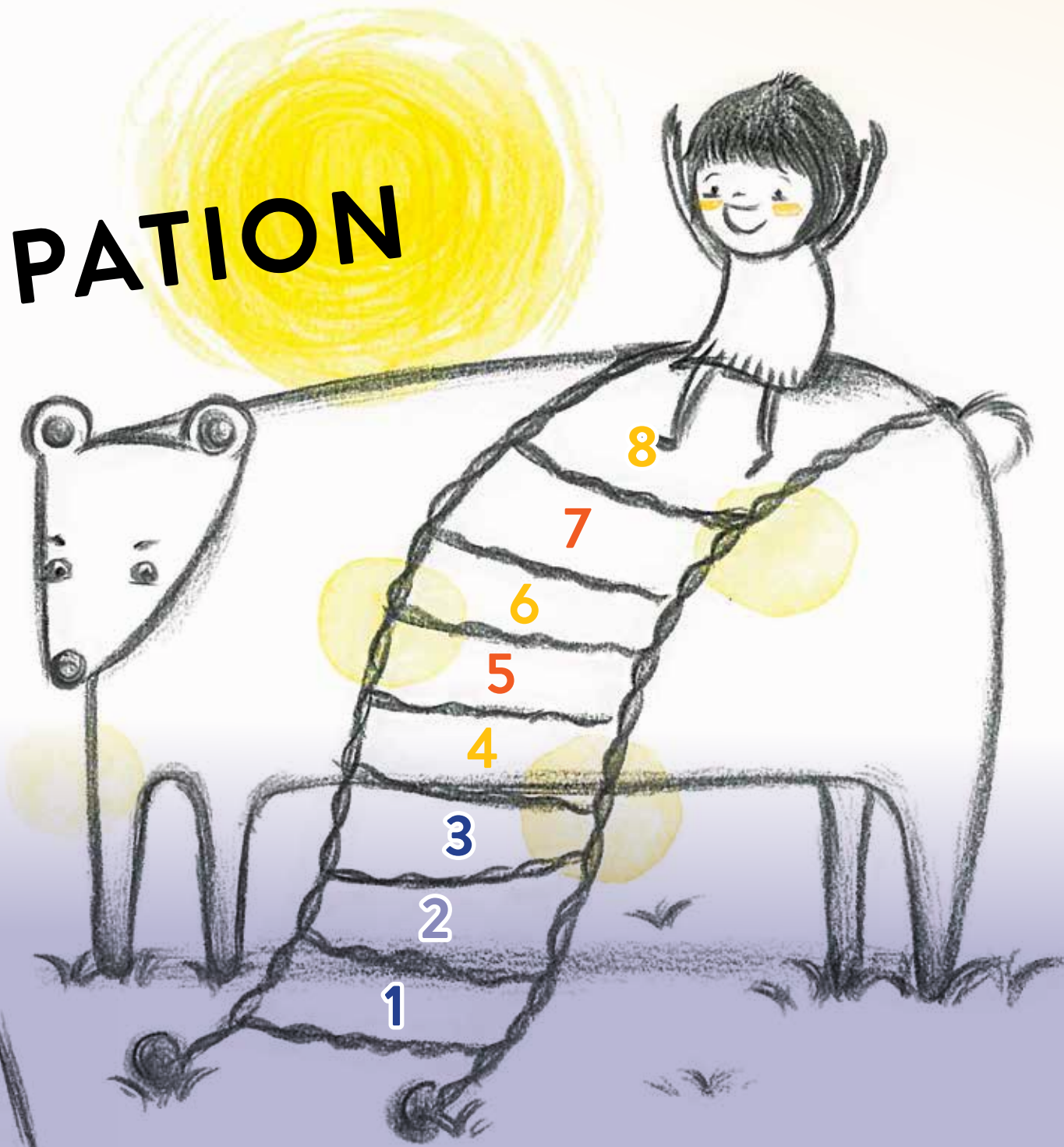
As children mature, they develop the capacities that empower them to participate in more complex and meaningful relationships, experiences, and opportunities. The more children participate in these relationships, experiences, and opportunities, the less likely they are to participate in risk behaviors and the more likely they are to develop the hallmark of positive youth development, thriving behavior. Hence, child participation is actually a necessary process of growth.

Benson et al. quoted by Edmund, 2010

SHOOT THE MYTHS
AND GIVE CHILDREN
A BRIGHT BLUE SKY!

The Ladder Of PARTICIPATION

The ladder of participation is not meant to be climbed from the bottom to the top! We SHOULD NOT climb the first 3 steps as they are BAD participation practices. For the rest of the steps, we hope you could support children's participation whenever it is possible according to the practical situation. **GIVE CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY AND LET THEM FLY!**



8 CHILD-INITIATED SHARED DECISIONS WITH ADULTS

Children have the ideas, set up the project and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for the children to consider.

7 CHILD-INITIATED AND DIRECTED

Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

6 ADULT-INITIATED SHARED DECISIONS WITH CHILDREN

Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in making decisions.

5 CONSULTED AND INFORMED

The project is designed and run by adults but children are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinion are taken seriously.

4 ASSIGNED BUT INFORMED

Adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project and decide why they should be involved and why adults respect their views.

3 TOKENISM

Children are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.

2 DECORATION

Children take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing or wearing T-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issues.

1 MANIPULATION

Children do or say what adults suggest they do but they have no real understanding of the issues.

The Ladder of Participation is based on a ladder of participation created by Roger Hart in *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, UNICEF (1992).

I don't know
what to do...

Let me show
you the way!



A checklist to measure if you are **PROMOTING** or **HINDERING** children's right to participation

IS IT VOLUNTARY?

True participation is something a young person should want to do.

Children are made to demonstrate against their will, or forcibly 'volunteered' into committees.

IS IT VALUED?

True participation requires all participants, including children, to be valued, listened to and taken seriously.

Children are present, but given little chance to participate. When they do, people don't listen carefully or take the children's views into account.

IS IT EQUITABLE?

True participation is inclusive; it does not discriminate on the basis of sex, wealth, rural/urban location, ethnicity, disability, etc.

Activities are in practice accessible only to rich or urban children, or only the "smart" ones are selected for meetings.

IS IT RESPECTFUL?

True participation means addressing each other with respect and care, not derision or paternalism.

The chair of the meeting ignores the children or speaks to them in a way that shows he does not value their presence or what they have to say.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF IT?

True participation requires young people to see the value of doing it.

Children are simply told what to do, they don't really know or understand why they are doing it.

DOES IT MATTER?

True participation happens when the topic or issue is important or interesting to young people.

Children are made to participate in matters that they don't care much about and feels are a waste of their time.

DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

True participation means young people's contributions have an influence and make a difference.

Children are asked for contributions that are then ignored, not permitted to influence thinking or change conditions.

ARE THE PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS FAIR AND CONDUCTIVE?

How the seating is arranged makes a big difference on the desire for participation.

The adults sit in chairs while children are on the floor; the room's periphery or under the hot sun.



IS IT DONE IN A LANGUAGE THAT CHILDREN UNDERSTAND WELL?

 True participation makes them to feel competent and comfortable in the medium of communication.

 Discussions are held in English in a rural district, or the manner is very formal and full of 'big words'.

ARE THE RULES FAIR FOR ALL?

 True participation is done in a manner in which everyone can participate equally and comfortably, and often involves children in making the rules.

 Some adults dominate, while children don't get a chance or are cut off too early. People are made to contribute in ways they do not know or like.

ARE THEY ADEQUATELY INFORMED AND PREPARED?

 True participation means children have been given enough time, opportunity and support to prepare.

 Adults have experience and information whereas the children are just pulled in with little sense of what is happening and time to prepare.

ARE THE ALLOWABLE ROLES FAIR?

 True participation assigns roles and responsibilities fairly, and allows everyone to play a role they are capable of whenever possible.

 Adults make all the decisions and rules while children just answer questions, or children are made to park bicycles and serve tea only.

WHAT'S THE LEVEL?

 True participation goes beyond show and allow young people to initiate ideas, make decisions and take actions to the maximum extent of their capability.

 Children are told to participate in certain ways without having a say in the content or method of participation, or they are only consulted when they are also capable of responsible decision making.

IS IT HONEST?

 True participation respects ethics, avoids manipulation and is clear in its purpose and methods.

 Children are not told the truth or deliberately left in the dark about what is happening.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTERWARDS?

 True participation is clear and transparent about how the output of the participation will be taken forward, and how it connects with other processes. It often aims to institutionalize participation for sustainability.

 Children participate actively on something important but it is not clear what follow-up will take place or what will be done with their contribution. The session report is not shared or checked with children.

IS IT SAFE?

 True participation takes all steps to ensure no participation is endangered.

 Confidentiality is not maintained where appropriate, such as when the child who tells the truth about something is punished.

Where do you stand on the list?

Where you stand is important as you could **STRENGTHEN** or **WEAKEN** children's right to participation!

CHILD PARTICIPATION STANDARDS

TRANSPARENT & INFORMATIVE

Children should be properly informed!

1. Children should understand their right to express their views freely and their views to be given due weight;
2. Children should understand how their participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact;
3. The above information should be given to children in a way that is easy for them to understand.

1. In order to facilitate children's participation effectively, adults should receive training on skills in listening, working with children and engaging children effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities;
2. Adults also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children's lives;
3. Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators;
4. Children require capacity-building to strengthen their skills in, for example, organizing meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking and advocacy, so that they can have the confidence to contribute their views.

SUPPORTED BY TRAINING

Both adults and children should be fully prepared!

CHILD-FRIENDLY

Environments and working methods should be adapted to children's capacities!

1. Children should be well prepared for participation, so that they can have the confidence and opportunity to share their views;
2. Adults should consider the fact that children will need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities.

1. There should be no discrimination. Children should not be a homogenous group. Participation opportunities for marginalized children should be encouraged, both girls and boys;
2. There should be equality of opportunity for all;
3. Programmes also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to children from all communities.

INCLUSIVE

Everyone should be involved!

YOU NEED TO KNOW!

RELEVANT

Children can express their views on what matters to them!

The issues on which children have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities.



VOLUNTARY

Children should be free to express their views!

1. Children should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes;
2. Children should be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage.

RESPECTFUL

Adults and children should respect each other!

1. Children's views have to be treated with respect;
2. Children should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities.

ACCOUNTABLE

A commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential!

1. In any research or consultative process, children should know how their views have been interpreted and used. They should also be able to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings.
2. Children should know how their participation has influenced any outcomes.
3. Wherever appropriate, children should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Children should be able to take part in the monitoring and evaluation of children's participation.

SAFE AND SENSITIVE TO RISK

Children should feel safe to express their views!

1. Adults have the responsibility towards the children with whom they work;
2. Adults must take every precaution to minimize the risk to children of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation;
3. Adults should develop a clear child-protection strategy which recognizes the particular risks faced by some groups of children, and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help;
4. Children must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help if needed;
5. Families and communities should be well informed of the value and implications of participation.





It is hard to realize
child rights...



Come, I will show
you real life stories!

REAL STORY in the Family Setting

“As the child is getting more and more independent, and as everyday he takes a step further away from us, we are actually preparing for the future when he becomes a fully independent person who has a life and a story of his own.”

case #1



ELAINE CHENG

A working mother with a three-and-a-half-year old boy. She has grown up with a lot of child rights education and experience. Currently, she is developing a few educational projects in Mainland China. She also actively engages in voluntary projects related to children.

Engaging the child to choose his first school

Nowadays, kindergartens provide N classes for kids to try before formally registering to enter the school. Elaine and her husband let their son try the N class at a local kindergarten and an international kindergarten for a few months respectively, then they let him to choose from the two afterwards.

His opinions and feelings fluctuated at times. We needed to give him plenty of time to express his true feelings. But at last he chose the local one, because he realized that, while the toys at the international school can easily be substituted by the toys he has at home, the friendship and teachers he had in the local school are unreplaceable. Thus, in the process of thinking through the two options, he found out what is truly important to him.

case #2

Engaging the child to prepare his free time



While we allow him to choose what he likes to do in the free time, what’s more important is to engage him in the preparation so he knows that he has a role. For example, if he chooses to go to the beach, we would ask him to pack for himself. He would usually take his swimming suit, sand toys, anti-insect spray, a big towel... He would even take with him a new set of clothes! Then we would tell him what he has missed, such as water, mat, shoes, soap and snacks. He really enjoys the process of preparation and wouldn’t just rely on us to prepare for him. He learns to become a more independent person.

REAL STORY in the Family Setting

con't case #2

Mom's view: How to engage a child in the process of decision-making?

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE ADULT TO...

- 😊 Allow plenty of time for the child to develop his opinions;
- 😊 Remember and seriously consider what the child says every time;
- 😊 Ask for the reasons of his opinions to encourage him to think deeper;
- 😊 Guide the child to weigh between different factors;
- 😊 Use stories and games to engage the child so he feels easy to visualize the situation, and;
- 😊 Consider themselves as facilitators rather than decision-makers in the process.

The process is important, because it helps the child to prepare for the final decision. If the parents abruptly make a decision, the child may feel unhappy and may have a hard time accepting the consequences of the decision made. However, the parents should make the final decisions after considering the opinions of the child, as the child may feel pressure in actually making a decision.

HER RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENGAGING CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY SETTING

- 😊 Close your ears to the noises of the world. Slow down and listen attentively to your own child.
- 😊 It is more important to inspire the passion and curiosity in the child than to force him/her to memorize a lot of information, because if the child is curious and free to pursue his/her interests, he/she would naturally excel in his/her passion.
- 😊 We need to have serious parent education and support network for parents who wish to engage their children better in the daily life. *"Parents nowadays are facing a lot of anxieties. They don't have the faith and skill to begin with. But once they begin, the child would actually lead you through!"*

Engaging the child in decision-making has actually improved our husband-and-wife relationship, as we no longer find the need to lobby each other or to argue for what is the best for the child. The child is the one who guides the decision-making. And since the child is considered to be an independent person, we still get to preserve a world just between the two of us.



REAL STORY in the Parental Divorce Setting

“The voice of children are usually the missing puzzles from what have been described by the conflicting adults. Their views are also helpful for the court’s consideration and decision.”

case #1



DENNIS HO

A lawyer practising family law since 1987, and has been representing children in legal proceedings in the past.

Engaging children to find out their views on parental divorce

In cases of divorce, as the divorcing couples are in a conflicting situation over their rights and wealth, the best interests of their child/children are often overlooked. Children’s voice is easily subsumed under the divorcing parents’.

The intervention of Dennis as a lawyer:

In cases where meeting the child is necessary, Dennis will put down his gown as a serious lawyer. He usually meets the child for the first time at a place comfortable for the child, eg. pizza house, café...etc. The purpose of the first meeting is to get to know each other, build trust, find out about the child’s life and his understanding of the parents’ divorce. He does not go into the legal questions straight away. It is only until the following meetings that Dennis discusses the important legal questions with the child when he/she is ready, and allows him/her enough time to think before coming to any decisions. Very often, the voice from the child in question would assist the court in coming to a decision, which may take into account of the child’s concerns unless it is against the child’s interest to do so.

case #2

Engaging children can ease the mistrust between divorced couples



LAI WONG SUET WING

A registered social worker with more than 20 years’ experience, qualified family mediator with about 10 years’ experience, 3 years’ experience as a parenting coordinator.

Children still long to meet and spend time with both parents even after their divorce. The mistrust between the separated parents, however, make things complicated.

In one case, the father suspects that the mother has brainwashed their son into not liking and not meeting him. The mother denies it and explains that it is because of his ill habits that his son doesn’t want to see him, but he does not believe in it.



When parents consider the feelings and voices of their child as the top priority of the whole issue, the situation becomes less a conflict. It becomes more about how the parents can better work for the well-being and interest of their child.

REAL STORY in the Parental Divorce Setting

con't case #2

The intervention of Wing as a Parenting Coordinator:

1. Educates the parents the importance of considering the needs of the child and having a child-focused perspective as the prime concern to resolve the issue
2. Contracts with the parents, stating that her meeting with their son would be private. The child could choose whether to permit Wing to release his views to the parents. In addition, the parents should not let the child suffer from any consequences for expressing his views.
3. Teaches the parents how to prepare the child for the meeting: They would tell the child the purpose of meeting and the fact that they have been learning the skills about parental coordination with Wing.
4. In the meeting, Wing states the purpose of the meeting and allows the child to use verbal or any other ways that he feels comfortable to explain his feelings towards the issue mentioned by the parents. The son in the end lists out the “10 sins” that he doesn’t like about his dad on a paper, including smoking and gambling. He explains that he is unhappy about his father spending the weekend with him at home while he is watching TV on horse racing. He only sees him once in a week and he doesn’t count this as a companionship. He also tells Wing that he prefers meeting his father on Sunday than on Saturday as he has his own activities too.
5. The child permits Wing to relay this information to his parents.
6. Wing prepares the child for the possible consequences of expressing such views to his parents. The child also knows that if he suffers from any consequences for expressing his views, he could tell Wing about it.
7. In the end, the father admits that he has some bad habits and promises to change. He realizes that his ex-spouse has not prevented their son from seeing him. The mistrust between the parents are resolved as a result of the child expressing his views in a child friendly way.

THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENGAGING CHILDREN IN THE PARENTAL DIVORCE SETTING

- ☺ It may not necessarily be a good thing to involve the child in complicated legal procedures and let him/her meet too many professions, as this usually means that he has to repeat his story for many times. It would also bring tremendous pressure upon the child.
- ☺ If the child doesn’t want to express his/her views or meet any professions, they should not be forced to do so.
- ☺ Child-related professionals should consider the age and maturity of the child when communicating with him/her.
- ☺ Child-related professionals should meet the child at an environment that is comfortable to him/her.
- ☺ Child-related professionals, such as judges, lawyers and social workers, should receive adequate training to prepare, to talk and to meet with children.
- ☺ Education should be provided to both parents and children, so the best interests of the child and their right to be heard can be honored.
- ☺ The channels for children to make their voice heard should be made more visible with professional support in the community.



REAL STORY in the School Setting

“Child participation is a unique experience. It cannot be replaced by the efforts of teachers and adults. We can only take a supporting role. Children learn in the process and develop the ownership.”

Engaging school children in service learning projects

FONG YUK CHI

An experienced teacher with over 20 years of teaching experience in both secondary and primary schools. She is now a Student Guidance Teacher of a primary school in east Kowloon.



Primary school children as young as 10 to 12 years old are running their service learning projects in a sophisticated way. They have served the elderly, people with down syndrome, children with mental disabilities, children in hospital and those in need in the community for many years. They decide their own service targets, research the social problem, communicate with the NGOs directly, conduct learning visit, design and revise the project content, and implement the project with their own hands. What’s the most important is, they conduct serious evaluation of their own job!



Through active participation, they have developed deep understanding of the disadvantaged communities as well as empathy for the others. These kids tend to care more about justice and voice their concerns more. They are courageous kids.

People are amazed at why primary school students in our school could run a service learning project in this way. The beneficiary organization workers said that they are doing much better than the secondary school students because they are passionate and treat it as their own business. They always want them back to re-run the services.

REAL STORY in the School Setting

Teacher's views: What are the benefits of engaging children in participation?

STUDENTS TEND TO HAVE...

- 😊 Better self-esteem;
- 😊 Better social and leadership skills;
- 😊 Better responsibility;
- 😊 Better problem solving skills;
- 😊 Empathy for the others, and;
- 😊 Courage to voice out and fight for the justice.

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR SCHOOL...

- 😊 The school environment has become more inclusive.
- 😊 The sense of belonging to the school has increased.
- 😊 Teachers are more ready to listen to students and consult their views.
- 😊 The teaching mode has become more interactive.
- 😊 The school has allowed more flexibilities to accommodate students' needs: *"I converted a counselling room into a small play room for school children. Later on, the game room was moved to a dance room which is the size of two classrooms. If they have done some good deeds, they could earn tokens to enter their wonderland!"*



If a student comes to me and ask me to start a new project or a new activity, I will ask him why he thinks it is important and ask him to do the ground work preparation before he comes back again with his researched findings and reasons. They need to learn the balance between Rights and Responsibility, and they have developed the habit.

HER RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENGAGING CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

- 😊 We need to allow our students to try!
- 😊 The school should allow teachers to cut down some of their work, so they could communicate more with students and support them in their child-led initiatives.
- 😊 Child participation is preventive work. If we have good preventive work, we don't need to waste efforts in putting down the fire.
- 😊 We need to do more promotion on the positive outcomes of child participation, so that others would follow and have the incentive to start trying.

REAL STORY in the Hospital Setting

“The communication with young patients before the medical procedure with child friendly means is very important. The child turns the negative experience into a positive one and feel empowered.”

case #1

Engaging child patients in Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) examination for child patients



BLONDI KWOK

A registered nurse at the beginning, received training in Britain, and has become a qualified hospital play specialist in hospital in HK since 1994.

In usual practice, child patients have to use tranquilizer in order not to struggle during the MRI. In some hospitals, hospital play specialists communicate with the child patients to understand their anxiety, and play with them to prepare them for MRI.

The child plays the role of an astronaut, and in order to achieve his mission, he cannot move in his spaceship.



What are the benefits of engaging patients in medical procedures?

- ☺ The child learns how to deal with stress. He also feels more comfortable and become more cooperative throughout the entire process.
- ☺ The child also does not have to suffer from the side effects of using tranquilizer (dizziness, nausea) and can leave immediately after the examination. He does not need to rest at the hospital and wait for the side effects of tranquilizer to pass.
- ☺ It is also beneficial to both the parents and the hospital as they can save time and medical cost. Hospital can also save resources to treat more patients.



We would also familiarize the child with the sound he would hear during MRI by recording the real sound of it.

REAL STORY in the Hospital Setting

case #2

Engaging child patients in setting up intravenous access for drug administration or fluid replacement



DR. CHOW CHUN BONG

A paediatrician for over 40 years of experience mainly in public hospitals, and has chaired many children related organizations in Hong Kong related to their rights and health.

The child patient can also choose whether to conduct the procedure on his right hand or on his left hand. He can also choose the cartoon bandage that he likes!



What are the benefits of engaging patients in medical procedures?

The communication before the medical procedure with child friendly means is very important. The child turns the negative experience into a positive one and feels empowered.



It is common for child patients to think that the needle remains underneath their skin after intravenous access is set up, so they daren't move their arms and feel uncomfortable. As a hospital play specialist, we will ask about the child patient's worries and explains to him/her the procedure with dolls and toy equipment through play. It greatly releases their anxiety.

THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENGAGING CHILDREN IN THE HOSPITAL SETTING

- It is crucial to consult kids directly to understand their feelings in the hospital instead of through their parents.
- Consultation of child patients about their experience in hospital should be done on a regular basis instead of a one-off event
- Systematic and sustainable education should be provided to health professionals (doctors, nurses, hospital administrators), so that they could understand the importance and benefits of listening to child patients
- It is important to generate systematic and reliable data to allow the community and the government visualize the positive outcomes as a result of meaningful child participation in the hospital setting.



REAL STORY in the Community Setting

“I just want her to know, her story is worth telling.”

case #1

Engaging children as tour guide in their living environment



LIU SZE MING

A young teacher and a volunteer in community work in To Kwa Wan.

When we take what the children say and do seriously, then they will take us seriously. This is what I have experienced in engaging the children.

To Kwa Wan is a district facing a lot of massive redevelopment projects. While adults and “kai fongs” are expressing their views about the impacts of redevelopment in their life, children are seldom involved in the discussion. However, children also have their feelings and views facing all these changes and they need suitable platforms to voice their views. In this regard, Sze Ming and a few other community organizers have piloted a project by engaging children as tour guide and tell their stories to people who feel interested about the district.

It all began with a ten-year-old girl Chau Tsz Ching who has been anxiously following the guided tours catered for adults. She made jokes that she could also be a tour guide, and Sze Ming allows her to design and lead her own guided tour to introduce “her community” to the others. Unlike the usual guided tours, participants (all adults) got to know the name and characters of the cats in different shops. Tsz Ching also brought participants to what children called their “secret bases”. They included a spot where participants could see the kindergarten kids from a window; and a school which is opened to kids on Sunday for free time, play and learning.

con’t case #1

It takes time to engage and understand a child. Sometimes she is too shy from telling her own story and feelings because she lacks confidence. Instead, she would cater to the adult world by suggesting to bring the tourists to the shopping malls. I have to ask her questions to help her reflect about her lives. I just want her to know, her story is worth telling.



case #2

Engaging children to voice out on issues related to themselves



SZE LAI SHAN

A registered social worker and community worker with over 20 years of experience working with children and families in deprived circumstances.

Children from poor families are usually not aware of their rights and do not know how to voice out for themselves. As a consequence, children are caught in very deprived circumstances. For this reason, Sze Lai Shan and her colleagues of her organization

have helped to establish a children’s group in 2003, the children’s group was set up with the aim of empowering the children. Initially the group had some 30 children members.

REAL STORY in the Community Setting

con't case #2

Now it has grown to roughly 1,800 children members. They were recruited from street stations and the regular family visits of her organization. Most of them come from Sham Shui Po.

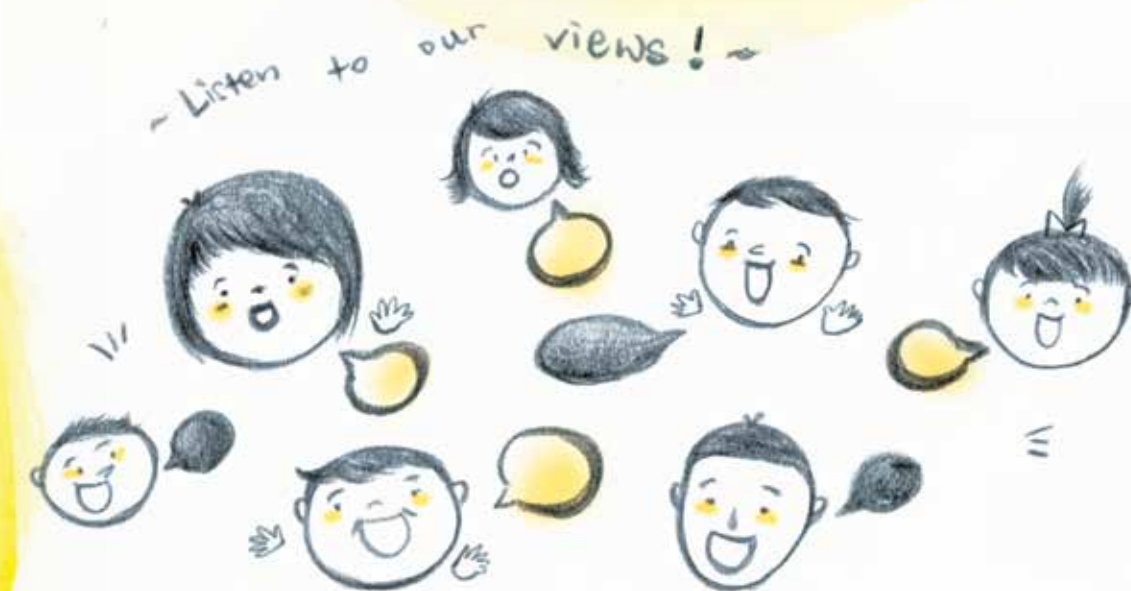
Every year, 20 Children Ambassadors are elected among the children members to coordinate their own activities. They also have their own Chairman and Vice-chairman, and are divided into action groups. The social workers give them training on children's rights as well as guidance and support in their activities ranging from street stations, exhibitions, children surveys, to social actions (such as petitions, peaceful demonstrations, press conference, and initiating meetings with government officials) to bring their attention into issues children concerned.

At first the government was not used to meeting with children and did not want to meet with them. Even with the participation of children, the government tended to talk only to adults, ignoring the opinions of children. But more and more, they get used to having children participants during meetings and are more open to their ideas. Children also feel more empowered and confident in giving their views.

Children's participation or children's right to be heard is a concept that has not been accepted by the community. Once they see children engaging in social actions, even if the children are only involving in very peaceful ones, they will start attacking and they forget the real issue behind. Children also have their right to be heard like everyone else, don't they?

THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENGAGING CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY SETTING

- 😊 We need public education on Children's Right to be Heard and Right to Participation, and this education should begin with adults.
- 😊 We need trained professionals and adults to support the children, in particular younger children in voicing their views.
- 😊 We need more resources and facilities, such as appropriate venues, for children to come together for meetings and discussions.
- 😊 The government shall have an official but child friendly system/ platform to collect children's views on policies and laws related to them.



What the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee say about children's right to participation



The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that, in most societies around the world, implementation of the child's right to express her or his view on the wide range of issues that affect her or him, and to have those views duly taken into account, continues to be impeded by many long-standing practices and attitudes, as well as political and economic barriers. While difficulties are experienced by many children, the UN Committee particularly recognizes that certain groups of children, including younger boys and girls, as well as children belonging to marginalized and disadvantaged groups, face particular barriers in the realization of this right. The Committee also remains concerned about the quality of many of the practices that do exist. There is a need for a better understanding of what Article 12 entails and how to fully implement it for every child.

In 2009, the UN Committee issued the General Comment No. 12 "The right of the child to be heard". The General Comment seeks to provide guidance and recommendations for the interpretation and implementation of Article 12 and all other provisions namely: Articles 2 "non-discrimination", Article 3 "best interests of the child", Article 5 "parental guidance", Article 6 "the right to life, survival and development", Article 13 "freedom of expression", and Article 17 "access to appropriate information" that are closely related in the Convention. The General Comment also highlights the implementation of the right to be heard in different settings and situations, such as in the family, in alternative care, in health care, in education and school, in play, recreation, sports and cultural activities, in emergency situations, and many more.

In order to fulfil these obligations, the UN Committee states that States parties should adopt the following strategies:

- Review and withdraw restrictive declarations and reservations to Article 12
- Establish independent human rights institutions, such as children's ombudsmen or commissioners with a broad children's rights mandate
- Ensure appropriate conditions for supporting and encouraging children to express their views, and make sure that these views are given due weight, by regulations and arrangements which are firmly anchored in laws and institutional codes and are regularly evaluated with regard to their effectiveness
- Combat negative attitudes, which impede the full realization of the child's right to be heard, through public campaigns, including opinion leaders and the media, to change widespread customary conceptions of the child.
- Provide training on Article 12 for all child-related professionals working with and for children, including lawyers, judges, police, social workers, community workers, psychologists, caregivers, residential and prison officers, teachers at all levels of the educational system, medical doctors, nurses and other health professionals, civil servants and public officials, asylum officers and traditional leaders





How to kick off a meaningful child participation process?

A SIMPLE 5-STEP APPROACH

According to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child - General Comment No. 12 “The right of the child to be heard” announced in 2009, there are 5 simple steps that can help you better listen to children’s voice in our everyday communication, thereby enhancing their participation in various aspects of decision making.

Before you start to collect the views of the child/children, make sure...

STEP 1: PREPARATION

1. The child is informed about his/her right to express his/her opinion.
2. The child is informed about the impact that his/her expressed views will have on the outcome.
3. Adults must explain how, when, where and to whom the child can express his/her opinion. Adults also have to take account of the views of the child in this regard.
4. The child can choose either to communicate directly or through a representative.

During the process...

STEP 2: THE HEARING

1. Adults should encourage the child to participate, and should show that we are willing to listen and seriously consider what the child has decided to communicate.
2. There should be two-way communication between adults and the child. Adults should not one-sidedly ask for or express opinions.
3. Adults should respect the privacy of the child.

STEP 3: ASSESSMENT OF THE CAPACITY OF THE CHILD

1. Good practice for assessing the capacity of the child has to be developed.
2. If the child is capable of forming his/her own views in a reasonable and independent manner, the decision maker must consider the views of the child as a significant factor in the settlement of the issue.

Situation varies, and the guidelines above may not apply to all settings. However, when the child is invited to give his/her views in a formal occasion or proceeding on matters affecting him/her, then these 5 steps are required to be taken in order to effectively realize the rights of the child to be heard and for their views to be given due weight.

STEP 4: INFORMATION ABOUT THE WEIGHT GIVEN TO THE VIEWS OF THE CHILD

1. The decision maker has to respond to the child and explain how he/she would follow up the child’s suggestion. The child should be informed about the impact that his/her expressed views will have on the outcome.
2. The decision maker’s response is a guarantee that the views of the child are not only heard as a formality, but are taken seriously. This may prompt the child to further response or action.

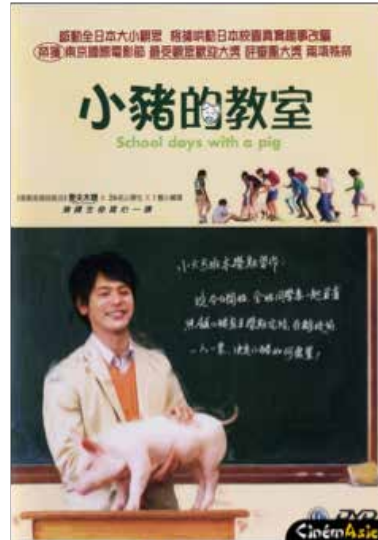
After the process...

STEP 5: COMPLAINTS, REMEDIES AND REDRESS

1. The decision maker should establish clear complaint procedures and guidelines to guarantee children’s right to be heard and for their views to be given due weight.
2. Children should know who and how they can turn to when their right to be heard and for their views to be given due weight is disregarded and violated.
3. Complaint procedures must be reliable and confidential, so that the child will not face violence or punishment as a result of his/her complaints.



Resources



SCHOOL DAYS WITH A PIG

Based on a true event that took place in an elementary school in Osaka Prefecture. The film revolves around the story of an elementary school teacher who proposes that his class raise a piglet at school with the aim of eating it once it has grown up.

Directed by Tetsu Maeda / Japan / 2008 / 109min / In Japanese with Chinese and English subtitles.



THE GAME MUST GO ON

As there are no any other playground they can go, Alexandra and her three friends decide to talk to the mayor and begins a year-long campaign to get the town to build them a football field.

Documentary made by Angeliki Andrikopoulou and Argyris Tsepelikas / Greece / 2011 / 22 min / In Greek with Chinese and English subtitles.



THE PROFESSIONALS - LESSONS FOR LIFE - CHIEKO NOJIMA, CHILD MINDER

Veteran childminder Chieko Nojima has won a lot of attention for her revolutionary methods. Assigning children to a mixed group, she gently guides them towards their own solutions to whatever problems may arise. Her philosophy has inspired firms looking for new ways to develop their human resources.

Documentary of NHK / Japan / 2016 / In Japanese and English with English subtitles.



ABC-TEACHING HUMAN RIGHTS – PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (2004)

It offers practical advice to teachers and other educators who want to foster human rights awareness and action among primary and secondary school children. It is not meant to place an extra burden on an already overloaded curriculum but to assist in infusing human rights issues into subjects already taught in schools. It is a user-friendly tool for human rights education.

United Nations Human Rights Education Series No. 4, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/TrainingEducation.aspx>.

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“It’s not Charity to listen to children,
it’s that you have something to learn”

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HKCCR is formed to promote, advance and ensure the rights of children by monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Hong Kong. We work with children, youth and child related professionals, and we share with them our knowledge and experience in the application of the UNCRC.

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CRC Asia is a network of child rights and human rights organizations working together to be a strong voice for child rights in the region by leading in strengthening child rights movements, promoting innovative programs, and advocating better policies for and with the children.

