YOU RESPOND

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Promoting effective project participation by young people who have experienced violence

A guide to good practice through training and development

Content

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Introduction
to the Guide

Background: the *You Respond* project

Promoting the participation of vulnerable young people who have experienced violence requires professional skill. This should be informed by a conceptual understanding of participation, research in the field and practice experience. Indeed, over the last twenty years there have been significant developments in both knowledge and understanding about young people's participation in general, leading to the development of some helpful conceptual frameworks (for more details see Module 1). Less, however, is known about the way in which experiences of violence, whether within the home, the community or because of war and national conflict, affect both young people's approach to participation and their needs when engaging in participatory projects. The project team, responsible for developing this Guide, sought to address this gap in knowledge by collaborating with young people who have experienced different forms of violence in order to identify promoters and inhibitors to participation. And, in light of these findings, to consider how training and staff development can be used to promote participation. Funding was obtained from the EU Daphne III Programme and a team was brought together of academics, who have experience of research with young people and agencies actively involved with young people who have experienced various forms of violence. The project was called *You Respond*.

Aims

The purpose of this Guide is two-fold: to provide training and learning materials to assist individuals and groups of staff within governmental and non-governmental organisations develop good practices in relation to promoting the participation of young people who have experienced violence, and to assist members of these organisations in developing participatory projects to combat violence against children.

This has been achieved by:

1. Considering findings from current research and practice developments, outside and with in Europe, that contribute towards understanding the nature of participation and the promoters and inhibitors to effective and meaningful participation.

2. Identifying best practice from both the literature and the views of young people engaged in the *You Respond* project.

3. Developing training materials that draws on the literature and the views and experiences of young people in order to promote and develop effective practice.

Target audience

The material within this Guide is targeted at:

- Practitioners wishing to promote the participation of young people, who have experienced violence, in decisions about their lives.

- Managers wishing to evaluate particular services taking into account the views of young people.

- Managers engaging young people who have experienced violence in the planning, operation and allocation of resources for services.

- Researchers undertaking studies, which require the participation of young people who have experienced violence.

Principles and values

The principles underpinning the approach to training within this Guide are based on the UNCRC.

Background to the development of the Guide

The development of the guide was completed in the following stages.

Stage One

An initial, comprehensive review of the literature on participation was completed. This enabled the project team to identify the key themes emerging from the literature in relation to different forms of participation; the promoters, inhibitors at the various levels; the role of the facilitator and the needs of young people.

Stage Two

These themes were then explored with groups of young people, known to the practice agencies, in the UK, Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus. The purpose of this exploration was to identify whether the themes identified in the literature were considered significant by the young people who had experienced violence. Moreover, the team wished to identify any additional issues and challenges that needed to be taken into account in order to promote the participation of vulnerable young people. Bearing in mind the different focus of activities of the practice agencies involved in this project the self-selecting sample of young people were diverse in relation to gender, age, ability, culture and socio-economic backgrounds. All the young people had either experienced some form of violence or had been involved in projects associated with violence, such as projects to prevent bullying or forced marriage.

Table 1 below, provides a breakdown of the young people who remained involved in all stages of the project. Additional numbers of young people contributed to stage two but for various reasons were unable to contribute to stage three, as a result of, for example, changes in out of home placements or educational commitments.

Stage Three

The information collected from the young people was collated and analysed by the academic partners together with members of the practice agencies. Drawing on these findings, a draft Guide was developed by the project team. This Guide was shared with the young people to ensure that it focused on the issues they considered important.

UK	10 girls	15 boys	Engaged in projects on forced marriage; children in care: young people vulnerable to abuse and neglect	12 - 18 yrs
Greece	8 girls	12 boys	Unaccompanied Asylum-seekers from Afghanistan and Somalia; young people in care through abuse and neglect	9 - 19 yrs
Bulgaria	7 girls	7 boys	Roma who experienced harassment	14 - 23 yrs
Cyprus	8 girls	7 boys	Young people in care	10 - 16 yrs
Total	33 girls	41 boys		

Table 1 Young people who remained actively engaged for the duration of the project

Stage Four

This stage involved testing the materials included in the Guide to ensure they were appropriate for the suggested target audience. Training events were organised in the four project countries. The training events included courses for both experienced and inexperienced frontline staff, service managers and research staff. The courses included presentations that drew on the literature review and the views and experiences of the young people as well as the exercises included in the Guide. Minor changes were made to the Guide based on the feedback of the course trainers and participants.

Contents and structure

Module 3 Preparation: setting the scene for effective participation

This section of the Guide aims to answer the questions posed by a 17-year-old boy from Greece who participated in the *You Respond* project:

"Why did you want to talk to us? How did you choose us? What are your expectations from us? What will you do if I tell you that I do not want to participate? How did you think that we would look like? Are you going to come back?"

In this section consideration is given to:

- The different factors that professionals and academics should consider if they wish to promote effective participation of young people in projects
- Identifying children and young people to participate in the project
- Recruitment and selection
- Working with members of organisations to assist in the process

The following issues are addressed:

- Gaining consent from young people, parents and carers
- Preparing children and young people for participation
- Establishing a contract and clarifying mutual expectations
- Identifying the needs of individuals and considering how to address these to ensure active meaningful participation
- Addressing ethical issues
- Identifying an appropriate setting

Module 4 Working with children and young people in participatory projects

In this module consideration is given to involving young people at each stage of the participatory process preferably from the beginning through to evaluation.

This section of the training Guide examines:

- Beginnings
- Build a rapport
- Ice-breakers
- Establishing ground rules
- Working with groups
- Methods
- Endings and feedback

The following issues are addressed:

- Different methods for different types of participation
- Group processes and implications for practice
- Monitoring and evaluating the process

Symbols are used throughout the guide to assist the reader:

This symbol indicates sections that consider the literature, theories, conceptual frameworks and research that informs thinking about a particular aspect of child participation.

This symbol signals sections where young people who participated in the *You Respond* workshops shared their views and experiences to inform understanding from vulnerable young people's perspectives of particular aspects of participation.
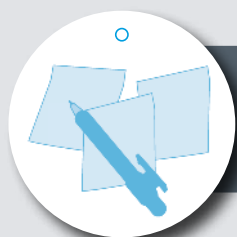
In sections that follow this symbol the key messages reflecting both the literature and the views of young people are synthesised.

This symbol signals that what follows is an exercise that an individual can undertake on their own for self-directed study.

N.B. these exercises can easily be adapted for group or team learning.

Exercises that follow this symbol are specifically designed for group learning.

Guidance on the use of the training materials.
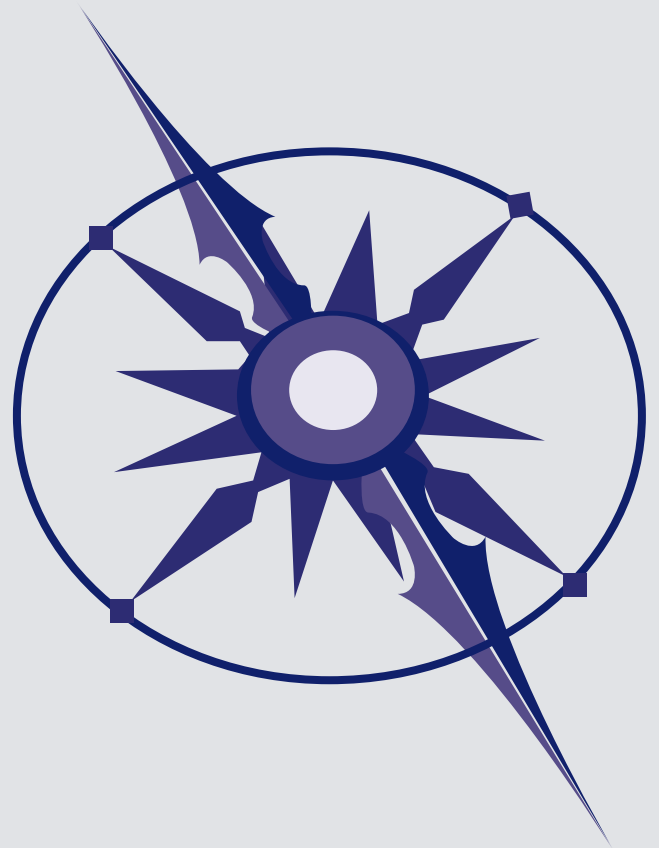
This Guide is designed to provide advice and suggestions in relation to planning and designing group training courses for the target groups, identified above, on young people's participation.

Whilst the focus of this pack is on promoting the participation of young people who have experienced violence or on the participation of young people in projects about violence, it is beyond the scope of this Guide to consider the impact of different forms of violence on children and young people. We would refer you therefore to the numerous texts and training packs on this topic.

We strongly recommend that training, using this Guide, is undertaken by trainers who have a sound understanding of the impact of various forms of violence on young people.

Planning

It is important that trainers familiarise themselves with the contents of this Guide and then consider the following questions:

Who is this training targeted at?

What are their training needs in terms of participation?

Do any participants have particular requirements?

How much time do I have to plan and deliver the training?

Will I be working with a co-trainer and are they identified?

What is the overall structure to the proposed training programme, i.e. how long will the training last; am I constrained by the venue?

You will need to carefully prepare yourself for delivering a range of programmes to different audiences recognising that it is equally demanding for you in terms of applying knowledge to meet different types of needs.

You will need time to:

- Agree the overall programme
- Familiarise yourself with the Guide
- Discuss the programme with your co-trainer
- Schedule dates, venues and other practicalities
- Plan the specific elements of the training programme for the different target audiences with your co-trainer
- Make an agreement with your co-trainer about how best to work together

The following questions should be taken into account when planning a particular training event:

- What are the aims and objectives of the training event?
- How much time have I got to deliver this training? How will this influence the content of the course?
- How many people will be attending this event? What are the implications for the exercises I select and the length of time each exercise will take?
- Will the venue for the event affect the content of the course? For example, is there sufficient room for small group exercises?

Whilst suggested training programmes are included in this Guide, trainers should select and adapt exercises to meet the needs of the target group. Particular consideration should be given to adapting scenarios and case examples to take account of cultural context, legislation and policy, service user groups. Examples and scenarios can also be adapted to take account of the knowledge and skills of the participants. For example, more experienced participants may welcome more challenging scenarios.

Choice of trainers

The following should be considered:

- knowledge, understanding and experience of child participation
- knowledge and understanding of the particular target group
- familiarity with the training materials
- ability to address issues of disability, ethnic identity, sexuality, gender, religion, culture and class
- experience of planning and designing courses (with realistic timescales)
- clear presentation skills, i.e. being able to explain and present material clearly
- listening, reflecting and facilitating skills.

The training process

Getting started

The most enabling approach to any training event is one which acknowledges and builds on existing levels of knowledge and skill, as well as using different styles of learning. Secondly, a participative approach to training together is more likely to be successful and mirrors good practice in relation to promoting participation. This is an approach that recognises that people learn best when they are actively involved in the process. It gives opportunities for participants to examine, question, share experiences and suggest ways forward.

Participants may feel apprehensive about engaging young people in projects, recognising and acknowledging these feelings at the beginning of the programme will help to establish a shared baseline from which to learn.

Creating a group agreement or principles at the beginning of all training events helps to create a safe learning environment. For example, agreeing on punctuality; making clear that poor practice cannot be ignored.

Time will also need to be built in for introductions.

Methods

In any group of participants, you will inevitably have a range of preferred learning styles and need to ensure that your programme provides opportunity for everyone to feel that their preferred approach has been included. The different styles require that participants have opportunities for:

Experiencing, for example, gaining some sense of what it is like to be a young person experiencing group participation for the first time;

Reflecting, this means opportunities to consider the implications of the content of a presentation or exercise for themselves and their practice;

Conceptualising considering the theory and research underpinning practice;
and
Actively experimenting, which is considering what the learning from the exercises etc. means for their individual practice.

Other issues

Careful attention to the practicalities and equipment, as well as to the methods of training, is important. Sound preparation and anticipation of any resistance to either the training or issues related to participation within the audience will be helpful.

Clarifying terms

It is important that trainers clarify the terms that they will be using at the beginning of the training course. This ensures that all participants reach a common understanding. The following are examples of the type of terms that should be defined with regard to the training included in this Guide. The final list would be dependent on the focus of the training and the target group:

Violence towards children and young people

Vulnerable young people

Participatory projects

Participation (if an exercise about this is not included)

The facilitator

Suggested programme outlines

N.B. each session bears the name of the suggested exercise

The following programme outlines take account of the different approaches and are designed to meet the learning needs of various target groups as indicated. It is essential, however, that the exercises are relevant to the participants. Therefore, it may be necessary to adapt the exercises to recognise the local context including the cultural context, legislation and policy, current work practices, service user groups etc. This is particularly important with regard to exercises that include examples and/or scenarios: they should reflect the local context.

Beginning and completing the course

Each of these programmes should begin with an introductory session that includes:

Outline of programme, aims etc.

Opportunities for the participants to introduce themselves to each other

Facilitator/s to introduce themselves and some ground rules

You may wish to use an ice-breaker (see relevant section of Guide)

The programme should finish with a plenary session that provides participants with opportunities to:

Ask questions seeking points of clarification

Reflect on the training and identify what they have learnt

Identify additional learning needs

Consider how the programme could have been improved.

Presentations

Most of the exercises begin with a presentation on the relevant topic (these are indicated in the instructions to the exercise). The trainer should be able to prepare the presentation, using the information included in the Guide under 'findings from the literature' and 'the views of young people'. It is essential that the trainer is fully conversant with the relevant topic so that they can answer any questions that are likely to arise. This means not only being familiar with what is contained in the Guide but also understanding the context in which the members of the training course are operating. In this way, the trainer will be able to assist participants apply theory to local practice.

We would advocate that trainers prepare Power Point presentations which can then be circulated as handouts. It is also worth including a Power Point slide that lists some key references.

Programme One:
For policy makers and/or senior managers

Aim: To raise awareness of the benefits of participation by vulnerable young people for policy and service developments.

Length: three hour event

Suggested outline:

Introduction

The benefits of participation

What is in it for vulnerable young people?

Power relationships and the barriers

Finish with a session on lessons learnt and the implications for developing participatory approaches with vulnerable young people within their organisations.

Programme Two:
For those who are keen to develop participatory practices. Two day course

Aims: To raise awareness of the benefits of participation by vulnerable young people.

To begin to recognise what is required of practitioners to promote effective participation.

To consider the implications for practice.

To identify methods for promoting group participation.

Length: two days

Suggested outline:

Day One: from theory to practice

Introduction

Understanding different types of participation

Making sense of the literature and the views of young people

Is it right to promote participation amongst vulnerable young people who have experienced violence?

What makes for an effective facilitator?

Day Two: working with young people

Addressing the challenges faced by the facilitator when working with hard to reach groups

Creating a safe environment

Exploring methods taking account of group processes

In their shoes: the importance of feedback

Programme Three:
For those who are keen to develop participatory practices. One day course

Aims: To raise awareness of the benefits of participation by vulnerable young people

To begin to recognise what is required of practitioners to promote effective participation

To consider the implications for practice

To identify methods for promoting group participation

Length: one day

Suggested outline:

What's in it for young people?

Making sense of the literature with focus on role of facilitator

Getting started

Exploring methods that promote participation

Programme Four:
To develop the knowledge and skills of those already engaged in participatory practices with vulnerable young people

Aim: To provide opportunities to consider the challenges of promoting the participation of young people

Length: one day

Suggested outline:

Experiences of participation

Is it right to promote participation amongst vulnerable young people who have experienced violence? The debate

Recognising ethical issues and developing strategies for managing these

Exploring methods that take account of group process

N.B. These are only suggestions. You may well identify more appropriate exercises within this Guide depending on the particular learning needs of the participants. You may also wish to read the self-reflection exercises and consider adapting those for your group programmes.

The group exercises

Self-directed study

The Guide not only includes exercises for group learning but also activities to enable individuals to undertake self-directed study. These exercises are specifically designed to enable individuals to further their knowledge and understanding of participation and to develop the relevant skills. In order to maximise the learning from self-directed study it is important that individuals complete the required reading before undertaking the related activity.

Undertaking these activities works particularly well if, following the completion of the exercise, the individual has opportunities to explore their learning and reflections further through, for example, discussion with work colleagues and/or their team manager or supervisor. If this is not possible then it is useful to attempt to monitor progress through, for example, ranking knowledge and skills at the start of activity, immediately following the activity and a few weeks later when there may have been an opportunity to put learning into practice.

Self-Directed Study Exercises

Module 1

Experiences of participation

Making sense of the literature and views of young people

Making sense of the different types of participation

What's in it for young people?

What's in it for adults and organisations?

Identifying the value of participation

Factors inhibiting participation by young people

Barriers and promoters to effective participation by young people

Addressing barriers to participation.

Module 2

Who is an effective facilitator?

Recognising leadership styles.

Module 3

Maintaining confidentiality

Recognising ethical issues and developing strategies for managing these

Identifying participants for a research project

Identifying participants for projects involving services

What do young people need to know to give informed consent?

Factors to consider to obtain consent

Obtaining informed consent

Developing awareness of difference

Factors that influence

Taking diversity into account

Addressing the challenges faced by facilitators when working with hard to reach groups.

Module 4

Establishing a rapport

Clarifying task and process: the facilitator's perspective

Creating a safe environment

Getting started: the use of ice-breakers

The use of ground rules

Matching needs and methods

Exploring methods that promote participation.

The nature of, and challenges to participation

Module

1

This section of the training guide examines:

- The concept of participation in relation to children and young people
- Provides a rationale for its utility
- Discusses the role of a facilitator to participatory initiatives
- Reflects on the challenges to participation for children and young people on the one hand and adults on the other

The following issues will be addressed in this section:

Participation

- What is participation?
- Ways of understanding participation: a brief overview of some well-known models of participation

Why participation is important

- Children's participation as a right
- Children's right to participation and combating violence
- Benefits of participation to children and young people
- Benefits of children's participation to organisations, projects, and services offered
- Benefits of participation to society and policy making

The challenges to participation

- What are the challenges to participation for children and young people?
- What are the challenges to participation for adults?

Making sense of participation: findings from the literature

ARTICLE 12 United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child UNCRC

During the last three to four decades the concept of adult participation has entered public discourse. In relation to children, the introduction of the concept is more recent, a turning point being the establishment of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. Children's right to participate in decisions which affect their lives, in addition to their right to be provided for and protected, is considered by the Convention as a human right that all people, irrespective of age or ability, are entitled to. At a more practical level, it is anticipated that when children participate directly in decisions which affect their lives, their needs, as children, are better served.

"….if participation counts then there would be better understanding and communication when trying to solve various problems." (Girl, 15yrs)

Article 12 of the UNCRC provides that a) 'State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' and b) that 'the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law'.

Article 12 does not exclude any children from its provisions irrespective of age or ability. All children have the right to participate and it is the responsibility of adults to facilitate their participation by taking into account their level of development and changing capacities. The UNCRC does not, of course, require that children do participate – for it to be meaningful, their participation needs to be voluntary – but it does require that adults take those measures which enable children to participate in decision-making if they wish. Article 12 also requires that adults seriously consider the views of children alongside the views of other stakeholders; it does not require that adults agree with the child's point of view but it does require that when they do make a decision which affects the child, they take into account the child's opinion. Needless to say, the provisions of Article 12 can, and often are, interpreted in different ways to serve different purposes, and hence the challenge of ensuring children's meaningful participation in decision-making is still a very real one today as it was in 1989 when the UNCRC was established.

Defining participation: the challenges

But what is participation? Though there is no single, universally accepted definition of participation, which can provide an overarching conceptual framework for thinking about the issue, scholars and practitioners have tried to identify some key elements that can provide some general guidelines for understanding participation. Roger Hart (1992) close to two decades ago, defined participation as

> *"My way of participating is by being present in a discussion and making the decision myself; to be able to give my opinions on the issue. Adults must accept young people with their particularities."*
> (Boy, 16yrs)

"the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured."

Hart's definition of participation draws our attention to a fundamental element of participation, namely decision-making, and to the democratic right of individuals to influence those decisions that have an impact on their lives.

The term participation is used to describe quite different processes (Kirby et al., 2003), since participation is not only a means by which children can effect change but also provides an opportunity for developing a sense of autonomy, independence, heightened social competence, and resilience. Therefore, defining participation is a difficult task, since terms such as 'participate', 'involve', 'take part', and 'consult' are used interchangeably to describe different circumstances (Testro & GForce Reference Group, 2006). Kirby et al. (2003) have acknowledged that participation is a multi-layered concept which needs to be defined along numerous dimensions, such as the *'degree of autonomy held by children and young people in the decision-making process, and the roles played by adults';* the *'individual or group focus on decision-making and the content or subject of the decision to be made',* the *'types of informal or formal activities being used to encourage children and young people to participate',* and the *'frequency and duration of participatory activities'* (Testro & GForce Reference Group, 2006 p.6).

Meaningful participation

To move from simply acknowledging the significance of children's participation to re-conceptualising its role in the larger context of human relations, O'Kane (2002) draws our attention to the need to reconstitute adult-child relationships and develop enabling structures that challenge established forms of power and allow children to participate meaningfully:

> *"Children's participation (especially in decision-making processes at different levels) involves empowering girls and boys, and preparing adults to be willing to share information and power, and to develop new kinds of relationships and partnerships with children and young people. Thus, promoting children's participation involves efforts to change adult attitudes, to build adults' and children's capacities, and to develop mechanisms and structures at different levels, which create access for children and young people to participate in decision-making processes and to hold duty bearers accountable."*

To avoid tokenism and to transform rhetoric about children's participation to reality requires a new vision and perspective on child-adult relationships and systematic effort to bring about such change.   For participation to be substantial, adults must learn to respect children and listen to their views, they must come to see children as competent and capable social actors who can participate meaningfully in decision-making processes, and they must be willing to invest both the financial and human resources necessary to enable and facilitate children's participation (O'Kane, 2002). Ultimately, children's participation can be meaningful if it is effective and brings about positive change in their lives.

A brief overview of some well-known participatory models

There are a number of different ways of conceptualising participation. These include:

The ladder of participation

Degrees of participation

Pathways to communication

Participation as categories of involvement

1) The ladder of participation

Many attempts to understand children's and young people's participation in decision-making utilise the so-called ladder of participation. The original ladder, introduced by Arnstein in 1969, has been subsequently revised and adapted by others. Roger Hart (1992) was the first one to adapt the ladder specifically to children's and young people's participation. Hart labels the first three levels of the ladder as manipulation, decoration and tokenism and argues that though they are often presented as participation they are, in fact, mere decoration. As such, they should be avoided. The following five rungs of the ladder constitute different levels with successively more involvement and participation by children. At the very top of the ladder, children are the ones who initiate the project.

> *"Children must definitely participate in everything that concerns them. Whenever their participation is necessary the children must demand to participate ".*
> (Girl, 16yrs)

1. Manipulation: Children do not really understand what is going on but follow what adults direct them to do. Adults may ask children to express their opinions, use some of their ideas but do not provide feedback to the children about how their input influenced any decisions made.

2. Decoration: Children do not really understand what is going on even though they are part of an event for example, by dancing, wearing T-shirts with slogans, etc.

3. Tokenism: Though adults ask children to say what they think about a particular issue, children cannot choose how to express themselves or what scope their ideas can express.

4. Assigned but informed: Children volunteer to participate in a project designed by adults. It is clear to children what is involved in the project, why they are participating in it and whose decision it was for them to get involved. Adults are respectful of children's opinions.

5. Consulted and informed: Adults consult children and take their views seriously even though it is them, as adults, who design and implement the project. Children have a clear idea of the process followed in the project.

6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children: Though the project is initiated by adults, children are part of the entire process of planning and implementing the project. Their views are seriously taken into account and they are part of the decision-making process.

7. Child-initiated and directed: Children initiate a project based on their own ideas and decide how to implement it. Though adults are available to help children if necessary, they are not in any way in charge of the project.

8. **Child-initiated shared decisions with adults:** Children initiate a project based on their own ideas and invite adults to share with them the task of making decisions.

    In this model, conceptualised more like a 'climbing wall', it is possible to engage at different levels in relation to different aspects of the process. So, a higher rung may be reached when considering children's ability to express themselves freely, but a lower one may be attained when considering the degree of control that children and young people have over the process. This model treats participation as a process rather than a one-dimensional or single instance of participation (Nigel, 2000).

    Furthermore, in this model the quality of participation at each level of the ladder may vary according to the social, cultural and political conditions, the quality of facilitation, the state of inclusion and democracy, and the extent to which children and young people are informed to make accurate decisions. It should also be pointed out that the level of participation may differ both between and within activities according to the type of task and the ability of the individual involved. For example, children and young people may differ in their personal and social characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, culture, disability, socioeconomic status all of which may have an impact on their participation. Moreover, children's participation may further vary given that they have the right to participate or to refuse to participate in any activity (Kirby et al., 2003).

    Hart's ladder of participation has attracted criticism from those who see it as providing a hierarchical order for children's participation where each higher level of participation assumes a qualitatively better form of participation. This, the argument goes, might imply that projects that do not reach the highest possible level of participation are not as successful as those projects that do (Ackermann et al., 2003). Moreover, as McAuley and Brattman (2002) suggest, *"This approach belies the dynamic and porous relationship that can exist between these different levels of involvement and obscures the possibility that 'assigned, but informed' involvement done well can be more effective than, for example, 'child initiated, shared decisions with adults' done badly."*

    The ladder of participation serves as a beginning typology for thinking about the way that children or young people can participate in projects. The level of participation depends on many factors that are not related to the design of a project, such as the ability of the child to participate and cultural issues affecting children's participation in general. It is not always necessary that children and young people operate on the highest possible rungs of the ladder, since children and young people at different times might opt to function at varying levels of involvement or participation. Since choice is an important principle of participation, projects should be designed to maximise the child's freedom to choose to participate at his/her highest level of ability (Hart, 1992).

2) Degrees of participation

John Huskins (1996) has elaborated on this hierarchical model of participation by describing the different degrees of participation in decision-making which entail different levels of personal involvement of young people in youth activities:

Stage 1: First Contact

Young people are testing their future coach out: what has this adult to offer us? Can he or she be trusted?

Stage 2: Familiarising

Both the group and the coach are gradually getting to know each other, getting to know more about the project idea, engaging with each other: trust and sharing begins.

Stage 3: Socialising

The group and the coach are building the relationship, clarifying expectations from both sides, agreeing about roles and responsibilities, setting some rules for cooperation and communication.

Stage 4: Taking Part

Young people are introduced to a participation process by taking part in the project activities developed out of their interests and needs.

Stage 5: Being Involved

Young people begin to take an active part in planning and running activities, the coach stays behind the scenes but is always available in case he or she is asked for advice or support.

Stage 6: Organising

Young people take responsibility for planning and running activities and they organise the activities themselves; the coach is progressively distancing him or herself from the group but is still there if needed.

Stage 7: Leading

Young people are fully independent in their decisions and their actions, they take the leadership role or resort to peer education: the coach is not needed any more!

Stage 8: Peer Coaching

After the leading stage young people are ready to take over a peer coaching role, based on their knowledge, skills and the experience gained during the process of participating in the Youth Initiative.

This progressive participation process within a decision-making approach ensures the development of young people's autonomy. But what is most important is to involve young people from the start. Young people should be involved throughout the whole process, from the very beginning till the end, in order to develop a sense of ownership. Stages 1 to 4 do not necessarily need to be considered as acting 'for' young people (as stated by Huskins) but 'with' young people, if they are encouraged progressively to take responsibilities.

This model should not be considered as a unique model of progressive participation in a youth project. Not all groups of young people must follow all the stages in the order presented above. Stages 1 to 3 ('first meeting' to 'socialisation') apply to most groups of young people, while stages 4 to 7 ('taking part' to 'leading') differ according to particular groups as well as to specific individuals within the group. Obviously, starting at one or another stage of the progression depends on how dependent/independent the specific group of young people is. Attention should be paid to each particular person in order to make sure that everybody progresses within his or her own level of participation. The aim is not that all groups reach the same level of active participation but that everyone progresses according to his or her potential. Every group should be seen as unique and therefore should be 'coached' by taking into consideration the particularities of its unique members.

3) Pathways to communication

Although the ladder of participation has been developed as an explanatory device, it remains largely descriptive and normative (Van Beers, Chau, Ennew, et al., 2006). Reddy and Ratna (2002, p.18) argued that the image of the ladder is not particularly helpful, since *'it implies a sequence, whereas in reality one level may not necessarily lead to the next level'*. The concept of the ladder may also imply a hierarchy of value. *'Ladder models tend to imply that whatever the circumstances, full autonomy is the ultimate goal. This may be unrealistic where stakeholders only want to participate in one or two aspects of a process'* (Save the Children, 2000, p.8).

An alternative typology has been introduced by Shier (2001), one however, which builds on Hart's ladder. Shier introduced the pathways to communication which consist of 5 levels: 1. children are listened to; 2. children are supported in expressing their views; 3. children's views are taken into account; 4. children are involved in decision-making processes; 5. children share power and responsibilities for decision-making (IAWGCP, 2008). At each level of participation, according to Shier, there are three different levels of commitment: openings, opportunities and obligations. When a worker is clearly committed to children and young people's participation and is determined to work towards participation whether or not such an opportunity exists, there is an opening. When the worker has the necessary resources, training, and skills to make participation happen, there is an opportunity. And when the organisation puts a policy which expects from workers that children's and young people's participation is part of their practice, there is an obligation (Shier, 2001, p.110-115). Shier argued that is it important to gradually involve children in decision-making and to support the mechanisms that increase children's control over decisions. The model can be used to assess the appropriate degree of participation for a specific task, such as within a team or across an organisation, by asking those who are involved what power they are prepared to share.

"I believe that power and responsibilities must be shared with children." (Girl, 16yrs)

4) Participation as categories of involvement

Another alternative model to children's and young people's participation has been suggested by Treseder (1997). Treseder also challenges the utility of the ladder which he sees as implying a hierarchy where the aim is to reach the top of the ladder. He states that different levels of participation may be appropriate for different groups of children and young people and at different stages of an organisation's development. Treseder introduces a non-hierarchical, circular model where no level of participation is assumed to be better or to work better than another level (Kirby et al., 2003). Treseder presents the top five levels of participation that Hart uses in his model as alternatives, which can involve children to different degrees in participatory projects.

Assigned but informed: Young people volunteer to participate in a project designed by adults. It is clear to young people what is involved in the project, why they are participating in it and whose decision it was for them to get involved. Adults are respectful of young people's opinions.

Consulted and informed: Adults consult young people and take their views seriously even though it is them, as adults, who design and implement the project. Young people have a clear idea of the process followed in the project.

Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people: Though the project is initiated by adults, young people are part of the entire process of planning and implementing the project. Their views are seriously taken into account and they are part of the decision-making process.

Young people-initiated and directed: Young people initiate a project based on their own ideas and decide how to implement it. Though adults are available to help young people if necessary, they are not in any way in charge of the project.

Young people-initiated shared decisions with adults: Young people initiate a project based on their own ideas, go to adults for advice, and invite adults to share with them the task of making decisions.

With this model, Treseder tries to present a context-sensitive approach to participation which recognises that in real life there are all kinds of limitations and challenges to children's and young people's participation in decision-making (e.g., lack of adequate time) which need to be taken into consideration in order to achieve realistic goals.

In more recent years a number of other scholars suggested alternative ways of thinking about children's and young people's participation which do away with the notion of the ladder. Kirby et al. (2003), for instance, have proposed a model of participation which includes four different categories of involvement as follows:

- Children's and young people's views are taken into account, irrespective of whether they are volunteered or sought by adults in order to respect their rights as stated by the UNCRC;

- Children and young people are involved in decision-making in an active and direct way, so that their views can be shared and discussed, despite the fact that adults are the ones who choose the final course of action;

- Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making, through negotiation, consensus, or voting;

- Children and young people make autonomous decisions, although it is acknowledged that the input of adults is instrumental in their implementation.

To sum up, all the models outlined above attempt to theorise children's and young people's participation in decision-making in ways that account for the latter's increasing involvement in decision-making and as adults gradually begin to share their power with children and young people.

Making sense of participation: the views and experiences of young people

What is participation?

The children and young people who participated in the *You Respond* workshops revealed a number of new insights into participation:

- In contrast to consultation, according to the young people, participation implied something more: a more active involvement on the part of children and young people; being merely present in an activity or setting in this sense did not constitute participation in their minds.

- Children's understanding of the term participation was associated to their previous experiences with children who had had participatory experiences having a better sense of what the term means. However, their perception of its value was also influenced by their past experiences. For example, a young person who had a positive experience of being involved in decision-making within a children's home was more likely to view participation positively compared to a young person who had been told they could participate in decisions related to the children's home but had not felt their view was valued.

- Cultures that encouraged participation or provided opportunities for this as opposed to those that did not influence the young people's understanding and interpretation of the levels of participation that it was possible to achieve. Interestingly, depending on previous experiences of participation, the young people who participated in the *You Respond* workshops viewed these workshops as highly participatory or as providing limited opportunities for participation.

- Participation needs to be discussed in relation to the specific contexts in which it takes place (for example, the home versus the school versus the community) so as to make it more meaningful and to allow participants to make sense of it through concrete examples.

- Facilitators can help children and young people make sense of participation through concrete examples, which are culturally-relevant to the group and draw on young people's experiences.

- Facilitators need to provide sufficient information to children and young people so that they can make informed decisions about whether to participate or not in a particular activity or project.

- Children and young people welcomed specific information prior to a participatory activity so that it was clear what was expected of them, the expectations and what level of participation was anticipated.

- Most of the children and young people believed, in some cases, adults were better equipped to make certain decisions than they were. Children and young people, in other words, could recognise the limits of their own knowledge and were willing to pass on the task and responsibility to adults.

- Some children considered participation in decision-making processes as a child's right.

- Some young people argued that older children (i.e., children older than 14 years of age) have more skills that allow them to get more involved in decision-making processes than younger children.

- Terms such as 'joining in,' 'having fun,' 'taking part,' 'socialising,' 'meeting new people,' 'listening,' and even 'boring experience' characterise participation.

- For some children and young people, participation meant helping others, learning and sharing and a sense of safety.

Key messages

". . . when adults listen to my point of view, they will make better decisions for me."
(Girl, 14yrs)

"Whatever has to do with me I want to be asked for my opinion, not for others to make decisions about me without my presence…"
(Girl, 14yrs)
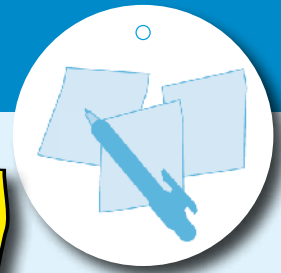
Making sense of theoretical models of participation

The *You Respond* workshops with children and young people provided insights into factors that influence levels of participation.

- They challenged the apparent simplicity of the ladder. For example, some children pointed out that the distances between each step of the ladder, or different type of participation are not necessarily equidistant.

- Other children questioned what happens when one reaches the top of the ladder. Is that an end-point and an ultimate goal?

- If participation is a process then how does the linearity of the ladder with a clear beginning and a clear end-point potentially limit our understanding of participation?

- For some children and young people the ladder is a two-way process whereby one can go up or down depending on what takes place in a participatory project at any point during the process.

"Participation is different for every child but I feel that if there is co-existence, then we would be able to understand each other and to form better relationships and be more interested in participation."
(Girl, 15yrs)

- They argued that it is quite possible to climb up the ladder at one stage of the project only to revert back to a lower step at another point in the process where the parameters of participation are different.

- The young people also indicated differentiating at the lower and upper rungs of the ladder is much easier as compared to the middle rungs where children find the different forms of participation were quite similar.

- Working with age-appropriate visual images can enhance children's understanding of the different forms of participation.

- Children's and young people's right to participation even if they are from vulnerable groups is above all a democratic right, which needs to be promoted and safeguarded.

- The exercise of this right ensures that decisions, which affect children and young people's lives, reflect their own needs and perspectives and not just those of adults.

- Practice suggests that including children's and young people's perspectives in decision-making can greatly enhance the quality of both the decisions made and of the services offered to them,provided that account is taken of their particular needs when considering how to promote their participation.

- Different models for explaining children's and young people's participation have been put forward they all seek to take account or the extent to which children and young people are involved in decision-making as well as the extent to which they share power with adults.

Different facilitators promote or inhibit the move up and down the ladder

The rungs of the ladder are not equi-distant some require bigger leaps in commitment and engagement than others

It's hard work sustaining participation at this level

It is possible to go up the ladder and back down depending on how safe it feels

Misuse of power, manipulation and tokenism result in a slide right down the ladder

Different rungs of the ladder require different things of young people

Different rungs are appropriate for different activities

Lower levels of participation are easier to achieve but may not be the most satisfying

Exercises: what is participation?

Experiences of Participation

Aim: to reflect on one's experiences of children's/young people's participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Bearing in mind your role, try to think back to any experiences you might have had with a child/children or young people who had experienced violence where you wished to promote participation.

Isolate one particular experience, reflect on and write down your answers to the following questions:

What were you trying to achieve through participation?

To what extent do you believe their experiences of violence impacted on what you wished to achieve and their needs?

Which child/ren did you include and why?

What specific activities did you use to facilitate child/ren/young people's participation?

What benefits did you derive from child/ren/young people's participation?

What difficulties or problems did you face in relation to child/ren/young people's participation?

Making sense of the literature and the views of young people

Aim: to reflect on the theories informing participation and consider their application to young people who have experienced violence.

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 40 minutes

Instructions

Read the literature section focusing on children's and young people's participation (including the various models of participation) as well as children's and young people's thoughts on the matter and consider:

What are the key messages from the literature?

Compare and contrast these to the messages from the young people.

How do you think experiences of violence could affect the needs of young people?

What are the implications for promoting participation within your work setting?

Making sense of the different types of participation

Aim: to reflect on the theories informing participation and on the benefits that may derive from increased participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 45 minutes

Instructions

Consider, either individually or within a small or large group a particular participatory experience with reference to the various steps of Hart's ladder of participation:

- Which step of the ladder do children/young people operate at in your identified experience?
- Why was their participation at this particular step of the ladder?
- What were the obstacles that prevented achieving a higher level of participation?
- Drawing on the literature and children's views about participation, what could you have done differently to further enhance their level of participation?
- What additional benefits, do you think, might have come about from increased participation?
- In order to have achieved a higher level of participation what would have been required of you and/or your organisation?
- To what extent do you believe experiences of violence by young people influenced your approach and what can be achieved?

Experiences of participation

Aim: to reflect on the group's experiences of child/ren's/young people's participation

Materials: flipchart and pen

Time: 45–60 minutes

Instructions

Ideally divide the participants into pairs but if time is limited and the group are comfortable with each other then divide into small groups of 4-6 and ask them to think back to any experiences they might have had with a child/children or young people preferably who had experienced violence, where they wished to promote participation. Ask them to share their experiences and answer the following questions:

- What were you trying to achieve through participation?
- Which child/ren did you include and why?
- What specific activities did you use to facilitate child/ren/young people's participation?
- What benefits derived from child/ren/young people's participation?
- What difficulties or problems did you face in relation to child/ren/young people's participation?
- To what extent was this affected by the young people's experiences of violence?
- Ask the pair or small group to identify the commonalties and differences in their experiences and to share these with the larger group. As they do this the group facilitator should record their responses on a flipchart having a different heading for each of the questions listed above.

Once this is completed, ask the group to comment on:

- The different situations in which participation takes place.
- The commonalities and differences in approaches towards engaging young people.
- The benefits and challenges group members have encountered.
- Ways in which experiences of violence by young people affect the situation.

N.B. you can return to this exercise at the end of the training programme and ask the participants to consider:

- In light of what they have learnt and the challenges they encountered are they able to:
- Understand why they encountered some of these challenges?
- What would they do differently?

Understanding different types of participation

Aim: to provide an opportunity for participants to consider the different types and levels of participation

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: a ladder, based on the work of Hart, as described above, drawn on flipchart paper for each small group. Download images from the web to reflect the different types of participation, for example: a group of professionals looking very intimidating; a group of adults and young people jointly engaged in activities. Alternatively, use the quotes below, which have been provided by young people, and ask the members of the groups to indicate the level of participation that reflects what would best meet the needs of the young person:

Participation is about just sitting at a meeting with adults, I'd be scared of being asked to do more.

I believe that power and responsibility must be shared with children.

My way of participating is by being present at a discussion.

I hate talking about my past experiences so active participation is not for me.

Participation is difficult for every child but I feel that there has to be some real sharing regarding decisions and actions between adults and young people.

When adults listen to my point of view and do their own thing anyway, it makes me angry. I want my views to be taken as seriously as the views of the adults.

I feel good when adults listen to my point of view even if at the end they don't agree with what I'm saying.

I learnt very quickly if I say what I think at home it ends up with me being hit.

My well-being and life depend on being listened to and involved in decisions about my life and community.

In the country I left before I came here you never dared say what you thought so I'm not sure how safe it is now.

I should be given the responsibility to take a major role in decisions about my life.

I'm involved in lots of projects but sometimes adults use me and my disability as a way of saying they have engaged with disabled young people.

It's taken me a long time to get over the abuse I suffered but I'm confident now and want to share my experiences to help others develop good services.

I feel adults have already made up their minds when they ask me things: that's not participation.

Adults tell me what to say at meetings and then convince me it's my point of view: that's how I've ended up in care so I think participation is just a pretence.

Instructions

Divide the participants into small groups, 4-6 per group. Suggest they sit around a table or in a circle on the floor.

Explain to them there are different ways in which young people are involved in making decisions and that some approaches can make young people feel more powerful and valued than other methods. Show them the different images or quotes and ask them to decide which is the least participative and then rank them through to the most participative. As they rank them ask them to place them on the ladder which you have drawn onto the flipchart. Highest level at top and so on.

If there is more than one small group they can then compare and contrast their ranking and the facilitator can ask questions such as:

- Why have different approaches been taken to ranking?
- Why are certain approaches ranked higher than others?
- What does this tell us about what they think is the most useful approach? Does it vary depending on the project?

Variation

As the participants lay down the images with the different approaches or quotes, they can be asked questions such as:

- Have you had experience of this?
- What did it feel like?

Making sense of the literature and the views of young people

N.B. This exercise can also be used to explore the role of the facilitator

Aim: to reflect on the theories informing participation and the views of young people and to consider the implications for practice

Materials: flipchart paper and pens

Time: 45 minutes

Instructions

The facilitator should give a presentation on participation, drawing on the findings from the literature and the views and experiences of young people who participated in the *You Respond* project. They should also indicate ways in which experiences of violence may affect young people's attitude towards participation. Following the presentation divide the participants into small groups. Ask each group to consider the messages from the young people in the context of the different types of participation and identify what workers would need to consider to achieve effective participation at the particular levels.

The facilitator should take feedback from each group collating this feedback on a flipchart to identify key factors that participants need to take into account in order to achieve the required form of participation.

Variation

Allocate each group with a particular type of participation. With these types in mind, ask them to consider the messages from young people and the implications for achieving this particular type of participation.

Once this is completed, each sub-group presents their list to the other groups. The facilitator can then ask the group if there are some key points that need to be taken into account irrespective of the type of participation, based on the messages from the young people.

Participation: a game of snakes and ladders

N.B. This exercise can also be used to explore the role of the facilitator

Aim: to reflect on the theories informing participation and the views of young people and to consider the implications for practice

Materials: flipchart paper and pens

Time: 45–60 minutes

Instructions

The facilitator should give a presentation on participation, drawing on the findings from the literature and the views and experiences of young people who participated in the *You Respond* project. Following the presentation divide the participants into small groups. Give each group a sheet of flipchart paper and coloured pens and explain that they are going to prepare their own snakes and ladders board. Drawing on the presentation they have just heard, ask them to think about the factors that would promote participation and those that would inhibit it when attempting to engage young people who have experienced violence. With these in mind ask them to prepare their board using the promoters as ladders and the inhibitors as snakes.

Variation

This exercise could be done with young people to promote participation in a particular setting.

Why is participation necessary?

This section examines:

- the rationale for children's and young people's participation
- the right to participation
- participation as a tool for preventing violence against children and young people
- the benefits of participation for children and young people, for organisations, projects, and services offered, as well as for society and policy making.

"I think that it is a good thing to participate and to express our opinion. This way we feel that they are paying attention to us."
(Boy, 14yrs)

Why bother? Findings from the literature

## Children's Participation as a Right

At a very fundamental level, children's participation is a right. The UNCRC clearly states that children have a right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. To fulfill the democratic right of all human beings to actively participate in their societies, the minimal right to participation needs to be safeguarded. If children are to enjoy this right, societies will need to provide them with the space to express themselves and have their opinions seriously taken into consideration. Similarly, if democracies are to be what they claim to be then the right to participation cannot in any sense, exclude children. As Sinclair (2004) argues, representative democracy can be strengthened as children gain new opportunities to become active members of their communities, whether in schools, local authorities or organisations. Moreover, through their participation, children help bring about a change in the power imbalance which exists between themselves and adults (Ennew & Plateau 2004).

As mentioned earlier, Article 12 of the UNCRC provides for children's right to participation and serves as a powerful tool for its promotion both within countries and internationally. Since the establishment of the UNCRC in 1989, children's right to actively participate in forming decisions that concern them has become widely acknowledged (Lansdown, 2005) and part of the discourse surrounding children's rights but we are still far from achieving the goal of children's participation at a sufficiently acceptable level. The reasons are many and diverse. Among others, they include the confusion among adults that surrounds the concept and definition of participation; the cultural barriers to child participation; adult resistance to participation in general and their unwillingness to share power with children; prevailing social views which prevent adults from seeing children and young people as social and political actors; and adults' lack of skill and expertise in facilitating and promoting children's and young people's participation (IAWGC, 2008).

Children's right to participation and combating violence

Doek (2002), while chair of the UN committee on the rights of the child, described how attitudes towards child protection have moved from compassion and charity to entitlement of children to their rights. Moreover, the UN Secretary General's study on Violence Against Children (2008), made twelve recommendations to studying violence against children, one of which is to ensure the participation of children (Jacomy, 2008).

There is an increasing bulk of research on children's participation rights in disabilities (Badham, 2004; Lightfoot & Sloper, 2003), in health (Alderson, Hawthorne, & Killen, 2005; Freeman, 2005; Franklin & Sloper, 2005), and in social policy networks (Tisdall & Davis, 2004), but there is very limited research on children's participation rights in relation to violence (Le Francois, 2007). *"Despite the near universal of the CRC, large numbers of children throughout the world are poorly protected"* (Landgren, 2005, p. 216). Lansdown et al. (2001) supported that there has been limited progress in the last decade in challenging violence against children. Reading et al. (2009) claimed that child maltreatment (in the form of physical, emotional and sexual violence) constitutes a violation of the human rights and a world-wide public health problem. Since the participation of young people is instrumental in combating various forms of violence, it is essential to integrate their experiences and perspectives in designing appropriate measures for their protection (ECPAT, 2006).

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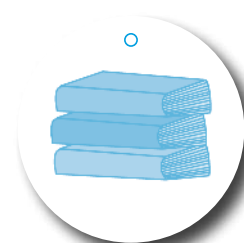
Vulnerable young people include those who are, or have been, in care or protection, or in the youth justice system. The vulnerability of children and young people and the circumstances that bring them to the attention of statutory agencies can lead to 'protective' and 'caring' responses from service providers which can inadvertently limit the participation of children and young people (CREATE, 2000). Boyden et al. (2005) argue that children should be offered the opportunity to express their views regarding their own protection. It is imperative, in this sense, to consider the role of participation in combating violence and abuse against children. A recurring theme of successive inquiries into abuse has been the failure to listen to children. Participation is an important aid to protection which needs to be taken into consideration (Sinclair, 2004).

The benefits of participation for young people

Children's participation in decision-making results in benefits not only for the children who participate but also for the projects in which they participate, the organisations through which they participate, as well as society-at-large and policy making which provides an overall framework for children's participation see especially Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2001).

The involvement of children and young people in the participatory process can have many benefits for them, (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; Children's Rights and Protection Unit, 2006; Laws & Mann, 2004; MacDonald, 2009; Comeau, 2006; Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2004; Barnardo's, 2009; Children and Young People's Unit, 2001; Black, 2004; Cutler, 2003; The National Youth Agency, 2009; IAWGCP, 2007a; Ennew & Hastadewi, 2004; Commission for Children and Young People & Child Guardian, 2009; Feinstein, et al., 2004; Kirby et al., 2003) such as:

> *"The most important benefit I could get from participating is that I would be able to deal effectively in relation to what I want to achieve and to be prepared to create in my own way. I would be able to gain more from my participation when others acknowledge my rights without any objections."* (Girl, 15yrs)

- Enhancement of confidence and self-esteem, which could be caused by the acquisition of new learning skills and the opportunity provided to young people to demonstrate abilities that are not often appreciated (Hannam, 2001; Kirby & Bryson, 2002).

- Enhancement of social, personal, and emotional competence: in particular, young people have reported that they had improved their relationships both with their peers and with adults because they have learnt to understand and trust others and to express their views. Young people had experienced also an increased sense of belonging because they were actively involved in decisions regarding their future (Fredericks, Kapland, & Zeister, 2001; Willow, 2002).

> *"I agree that participation is very beneficial for children… the most important benefit that I would get from participating is that my life's circumstances would change, and become better. Because if I have better ideas, then the decisions would be better and that would be to my advantage."* (Boy, 12yrs)

- Enhancement of the sense of responsibility, efficacy, and autonomy, which is linked to the opportunity that they are given to make a valuable contribution (Cleaver & Kerr, 2006).

- Enhancement of communication and collaborative skills that is achieved through debating, exchanging ideas, negotiating, listening, talking, making decisions, and working in groups (Hannam, 2001).

- Enhancement of civic and political competence through active participation in democratic decision-making processes. Children and young people have the right to participate and become aware of democratic and group processes (Checkoway et al., 2003).

- Acquisition of new knowledge and skills, where young people are encouraged to use different methods to convey their ideas and opinions (Oliver, Colin, Burns, & Nicholas, 2006; Partridge, 2005).

- Reduction of exclusion caused by all the changes mentioned above (Willow, 2002) that makes them feel less underprivileged, since they are given access to greater opportunities (ECPAT, 2007a).

- Increased motivation to achieve due to increased sense of involvement, investment, control (Hannam, 2001), and will to make a better world (Lansdown, 2001).

- Improved behaviour and decreased involvement in criminal behaviour, drug use and teenage pregnancy (Kirby, 2001), as well as direct improvement in their lives and life chances.

- Empowerment of children and young people through the development of the ability to speak in public, to meet and talk to other children and young people, to negotiate, to work in teams, and to plan some activities (Save the Children, 2000; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; Skinner & Fleming, 2007; Sinclair 2004).

"…an important benefit I could have from participating would be to be rewarded for my effort."
(Boy, 14yrs)

- Better understanding of children's own situation (Ennew and Plateau, 2004).

- Increased sense of ownership by children who participate of the decisions made since they are a constitutive part of the decision-making process.

Benefits of children's participation to organisations

Despite the fact that researchers have identified in the past the lack of the documented impact of child participation at political and organisational levels (for example Carr, 2004), Hasley et al. (2006) report that the situation has changed recently. Oldfield and Fowler (2004) reported that over 4/5 of the respondents in their study felt that their services had improved due to the involvement of young people in the decision-making process. Davies et al. (2006) provided the example of students who were involved in decision-making regarding school policies about rewards, bullying and behaviour. The example showed that young people's involvement in interviews for new teachers and their role in deciding the continued employment of probationary staff, resulted in the school making 'better' appointments.

"…children are able to provide fresh ideas…. the most important benefit for society from children's participation is that all children and young people would be happy."
(Girl, 14yrs)

When children participate, the services designed are informed by new perspectives on issues that pertain to children such as child labour or trafficking (Feinstein, Karkara, & Laws, 2004). Organisations and services are also better informed about the views and priorities of children and young people (Lansdown, 2005; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; Children's Rights and Protection Unit, 2006; Smail, 2007; Aspinwall & Larkins, 2002; Comeau, 2006). Child and youth participation in projects including research-focused ones, renders interventions to improve children's lives more effective, appropriate, relevant and sustainable (Feinstein et al., 2004). The involved services can benefit practically, since they will be able to better address the needs of the designated population, to support it with the appropriate means, and to ameliorate their experiences (Kirby et al., 2003). Participation leads to more accurate, relevant decisions, which are better informed and hence more likely to be implemented (Sinclair, 2004). For children, participation may mean a higher sense of ownership and responsibility about the projects and services developed for their benefit (Feinstein et al., 2004).

Over the years, the increased involvement of children and young people in research has also led to higher recognition of the value of their contributions and abilities in issues of social change and development (ECPAT, 2007). Increased child participation in research has become a priority because of the acknowledgement of children's rights and the enhanced understanding of the active role that children play in making decisions about their lives (Clark & Moss, 2001; Prout & James, 1997). Boyden and Ennew (1997) argued that children are just as capable and knowledgeable as adult participants in research. Their perspectives and knowledge are valid, they are very good informants and they are not less reliable than adults. Within this framework, the positive impact of the participatory process on research is (Lansdown, 2005; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; Laws & Mann, 2004; Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2004):

- Better quality data that helps focus the research, clarify the analysis and the interpretation of data.

- Increased probability to portray a picture that is freer of adult interpretations.

- Better insight into the daily lives of children and young people, which have been influenced by the drastic changes that have taken part in most places of the world.

Benefits of participation to society and policy makers

Children's and young people's participation also benefits society as a whole. At a very general level, adults are more likely to become aware of the abilities and skills of children so that they can, in turn, change their stereotypes towards children and show greater respect for their rights (Ennew & Plateau, 2004; Feinstein et al., 2004) Participation allows adults to reflect more directly on their own unwarranted assumptions about children and their abilities and to reconsider their relationship with them (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000). Adults are also more likely to listen to children, to recognise the value of participation, to offer children more opportunities to participate, to implement changes in laws and policies, and to allocate more resources and funds to further support children's right to participation (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Ultimately, participation encourages the development of citizenship among children and makes society more democratic.

> *"There are a lot of benefits that society could gain from young people's participation because society is changing and it would be good if young people's opinions could be heard. The most important benefit for the community and for society from children's and young people's participation is that society would become better, it would be more open-minded, it won't judge but it will recognise and accept young people with their distinctive characteristics."*
> (Boy, 16yrs)

Benefits also accrue to the communities where children's and young people's participation takes place. Clark and Moss (2001) argue that communities need to realise that children are: *experts* in their own lives and have the ability to communicate in a unique way their own experiences and perspectives; *skilful communicators* who express their opinions in a variety of ways; *active agents* who can influence and interact with the world around them; and meaning makers who make sense of their lives. Therefore, the positive impact of the participatory process on the community is (Lansdown, 2005; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; Children's Rights and Protection Unit, 2006; Smail, 2007; Hart et al., 2004):

- To become more aware that children have rights and therefore to change its attitudes towards them;
- To improve children's status within the community;
- To be more willing to act in the best interest of children;
- To improve relationships between older and younger community members;
- To help communities develop according to the input of children and young people;
- To decrease anti-social behaviours, crime levels, and fear of crime;
- To increase awareness of children's and young people's needs in the community;
- To acknowledge that children's and young people's knowledge and ideas benefit families and communities.

Finally, participation can be effective in developing better policies for children since such policies will be informed by children's own perspectives. Hasley et al. (2006) have concluded from their literature search that child participation has had an effect on five major policy and practice areas which are listed below:

- changes in practices, services, and facilities of organisational settings;
- development and design of strategies and policies;
- decision-making regarding budgetary issues;
- revision of staff recruitment practices;
- production of resources for materials and information.

Benefits of participation: the views and experiences of young people

The *You Respond* workshop findings indicate that children and young people think of participation in decision-making as something positive.
They pointed out that participation:

- Increases their self-esteem and confidence.
- Increases their sense of contribution.
- Increases their sense of responsibility.
- Increases their feelings of safety, security and control.
- Increases their feeling of being accepted, valued, respected, appreciated, and empowered.
- Allows them to build their character and become more mature.
- Allows them to claim their rights.
- Allows them to express their opinions and to have their voices heard.
- Allows them to participate in, and have an impact on, decisions which affect their lives and those of others.
- Allows them to learn more about the nature of human relationships.
- Allows them to develop relationships of friendship and trust with others, to share their views and to develop a sense of belonging to a group.
- Allows them to broaden their own cultural horizons through interaction with others.
- Allows them to learn new things and improve their qualifications.
- Allows them to develop new skills or enhance existing ones (e.g., their expressive skills).
- Allows them to learn how to listen to others.
- Allows their peers' opinions to be acknowledged.
- Allows them to gain rewards for their efforts.

The young people who participated in the *You Respond* workshops believe that their participation would benefit society in different ways. More specifically, they pointed out that by participating:

- Society would learn to accept and respect children and young people.
- Society would become more informed about, and acknowledge children's and young people's efforts and particular needs.
- Parents would get more acquainted with children's needs and adopt this approach with their own children.
- Children would be happier.

Motivators: views of young people

The *You Respond* workshops with children and young people indicated that:

- Most young people did not want to receive any monetary reward for their participation, since they believed that participation was a reward in itself.

- There was an issue with young people from a particular cultural context, where reward for participation in the workshops was viewed as an effort to 'bribe' them.

- For some young people, the reward is not something tangible, but something greater – such as justice for all children or protection from violence.

- Most young people said that when participation is voluntary, there is no need for reward.

- There were also a few young people who said that they deserve to be rewarded, since they devoted time and effort to the workshop.

"It is important for me to speak for the children that I know. I do not get disappointed if my opinion is not acted upon. I prefer to express my view than to be impassive. This is the reason why I wanted to participate in this workshop."
(Boy, 15yrs)

"Our reward should be justice for all young people. Anything else would be too small."
(Girl, 17yrs)

"What you did was noble, and there is no reason to be rewarded for everything that we do."
(Boy, 16yrs)

Benefits and participation: key messages
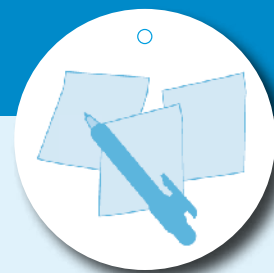
- Though children's and young people's participation in decision-making is an entitlement and as such a right that enhances their citizenship, it is also a means for further protecting children from violence.

- Research shows that listening to what children have to say about violence can greatly enhance our measures for protecting them from violence.

- Through participation children and young people develop useful competencies for carrying out their role as citizens and for actively shaping their worlds; the services offered to them improve in quality; and the communities and societies in which they live become more democratic.

- It cannot be presumed that it is important to motivate children and young people through financial reward. However, it is important to acknowledge their effort and explore with them the most appropriate way of acknowledging this.

The benefits of participation: exercises

These reflective exercises build on each other, so they should be completed sequentially. You may wish to develop and build on your own relevant scenario.

What's in it for young people?

Aim:	to reflect on the benefits of participation to children and young people
Materials:	paper and pencil
Time:	15 minutes

Instructions

Imagine that a group of children residing in an out-of-home care setting are invited to participate in a public event organised by the management of the agency and whose aim is to openly discuss the issue of children and physical punishment in the community. The hope is, that by having children contribute their views on the issue, everyone's understanding will be enhanced. However, children themselves are also likely to benefit from their participation in the event. Keeping in mind this particular scenario, possible needs of this group of children and children's participation in general consider:

- How do you think the children themselves will benefit from participation?

- What would you as organiser of the event have to put into place to try and ensure that this is a beneficial experience for the young people?

What is in it for adults and organisations?

Aim:	to reflect on the benefits of children's and young people's participation for projects, organisations, and society at large
Materials:	paper and pencil
Time:	15 minutes

Instructions

Imagine you are the principal of a school and you have observed that there is one group of children who bully and terrorise other children. In order to raise awareness about the negative impact of bullying you invite students to participate in a discussion amongst themselves about the best ways to combat bullying and school violence. As a principal of the school:

- How do you think your initiative to address this issue will benefit by having children and young people participate in it?

- What is the added value to including children and young people in an initiative of this kind?

- Consider what the benefits of children's and young people's participation in general may be for the school, the local community and the society at large.

Identifying the value of participation?

Aim: to consider the benefits of participation to children and young people

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions

Reflecting on what the literature says about children's participation and what children themselves point out as the benefits of participation for themselves answer the following:

- Do you think children's participation is valuable?
- Are there certain circumstances when it is not appropriate?
- Are there particular situations when the level of participation is going to be limited?

To what extent have you taken the views of the young people from the *You Respond* project into account when answering these questions?

The benefits of participation

Aim: to reflect on the benefits of participation for different stakeholders

Materials: sheets with views and experiences of young people included in the findings from the literature section

Time: 90 minutes

Instructions

Divide participants into small groups and give them each a sheet with the views from young people included in the findings from literature section above. Ask them to discuss each point in turn and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the benefits outlined by the young people for themselves, organisations and wider society.

Once they have completed this task ask for feedback and pull out commonalities and differences.

Make a presentation to the group that draws on the benefits of participation as described in both the literature above and the views of the young people who participated in the *You Respond* project.

Following this presentation ask the participants to go back into their small groups and imagine that a group of children residing in an out-of-home care establishment are invited to participate in a public event organised by the local council whose aim is to openly discuss the issue of children and physical punishment in the community. They should consider:

- What level of participation do you feel is achievable?
- What would be the benefits for the young people, the establishment and the local community in terms of engaging young people in this event?
- Bearing in mind the messages from the *You Respond* young people, if you were head of the establishment what would you want to have in place to ensure the young people benefit from engagement in this activity?

Once the groups have discussed this, invite feedback focusing particularly on what would need to be in place to ensure that young people benefit from participation in this project. Do the participants think they have particular needs over and above those of young people living in the community?

What's in it for young people?

Aim: to provide opportunities for course participants to consider motivators and inhibitors that may influence young people's willingness to participate in a project

Materials: Flipchart paper and pens, presentation drawing on the literature

Time: approximately 40 minutes

Instructions

The trainer can begin this exercise by giving a brief presentation on the benefits of participation for young people and then raise the question *'Is this sufficient to motivate young people to participate in projects?'*

Invite the group to consider the different types of participatory projects that exist and call them out. The trainer then writes these down on the flipchart. As a trainer make sure they include projects within organisations as well as, for example, research or community projects external to organisations.

On a separate flipchart ask them to consider all the reasons why young people may choose to participate in projects. You may prompt them by inviting them to consider personal, material and altruistic motivators.

Once they have done this, divide participants into small groups and give them each an example of a different type of project. For example:

You are a manager of a small residential unit for young people who have been sexually abused. The unit is well known for its work and a lot of officials from all over the world want to visit the unit. You are wishing to engage the young people in the unit in developing a policy on how to manage these visits.

You have received an invitation for members of your youth organisation to participate in a community project on keeping the streets safe.

You are a researcher and want to invite young people who have been sexually exploited to allow you to interview them as part of a qualitative research project on sexually exploited youth.

A group of young people in a school have decided that they want to develop a monthly newsletter for all pupils called 'Keeping Safe'.

Give each small group one of the scenarios and ask them to consider the reasons why young people may choose to participate in the particular project.

Once they have done this, invite them to imagine they are the facilitator for the particular project: what would they consider appropriate and inappropriate incentives to promote participation in the project?

Once each group has completed the task, ask them to present their responses to the two questions.

Draw out the commonalities and differences and facilitate a group discussion about the need to think carefully about incentives etc. that promote participation.

Exploring reasons why adults may find the notion of participation difficult

Aim: the purpose of this exercise is to elicit views and experiences as to why adults may find engaging with young people in research, practice and policy development projects difficult.

Materials: sheet/s of flipchart paper with a cross/puzzled adult drawn on it, marker pens

Time: 45 minutes

Instructions

This can be done in small or large groups.

Begin the exercise by acknowledging that adults may find the notion and the process of young people's participation difficult and this is why young people may only be involved at the lower levels. This is an opportunity to begin to think about why this may be the case.

Using the flipcharts with the cross/puzzled adult divide the participants into small groups and ask them to think of phrases that they have heard from colleagues, the public, etc. justifying minimum or no participation by young people and write them on the flipchart. For example: *'they'll only feel embarrassed in a room full of adults'.*

Once they have completed this, invite them to pass their completed sheets on to another small group. Ask members of these groups to go through the different phrases and:

- Consider what the adults may be afraid of. For instance, in the example given above, it may be having to change the way they communicate, altering the way they do things, changing the venue, etc.

- Discuss how this lack of commitment on the part of adults may make young people feel.

- How will it impact on the level of participation?

The challenges to effective participation

The challenges: findings from the literature

Participation that is tokenistic or unreflective creates cynicism and feelings of powerlessness among children and young people (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008), while lack of understanding about participation undermines any potential work or research in the area (Wright et al., 2006). However, it should be noted that it is also wrong to presume that more participation is necessarily better, since bad participatory practice can create mistrust, waste participants' time, and seriously undermine future attempts at public involvement (Together We Can, 2005).
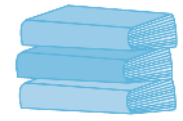
Barriers to youth participation that have been identified by various researchers (Braeken, De Silv & Saidy, 2004; Brodie, 2002; Creegan et al., 2006; Fanelli, Mushunje & CRS Zimbabwe, 2007; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003; Northern Ireland Youth Forum, NECF research team, 2004; Newman, 2004) include a very formal and unfriendly environment; an extremely bureaucratic and/or academic language; high demands placed on young people's time; and unclear or unreasonable expectations.

"Adults sometimes believe that young people can't make important decisions. I think that with the assistance of a good facilitator children can participate in very important decisions witch affect their lives." (Girl, 14yrs)

All the obstacles that children and young people face when trying to participate in projects can have any of the following negative impacts on them:

- children and young people may be singled out for derision or discrimination because of their participation (McIvor, 2005).

- children and young people may be burdened with *'excessive responsibilities, costs or workloads… under the guise of participation'* (Ackermann et al., 2003).

- disillusionment and disempowerment of young people can be caused by lack of actual participation in the outcome (Brownlie et al., 2006).

The challenges of participation for adults

Pupavac (2001) and Bolrand and colleagues (1998) stated that one of the barriers to child participation is that adults fear that they will lose their rights and authorities and that children's rights undermine the clear-cut distinction between adults and children (Hill et al., 2004; Pupavac, 2003). Moreover, prevailing conceptualisations of childhood in the Western world view children as largely immature, incompetent and irrational and therefore in need of protection and close monitoring. By underestimating children's abilities and potential, this view ultimately provides a justification for the obstacles which adults often erect between themselves and children (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005; Chambers, 1998). Given their roles as protectors, educators, and parents, adults often find it difficult to share power with children and instead make decisions on behalf of children (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006).

"Sometimes adults think that it is not necessary for us to talk about things that we are interested in. On the contrary, if there is something that needs to improve is this...that is, if children participate in something that we want then we will become better in the future and we will be united as a team which will participate in a conventional way to make decisions which affect us." (Girl, 15yrs)

The challenges: the views and experiences of young people

In the *You Respond* workshops with young people, the following challenges were identified in relation to young people's participation:

Practical challenges:

- Time constraints in terms of both young people and facilitators' availability.
- Difficulties in accessing meeting places where young people felt comfortable and safe to discuss issues and actively participate.
- Health and safety issues.

Challenges in relation to adults' approach including:

- Inadequate preparation of young people by adults to participate meaningfully in decision-making.
- Lack of assurance about anonymity, confidentiality, and legal protection.
- Lack of honesty about the real reasons for participation, such as an expectation by managers that young people will be consulted.
- Adults' inability to acknowledge children's individuality and viewing them as a type, for example, abused children.
- Fear that adults will interpret young people's views to suit their own needs.
- Pressure from adults to conform.
- Lack of psychological support by adults during the process.
- Adults' failure to really listen to children, which often results in disappointment and frustration on the part of young people.

"Adults think that they know everything. I agree that they have lived longer but a child might have experienced all the good and bad things of this world in the short period of his/her life. Therefore, adults might be unwilling to allow children and young people to participate because they think they know everything." (Girl, 17yrs)

Emotional challenges:

- Lack of self-esteem especially during the initial stages when they are not sure what is expected of them.
- Lack of self-confidence.
- Feeling embarrassed.
- Fear or intimidation from others because they have participated and given their opinions.
- Having limited knowledge of the issue/topic and therefore being scared to say something.
- Being inarticulate or not able to express one self clearly.

Why adults may find the notion of participation difficult

During the workshops the young people considered some of the reasons that young people feel adults find difficulties with children's participation in decision-making. These included adults':

- Perception of young people as a threat. For example, adults' fear that young people's ideas might embarrass or challenge the authority of adults; adults' tendency to become defensive when children have different views or challenge adults' views; adults' unwillingness to confront certain truths.
- Need to control and protect vulnerable children and to always be in charge. For example, adults' tendency to wish to prevent children from making mistakes.

- Lack of interest in young people's issues and their unwillingness to dedicate time to young people.

- Beliefs and assumptions about young people. For example, adults' belief that they always know more than young people or that they are always right; adults' unwillingness to take young people seriously; adults' preconceived notions which devalue young people's participation; adults' assumption that young people are passive listeners/learners rather than active participants.

- Difficulties in communicating effectively with young people. For example, adults' use of technical language which limits the ability of young people to participate.

- Inability to recognise, understand, and manage the diversity which exists among young people and which may result in stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against young people.

- Inability to reflect on how their behaviour limits young people's participation.

- Lack of knowledge as to how to empower young people to participate meaningfully.

- Inability to act on the knowledge they gain from children's participation.

- Inability to empathise with young people – to put themselves in young people's position – and to align their own interests and agendas to those of young people.

The challenges: key messages

- Participation in decision-making presents children and young people with challenges that should be considered when attempting to identify the level of participation and the approach taken by the facilitator when preparing themselves and young people.

- Ignoring adults and young people's feelings of inadequacy may inhibit their meaningful participation in decision-making.

- Adults' ideological assumptions or perceptions about children as agents may limit the level of participation they consider appropriate.

- Adults' fears about sharing power with children and young people may affect meaningful engagement with children and young people because the adults feel threatened by participation.

"…you as an adult can't tell a child or young person what to do with his/her personal life. Of course you will inform them about the risks involved but we (young people) are fighters for life and we proceed with our beliefs and needs." (Girl, 17yrs)

The challenges: exercises

Factors inhibiting participation by young people

Aim: to reflect on the underlying causes which inhibit children's and young people's participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Imagine for a moment that you are thirteen years old and you are being asked to participate in an initiative that seeks to combat domestic violence against young people. You have opinions on the subject and you are excited about the opportunity you are given to have a say in this initiative, which, among others, seeks to include young people's perspectives. However, you soon discover that the adults who invited you to participate in the project are not particularly interested in what you have to say. They clearly position themselves as experts on the subject and in fact, they are more interested in talking to you about their views than listening to what you have to say.

- How does that make you feel?
- What do you think are the reasons which make adults treat you this way?

Now return to the present and your adult status and think about the same issue.

- Is there anything that you find threatening in young people's participation?
- What if their views entirely contradict your views on the issue?
- And what if you are totally convinced that you are right and that they do not really understand the issue?

Try to be honest and reflective and to explore the reasons behind your own. This is an exercise in self-reflexivity. The aim is for you to explore your own biases and those factors which inhibit your engagement with young people.

Barriers and promoters to effective participation by young people

N.B. This exercise can be used to develop facilitation skills

Aim: to reflect on the factors which enable and constrain children's and young people's participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Keeping in mind everything you have read and learned about children's and young people's participation in this section:

What do you think you need to take into account in order to be a sensitive and effective facilitator?

N.B. While carrying out this exercise, it might be helpful to think about all the essential contextual factors that constrain or enable participation at different levels (e.g. the physical and social context of interaction between yourself and the young people and the institutional context in which you operate as well as the local, national, and international contexts in which children's and young people's participation is situated).

Similarly, it might be helpful to think of both the individual (e.g. the unique past experiences which shape one as an individual) and social characteristics (e.g. culture, gender, age, race, etc. which shape a person as a result of his/her membership in particular social groups) that you have as a facilitator and those of the young people you work with and which are likely to impact the level of participation at which you operate or you are able to achieve.

Addressing barriers to participation

Aim: to develop awareness of the behaviours that could make young people feel that they are not treated fairly and try to eliminate them by motivating them to engage in active meaningful participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 25 minutes

Instructions

Imagine that when you were going to school with classmates, a classmate hit another child and the teacher blamed and punished you, refusing to hear anything that you or your classmates had to say:

- How would that make you feel and why?
- How would you try to set things right?
- What would happen if you found yourself repeatedly in similar situations?
- If you had experienced violence, would this affect your reaction to the incidence?
- What effect could this kind of unfair treatment have on children and young people?

When you are recording the answers notice the role that non-participation played in your experiences and try to reflect on the strong negative feelings that you might still have about the unfair treatment, and the outcomes that you mentioned.

- Would a material/verbal reward/apology have made a difference?
- What would have made a difference?
- With this in mind, what do you need to think about when considering how to make young people feel that it is worth participating in a certain activity?

How assumptions about vulnerable children can inhibit approaches to vulnerability

Aim: to gain insight into the perceived power relationships that may act as barriers to participation

Materials: download from the web or cut from magazines images of children. Try and include images of children of different ages, ethnicities, disabilities and gender, some looking sad, homeless, aggressive, very young children etc. Adverts for children's charities are a good source.

Time: 45 minutes

Instructions

Introduce this exercise by explaining that key barriers to effective participation are perceptions of children and young people as largely immature, incompetent and irrational and therefore in need of protection, close monitoring and direction etc. With this in mind divide the participants into small groups and invite them to cut out pictures of children and young people from the magazines provided and to paste them onto the flipchart paper. Ask them to describe each image using one or two adjectives. For example, young and vulnerable, engaging, disrespectful etc.

Invite each group to consider how these views influence our perceptions of young people's ability to participate and take feedback.

Drawing on their experiences during this exercise ask the small groups to list key barriers to participation resulting from immediate impressions of children's competence etc.

Is it right to promote participation amongst vulnerable young people who have experienced violence?

N.B. This exercise can also be used to consider the benefits of participation

Aim: to explore the ethical dilemmas in relation to the participation of young people who have experienced different forms of violence

Materials: a room that can be divided up to enable a debate to take place. Make sure that as a facilitator you are familiar with the way experiencing or witnessing violence can impact on a child, you may wish to prepare a handout on the impact

Time: 75 minutes

This works with a group that is maximum 20 people, ideally less.

Instructions

Divide the group into two and explain that they are going to debate the following topic:

We believe that it is improper to ask young people who have experienced violence to participate in developing an advisory project to support young people who are being bullied either in school or the community.

N.B. You may wish to alter the title, bearing in mind the focus of activity for the participants in your group.

Ask half the group to prepare a case to support this statement and half to argue against it. Explain that three people on each side will put forward the case but the rest of the group must help them put their arguments together.

N.B. You may need to emphasise that this is a theoretical debate and the participants may be asked to take a stand that does not necessarily express their own personal views.

When the arguments are prepared allow each side to put forward their case for no more than five minutes.

Once each side has done this, then allow each side to challenge the other side. At this point any member of each side can respond to the challenge. This should result in a heated debate. Allow this to go on for about 15 minutes.

Ask each group to summarise their key arguments and then take a vote to see which side has 'won'.

Draw out the learning from this debate by explaining that the arguments used to support the statement are ones that those wishing to promote participation amongst vulnerable young people are likely to encounter and need to be able to address.

Alternatively, hold a general group discussion on the ethical issues encountred by facilitators when promoting participation amongst young people who have experienced or witnessed violence.

Group exercise: promoting participation amongst vulnerable young people

Aim: to provide an opportunity to consider the barriers to participation for young people who have experienced violence

Materials: flipchart paper and pens. Make sure that as a facilitator you are familiar with the impact of violence on a child you may wish to prepare a handout on the impact

Time: 60 minutes

Instructions

Begin the session by asking the group to consider how experiencing or witnessing violence impacts on a child's health and development. Ask the group to consider ways in which it can impact. List their comments on a flipchart.

Divide the participants into small groups and give each group a scenario. You will need to alter the scenarios depending on whether the focus of the group is on promoting participation to: enable young people to make decisions about their own lives; to obtain their expertise to change practices in a particular uni; to improve or develop a service or community resource; for research purposes. Examples are provided below.

Maria, 13 years old, lived with her alcoholic parents and witnessed a significant amount of domestic violence. She is now living with her grandparents and you are wishing to engage her in developing a project designed to support young people living with alcoholic parents.

Rowena is 16 years old and her family are refugees who arrived in the country a year ago from a war zone. You are a researcher and are wishing to seek Rowena's views regarding her experiences of being a refugee in this country with a view to service development.

Using these examples or others that you have developed for the group, invite members in small groups to consider their particular scenario and consider:

- What impact the young person's experience may have had on their health and development.
- How could this impact on their attitude and ability to participate in the particular circumstances described in the scenario?
- What would you as facilitator need to consider to promote participation?

Once the group have completed this part of the exercise ask them to share their thoughts with the other groups.

Draw together the key points, placing an emphasis on ways in which the needs of vulnerable young people can be identified and addressed in order to promote participation.

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Being an effective facilitator

Module

2

In this module consideration is given to the knowledge and skills required for effective facilitation. However, this whole Guide is designed to promote effective facilitation, therefore this module should not be read in isolation.

An effective facilitator:
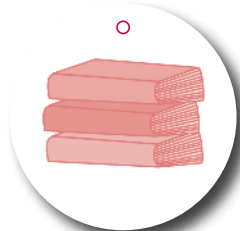# findings from the literature

A facilitator is the person who will play that key role in supporting and making possible, children's and young people's participation in an initiative. A facilitator to child participation needs to be properly trained and acquire the necessary skills to truly empower children to take part in decision-making which affect their lives. To start with, the facilitator must ensure that young people understand what the aims of the participatory activity are and that young people provided their informed consent to participating. Young people must also be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any moment they wish without penalties.

A good facilitator needs to make sure that young people feel safe to participate and that there is no risk of harm to them. It is also the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that participation takes place in a friendly environment and that young people are offered the necessary time and support to freely express their opinions. How the facilitator communicates with young people is key to effective participation. The language used should be clear and jargon-free to ensure that all young people fully understand what is being discussed. When interpretation is necessary for the facilitator to communicate with the young people as for example when working with young people who use communication boards care should be taken to make sure that the interpreter has the necessary skills to communicate effectively with the young people and to pass on their views to the facilitator with accuracy.

A good facilitator will also ensure that all children have an opportunity to participate irrespective of their backgrounds or other characteristics. In practice, this means that the facilitator creates those conditions that encourage all young people to participate meaningfully and according to their abilities and intentions. Put another way, a good facilitator is a friendly individual who knows how to listen to children and uses creative approaches to open up the space for all children to participate meaningfully in decision-making.

> *"A good facilitator must let the children express themselves without constraints and also to help them when they need help. A good facilitator is the person who can support you…"* (Girl, 15yrs)

> *"I agree that a good facilitator listens carefully and respects what children and young people have to say even if s/he disagrees with what they say, because s/he must listen to all children's ideas and then decide which one is better. The most important characteristic of a good facilitator is to have open-minded ideas, but above all to understand young people."* (Boy, 16yrs)

Though an ideal facilitator may never exist it is worth taking into account what it is that children value in such an individual. The Box below is illustrative of some of the qualities that children attribute to such an 'ideal facilitator':

Building an 'ideal facilitator'

In Pakistan adults from a Save the Children project and their partners created an 'ideal facilitator' for working with children in participatory and empowering ways. Visual images were used to indicate the qualities, attitudes, knowledge and skills needed. These visual images included:

- Wearing a CRC and CRP (Child Rights Programming) cap: as they have good knowledge of child rights and child rights programming

- A big brain: intelligent and good knowledge

- Light bulb: bright ideas

- Magnifying glass eyes: for good observation and analysis

- One BIG ear: for sincere listening and acting on what they hear (only one ear, so that it does not go 'in one ear and out of the other'!)

- A big smile: very friendly

- A small tongue: they talk less, but enable all girls and boys to speak

- Cartoon balloon: speaks in child's language

- Equal sign (=): they treat everyone equally

- A BIG heart: they love children and have children in their heart

- Equal (=) sign in their heart: as they believe that everyone is equal

- CRC and CRP in their heart: they firmly believe in the principles of child rights

- A basket 'tool box': The basket of innovative tools helps children communicate in creative ways, e.g. games, role-play, drawing, art, story-telling, singing, poetry, PLA

- A watch: the facilitator needs to be punctual when working with children

- Carrying a balloon and a flower, and kicking a football: the facilitator needs to be playful, encouraging and child-friendly

- Music: to be child-friendly and help children feel free to communicate however they are most comfortable

In Afghanistan the participants created an 'ideal facilitator' with similar characteristics, although their facilitator was half female and half male, as ideally in their cultural context they felt it would be best to have female facilitators for working with the girls, and male facilitators for working with the boys.

Source: O'Kane, Claire, 2003, Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for Social Change, p. 60. Save the Children, available online at:
www.savethechildren.net/alliance/resources/child_part/child_citizens_2.pdf

Role of the facilitator

It is essential to define the role of the facilitator in order to have a common understanding of what is expected of him/her. The core values are providing valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment and compassion. Schwarz (2002) also proposes some facilitator roles that share some underlying core values and principles: facilitative consultant, facilitative coach, facilitative trainer, and facilitative leader. Facilitation should not be confused with instruction, counselling or consulting, since the facilitator has to remain neutral, objective, and ethically committed to collaboration and democratic problem-solving strategies. The facilitator acts as a negotiator when the expressed opinions are compatible and as a mediator when they are conflicting (Webne-Behram, 1998).

The facilitator's responsibility is to 'support everyone to do their best thinking' through searching for inclusive solutions and building sustainable agreements (Kaner et al., 2007, p. 32). Additional responsibilities of the facilitator include the need to help the group accomplish its goals while acknowledging the individual needs of its members, to empower all members to exercise their leadership skills and to encourage them to facilitate the group process (Webne-Behram, 1998). The facilitator can do this by encouraging full participation, promoting mutual understanding, fostering inclusive solutions, and cultivating shared responsibility (Kaner et al., 2007).

It is also important that the facilitator is aware of the basic prerequisites for full participation, which are that members should: feel at ease with other participants; contribute to the planning process; understand the topic to be discussed; possess the necessary relevant information and knowledge; feel safe to express themselves freely; not feel influenced or pressured; trust and have confidence in the facilitator; feel comfortable and relaxed in the meeting place; and feel that their opinion will be valued (Bens, 2005). Facilitators who are asked to work with multicultural groups that may have different understandings and perceptions of participation face more challenges, so maybe more than one facilitator should be used (Hogan, 2007).

Facilitators are usually adults who make it easier for children and young people to express what they think and to share their experiences because they are trained to work with these groups using a variety of methods, such as games, drama or art (IAWGCP, 2007). On some occasions, facilitators may try to reconcile children's views with their best interests by acting to mitigate the effects on children of decisions that were against the children's wishes, in an attempt to protect their welfare (Tyler et al., 2006; Children in Scotland, 2006). Lidchi (2007) supported that the aims of training professionals who work for child protection are to communicate knowledge and to develop practical skills. Facilitators may use their knowledge of what is effective with a group of children so that they work with them in order to motivate them to engage more meaningfully. In some of the workshops that we conducted a representative of the organisation was present and s/he acted informally as a facilitator, knowing what every child could contribute to the discussion and how s/he could empower the young person. This preference for having such an informal facilitator was also confirmed by some young people who pointed out the only person who could empower them to do or say something more was a representative from their organisation. However, depending on the young person, the approach of the facilitator and the nature of the organisation this could also inhibit or even intimidate the young person.

According to Kaner et al. (2007), in order for group facilitation to be effective, facilitators need: to make an assumption that people are wise and creative; be able to listen openly and actively and look for synergy and overlapping goals; respect individuals and their points of view, have faith in the inherent power of groups that is accompanied by working knowledge of group dynamics; possess strong interpersonal and collaborative problem-solving skills, and have an understanding of thinking processes (Kaner et al., 2007).

Researchers may take on the role of facilitator when undertaking research with children. Facilitators working with young people in a research context should have a background in a relevant child-related field and be experienced in communicating with children. They should be sensitive and alert to signs of distress exhibited by children and acknowledge any reluctance to talk about their experience. Moreover, they need to invest time in creating a trusting relationship with children and with their parents/carers or relevant staff and they should treat children as social actors and partners in research and create a friendly and empowering environment.

A simple checklist for the successful involvement of children and young people may be helpful.

- Are the methods used for the children and young people appropriate to the group and the facilitator?
- Is the age range involved appropriate to the methods being used?

- Has the facilitator utilised a variety of methods to engage the varied needs of vulnerable groups?

Although there are differences for facilitators who work with individual children as opposed to groups of children, the main aims of facilitation in every context are usually to (Ennew & Plateau, 2004):

- create a friendly and positive environment;
- initiate the discussion process;
- encourage an atmosphere of open discussion and involve actively all the participants in the process;
- monitor the progress of the discussion and try to make sure that all the participants contribute equally;
- be able to deal effectively with the emotions that participants exhibit, even if they are negative, and resolve any disagreements that might arise between group members;
- summarise the main points of the group at the end and pay attention to comments made after the session has finished.

In order to make children and young people feel comfortable to participate, it is important to provide facilitators with the necessary skills (Ministry of Youth Affairs , 2003). Some of the most important skills for good facilitation are listed below (Gosling & Cohen, 2007; Braeken, De Silv & Saidy, 2004; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003; Brulefert, 2009; IPPF, 2008). They are divided into non-verbal and verbal communication skills:

Non-verbal communication skills

- maintain constant eye contact without showing any preferences;
- address the whole group from a visible point without distracting it;
- smile, nod or engage with others to express sympathy and understanding;
- be relaxed and confident when standing in front of the group.

Verbal communication skills

- create a friendly and comfortable atmosphere between the facilitator and the participants;
- ask using open-ended questions and prompts to elaborate on simple answers;
- explore whether all the members of the group agree with an expressed statement;
- speak slowly and clearly, with a controlled tone of voice;
- avoid using jargon, technical language or slang;
- try not to talk more than the participants and to be a good listener;
- encourages participants to offer possible answers to questions that are raised;
- asks and encourages participants to speak and is friendly;
- paraphrase participants' statements to make sure that what they said has been accurately understood;
- help advance the discussion by settling disagreements and drawing conclusions;
- offer appropriate personal experiences to reinforce participants' statements;
- apply participatory methodologies using small groups of participants and changing their composition whenever possible to introduce new ideas and create new group dynamics;
- keep an eye on participants requiring translation and checks whether they are able to follow the discussions;
- stay close enough to record what is going on, but not too close to put people off;
- be respectful, trustworthy, non-judgmental, playful, and competent in his/her role;
- summarise the discussion so that main points are highlighted;
- ask participants to identify key points that emerged from the experience and the discussion;
- provide feedback to the participants about the outcome of the meeting;
- guide participants to draw general conclusions from the experience, allowing time for reflection;
- make sure that participants leave with positive feelings about what they have learned.

Young people want to be liked and respected by their facilitators and they describe as 'bad' facilitators those who do not respect them and abuse their position of authority by disciplining and punishing them (Hills, 2002, D'Agostino et al., 2006; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003; IPPF, 2008).

In addition to the advice provided above, Boyden and Ennew (1997) have established some practical guidelines for people who work with children and young people and wish to engage them in meaningful participation. It should be pointed out that past experience, professional training, personality, perception of participation, and cultural issues may have a significant impact on the extent to which the facilitators can follow these guidelines.

Facilitators are advised to:

- introduce themselves, unless they have already worked with the children and young people;
- create an atmosphere of trust;
- use simple language according to the developmental stage of the child;
- show patience;
- ensure privacy and safety during data collection;
- exhibit sensitivity for the emotions of the child and be attentive to the child's views and respect them;
- get consent from the child to use his/her time, drawings, and perspectives/views;
- respect the confidentiality of the child's opinions and perspectives;
- show flexibility and creativity;
- keep an exact record of what the child says;
- sit with the child at the same level;
- be aware and critical of their attitude and behaviour towards the child;
- respect the opinion, knowledge, and skills of the child by paying attention to them;
- employ non-directive research methods that let the child express his/her views, knowledge and skills;
- allow the child to behave spontaneously and freely;
- treat the child as a partner;

Boyden and Ennew (1997) also advise facilitators not to:

- start the participatory activity by asking direct questions or using a questionnaire or a structured interview;
- lecture the child;
- comment negatively on how the child talks, behaves or looks;
- interrupt the child;
- dominate the child;
- attempt to guide or patronise the child;
- intimidate the child by having many adults present;
- make fun of the child;
- express negative views to the child or about children;
- impose their own meaning on what the child says;
- stand over the child or sit at a higher level;
- show preference or favouritism for some children when in a group setting;
- discriminate against children based on their age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, or any other point of differentiation.

Getting started

Facilitators who want to work with children and young people may find it fruitful to directly ask children and young people to suggest a place where they would feel comfortable to meet whilst recognising the practicalities of finding appropriate places. Children and young people who have experienced violence may be especially cautious towards adults and this is something that the facilitators should respect by allowing them more time to warm up to the participatory process. Boyden and Ennew (1997) have made some useful suggestions to help facilitators who work with children and young people to be as effective as possible. They are as follows:

- try not to have preconceptions about the participatory process and be open to what you see or hear – even if it contradicts your attitudes and expectations;

- realise that we all make mistakes and that we should learn from them and not ignore them; recording those mistakes might be a good idea;

- do what children and young people are doing in order to manage to fit in (e.g. if they are sitting on the floor join them);

- become an active listener who respects and values the opinions, knowledge, experiences, feelings, analyses, and thoughts of every child and young person;

- accept what the others tell you even if they disagree and try not to impose your views on them;

- although it will be important to share the material that you gathered with other adult colleagues, keep in mind that you have promised anonymity and confidentiality;

- make sure that your voice, body language, and attitudes are not threatening to the children and the young people;

- allow time for children and young people to give their answers and share their ideas. If you rush them, they may provide hasty and inaccurate responses;

- do not be tempted to provide solutions that you were not asked to provide and avoid making promises that you cannot keep.

A more recently introduced concept that has been used to describe the facilitator is that of the coach. The term 'coaching' is used to describe dialogue and activities aimed at releasing potential within groups of young people or individuals. Although coaching services are common in non-governmental organisations, in the framework of the European YOUTH programme the use of coaching is a recently introduced concept (D'Agostino et al., 2006). The skills that a coach should have could be summarised as follows: patience, humour, empathy, capacity for self-reflection, personal standing, conflict and relationship attitude, experience in project development and management, knowledge about group processes and communication techniques, methods for coaching, self-experience with coaching, expert knowledge, personal contacts with other advisors, as well as psychological and pedagogical skills (D'Agostino, Butt-Pośnik et al., 2006).

When several facilitators are involved, team co-ordinator(s) supervise and manage the members of the team and are responsible for:

- making sure that ethical standards are kept at all times;

- monitoring facilitators while at work and providing them with appropriate feedback;

- maintaining positive relationships between facilitators and resolving any conflicts that might arise;

- monitoring the power relationships between facilitators and young people and correcting any inappropriate behaviour of the facilitators;

- making sure that the methods that they agreed upon are implemented properly;

- checking the quality and quantity of collected data;

- checking the recording methods and the ways in which records are organised;

- making appropriate and timely suggestions for changes, additions, and improvements in the participatory process;

- being open to suggestions for changes from facilitators;

- trying to resolve problems that may arise;

- offering appropriate support on a psychological and practical level to facilitators;

- ensuring safety and security of everyone involved in the participatory process.

Leadership styles

Facilitators have their own styles of delivery, some can take more of an active leadership role while others may act more as managers of the process with children and young people leading.

There are three main styles of leadership which are as follows:

- Autocratic – The facilitator takes full control over the participation process instructing children and young people to do as they are told.

- Democratic – This allows for balance of power between the facilitator and the children and young people; both have a sense of belonging and there is a balance of power in decision-making.

- Laissez-faire – This is when children and young people have total control of the process while the facilitator is sitting back and is being told what to do.

An effective facilitator: the views of young people

In the *You Respond* workshops with young people we introduced the concept of the facilitator and asked young people to think about this person. In some of the countries young people were not sure who a facilitator is, mainly because a translation of the term from English to their languages did not provide for a culturally meaningful term. As a result, it was important for us to illustrate the concept with examples so that young people would have a more grounded understanding of the reference. Through the workshops we were also able to identify some of the characteristics that young people associate with a good and a bad facilitator. We realised that many young people think of their teachers when referring to a facilitator, especially young people from countries that lack formal ways of promoting engagement in meaningful participation. It is important to keep in mind of course that this is not an exhaustive list, nor is it necessarily universally applicable given the cultural specificities of the children who participated in the exercises. However, it still provides valuable insights into children's and young people's understandings of the role of the facilitator and how adults who play such a role can make it more productive. First, consider how children and young people paint the picture of the bad facilitator.

> *"An excellent facilitator must take into consideration all children's and young people's opinions in order to come to a right decision and he must be close to our age in order to understand us."*
> (Girl, 14yrs)

> *"A bad facilitator is sarcastic and yells at children because he thinks that he's the only one who holds the power to be a facilitator"*
> (Girl, 17yrs)

Who is a Poor Facilitator?

- A bad facilitator is usually a male;
- He is often untidy or sometimes dressed a bit too formally;
- He is a smoker;
- He shouts and yells, does not listen, and does not encourage young people to express their opinions;
- He patronises, bullies and tries to dominate young people creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation;
- He has a bad temper and does not smile;
- He is too robotic, target driven, and does everything by the book;
- He is not a sociable person or a team player and is unavailable when needed;
- When he speaks he uses jargon and formal language, and often fails to explain what is happening;
- He is indifferent and often lacks a sense of humour;
- He is selfish and big headed, disrespectful, rude, arrogant, pretentious, prejudiced, and racist;
- He lacks self confidence and uses young people for his own purposes;
- He is careless and unreliable;
- He just does his job and only works for the money;
- In general he is not happy with what he is doing;
- He is seen by young people as corrupted and in general does not enjoy a good reputation among them;
- He always thinks he is right and knows everything;
- He makes simple things complicated;
- He excludes children and young people from participatory procedures.

> *"A bad facilitator is the person who says – I have decided for you and this is what you have to do, I won't discuss it anymore."*
> (Girl, 14yrs)

Who is an effective facilitator?

- A good facilitator is usually a female;
- She is physically attractive, charming, and on the younger side;
- She is trustworthy, honest, responsible, professional and fair to all;
- She is respectful towards young people and other cultures;
- She is open-minded, non-judgmental and unpretentious;
- She is flexible and adapts to circumstances and situations;
- She is friendly, caring, relates to young people, and creates a positive first impression;
- She listens and thinks before she talks, encourages young people to talk and is interested in their stories;
- She is attentive to, and supportive of young people;
- She maintains eye contact and pays attention to young people's non-verbal cues;
- She makes young people feel comfortable and takes into account their practical and special needs;
- She talks politely, advises, and praises young people;
- She is not necessarily an expert but she has good time management skills and is able to set the right limits;
- She gives sufficient freedom to young people to express themselves and she shares her own ideas with them;
- She provides children and young people with an organised schedule of activities;
- She encourages children and young people for their efforts;

An effective facilitator: key messages

- An effective facilitator is that person who is able to support children and young people to participate in decision-making without patronising them and limiting their right to participate through unwarranted assumptions and stereotypes.

- A weak facilitator, on the other hand, fails to engage meaningfully with children and to provide them with the means to express themselves freely and to be part of the process of deciding, alongside adults, about issues which affect their lives.

- Developing an appropriate leadership style is important.

- When evaluating the effectiveness of a facilitator children and young people pay attention to details that adults may not consider to be so important, for example, dress code or to things that could not possibly change such as gender and age.
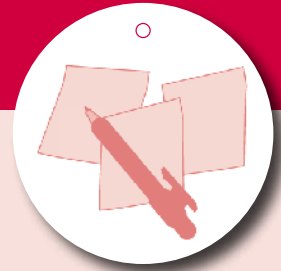
"A bad facilitator rejects individuals from the team and does not listen to others' opinions." (Boy, 12yrs)

An effective facilitator: exercises

N.B. relevant exercises also appear in the other modules

What is an effective facilitator?

Aim: to reflect on what it is that makes a good and a bad facilitator of children's and young people's participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions

Your supervisor has recently asked you to facilitate a discussion of a group of young people who have personally experienced violence in their lives in order to get their views on how their participation in policy design can improve the quality of policies put in place. She does not give you much direction on how to proceed though she does mention that you are not supposed to explore in the discussion with young people their personal experiences of violence; rather, you should focus on their views and opinions on the subject. Bearing in mind what your supervisor has asked you to do:

- At what level of participation do you think your supervisor wishes you to operate?
- Do you think this is the right level, bearing in mind the purpose of the group?
- Do you think that you can play a role that further enhances young people's participation and which moves further from what your supervisor suggested?
- As a facilitator what do you think your role will be?
- What will you make sure you do to facilitate children's participation and what will you try to avoid?
- How will you be able to provide a safe environment for these children in order to feel comfortable to express themselves?

Create two lists, one with DOs and one with DON'Ts.

- Is the level of participation suggested by your supervisor sufficient? What can you do to raise it if appropriate?
- In what ways do your own personal past experiences and social characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc. affect your role as a facilitator?
- As a facilitator, is it always possible to achieve the maximum level of participation?
- If not, what limits your ability to do so?

Recognising leadership styles

Aim: to provide opportunities to consider differences in leadership style

Materials: pen and paper

Time: 25 minutes

Instructions

Part One

Drawing on the leadership styles described in the findings from literature section:

Identify where and how you would use the different styles to engage with vulnerable young people.

Consider the potential benefits and disadvantages of each of the styles and how they can be adapted to different situations.

Part Two

The literature indicates that a democratic style promotes participation because it allows young people to get their points across and to be listened to, however, there are times when this may not work. Consider why you may have to change a predominantly democratic style during the course of a participatory activity.

What makes for an effective facilitator?

Aim: to understand what young people require from a facilitator in order to promote effective engagement in participatory processes.

Materials: flipchart paper and marker pens

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

This can be done in pairs.

Ask each pair to think back to an experience when they were young and someone was trying to get their views on a subject but they did not feel able to share their views. With this in mind, consider:

- What was it about the person that made you feel reluctant to share your views?
- To what extent did the context impact on reluctance to share?
- What would have enabled you to have felt more confident in sharing your opinions?
- What are the implications for effective facilitation?

Ask each pair to prepare a list on flipchart paper and pin up around the room. Asking the group to read them and comment on commonalities and differences.

Leadership styles

Aim: to identify appropriate leadership styles that promote effective engagement in participatory processes

Materials: flipchart paper and marker pens

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Begin with a brief presentation of the different leadership styles. Then divide the participants into three small groups and give each group one of the following statements (you may wish to develop additional ones):

If you are promoting participation, you never need to take an autocratic style

A laissez-faire style is best to ensure active participation

Any breaking of the rules of engagement has to be managed with a democratic style

Invite each group to consider and comment on their statement and then present their views to the larger group.

Identify the commonalities and differences in their conclusions and discuss the implications for promoting participation.

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Preparation: Setting the scene for effective participation

Module

3

This section of the Guide aims to answer the questions posed by a 17-year-old boy from Greece who participated in the *You Respond* project:

"Why did you want to talk to us? How did you choose us? What are your expectations from us? What will you do if I tell you that I do not want to participate? What did you think that we would look like? Are you going to come back?"

In this section consideration is given to the different factors that professionals and academics should consider if they wish to promote the effective participation of young people in projects. These include:

Identifying children and young people to participate in the project

- Recruitment and selection
- Working with members of organisations to assist in the process

Gaining consent from young people, parents and carers

Preparing children and young people for participation

- Establishing a contract and clarifying mutual expectations

Identifying the needs of individuals and considering how to address these to ensure active meaningful participation

Addressing ethical issues

Identifying an appropriate setting

Addressing ethical issues: findings from the literature

Meaningful child and youth participation takes place when children and young people act as participants, consultants or advisors in the planning, analysis, and dissemination stages of participatory activities. But meaningful child and youth participation also involves approaches that are ethical, safe, non-discriminatory and child-friendly. This means that children's participation is relevant and voluntary and promotes children's safety and protection. It also means that the selection of children is based on principles of democracy and non-discrimination and that follow-up and evaluation are guaranteed (Save the Children, 2003). When participation is meaningful it can also help children and young people build and reinforce their resilience (Oliver et al., 2006).

Meaningful child and youth participation can be achieved through an ethical approach and a commitment to transparency, honesty and accountability (Feinstein et al., 2004). When they participate, children and young people want to ensure that their privacy is protected and information they share is kept confidential, to know that they are 'being listened to' and to be sure that adults will help them to solve their problems (Hills, 2002). The following is a sample checklist of ethical issues to consider before embarking on a participatory project with children and young people (Laws et al., 2002; Feinstein et al., 2004; Plateau et al., 2006):

- whether it is appropriate to conduct the particular participatory activity and whether it is well designed;
- whether some course of action will be taken on the basis of the information that is collected and analysed;
- whether there is consideration of how ethical issues that might arise will be addressed;
- which are the methods to obtain informed consent from children or their parents or carers and whether they are given access to all the necessary information;
- whether confidentiality and anonymity of the young people is ensured and whether they will provide their consent for the use of any artwork;
- which is the appropriate remuneration offered to young people or hosting organisations, when it will be given and by whom;
- whether young people will be given the chance to check the accuracy or the adults' version of the collected information and to be consulted on the validity of their interpretation;

- which procedures are arranged to minimise any potential risks posed to both the young people and the adults; whether an inclusive approach is practiced and fair return for participation is provided.

Special consideration should be taken when dealing with children and young people who have experienced different forms of violence and may feel vulnerable and insecure. It is the responsibility of adults to create a safe and meaningful environment for child participation that minimises any possible risks and ensure safety (Feinstein et al., 2004): take an ethical approach that deals with inequalities in power and status between adults and children; enable children to express themselves freely and be respected; ensure the purpose of participation is clear; that children are provided with relevant information and have the ability to consent to their participation; that adults are sensitised to working with children; that children can choose whether they will participate or not, for how long they will participate, and in which ways they will participate; create a 'child friendly' enabling environment that provides the time and resources that are essential for quality participation; that participation promotes the safety and protection of children, ensuring, for example, confidentiality and anonymity; that the selection of children, young people or representatives is based on principles of democracy and non-discrimination; follow-up and evaluation should involve any active participation of children and young people.

When working with vulnerable young people, it is important to ensure, and clarify, that everything is private and confidential (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003). However, as Hasley et al. (2006) have argued, adults should also make sure that children and young people understand that not all communications can be confidential. Adults should clarify to children and young people what may happen when they have to act on certain information they obtain from them. Adults also need to inform children and young people of what might be expected from them if they disclose such information and be ready and willing to address children's and young people's potential fears about how parents or carers may react.

Ethical issues:
views and experiences of young people

The *You Respond* workshop findings show that:

- It is important that they know the reasons why they are being invited to participate before agreeing to do so.

- It is important that this explanation is meaningful. For example, one group indicated that they were just told to go to a room to talk to some nice ladies.

- The young people thought it was important to create an environment where they felt free to express themselves without fear of recrimination.

- Group consent is also important. For example, in one of the *You Respond* groups all of the young people, but one, consented to being tape recorded, because one did not consent, notes were taken in order to respect their wishes.

- All the young people said that it was very important for them that facilitators checked that they have understood correctly what has been said.

- Young people who were not willing to participate in particular activities indicated it was important that this was accepted.

- Young people may wish to test out whether what the facilitator says they mean.

"I always feel free to express myself and this is a right that nobody can deprive me of."
(Boy, 12yrs)

"(Being asked again for my opinion) makes me feel that I actively participate in the project, that I become more mature and that you can trust me."
(Girl, 15yrs)

"I did everything willingly and I am happy about it."
(Girl, 9yrs)

Ethical issues: key messages

- Any ethical guidelines should be followed by every adult who is involved in the participatory process.

- Children and young people really value the opportunity to speak freely, to be given respect and to have their opinions taken into consideration, since it makes them feel that this is the definition of meaningful active participation.

- Facilitators should respect cultural and religious beliefs.

- Facilitators must be clear about information that is confidential and what may be shared outside the group.

Ethical issues: exercises

Maintaining confidentiality

Aim: to demonstrate the importance of maintaining confidentiality in relation to personal information.

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Write on a piece of paper something that only you know and you do not want to share with anyone else and put it in your pocket.

- How would you feel if someone stole it from you and told everyone you knew?

Write down your feelings and reflect about them.

- How would you feel about the person who breached your trust?
- Would you be able to trust this person again?
- Would it affect your ability to trust people in general?
- Does the nature of your relationship with the person who disclosed your secret influence the impact that his/her betrayal has on you?
- What are the implications of this for maintaining confidentiality when working with young people?
- Are there certain situations when you would have to breach confidentiality?
- How would you prepare young people to recognise that there are parameters around your ability to keep information confidential?

Recognising ethical issues and developing strategies for managing these

Aim: to demonstrate the importance of considering how one would manage ethical issues before engaging in a participatory project

Materials: copies of the dilemmas sheet, flipchart paper and pens

Time: 60–75 minutes

Instructions Part One

Give an introduction to this exercise drawing on the literature and views of young people above.

Divide the participants into pairs or small groups and give them each a sheet with the following ethical issues on them:

A member of the group announces at the start of the activity that they have no idea why they are here – they were sent.

Another member says their mother wanted them to come and signed the consent form but they themselves felt under pressure to attend and don't really want to take part.

You recognise one of the young people as someone who you know personally and knows a great deal about your recent divorce.

Three members of the group get up and leave because they thought they would get a monetary reward at the start of the activity.

There is only one young disabled person in the group and she tells you she's not staying as she feels left out.

None of the group are aware they were invited because they have experienced violence within their home.

You may wish to add others.

Ask the participants to consider what they could have done when recruiting and preparing the young people for the activity that could have prevented these issues arising.

Ask for their feedback and from this draw up a list of factors to consider to ensure ethical issues are addressed prior to participation.

Part Two

(This exercise can also be used to emphasise the importance of establishing rules of engagement)

If you are faced with these issues during a participatory activity what can you do?

Invite the small groups to share their strategies and allow the other participants to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy.

Draw the session together by identifying 10 key steps that facilitators could take to prevent these types of issues occurring.

Identifying children and young people to engage in participatory activities: findings from the literature
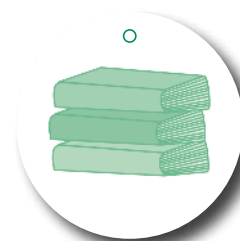
Alderson (2004) and Sinclair (2004) reported that it is very difficult to identify children and young people to engage in participatory activities, since the access given to adults outside of organisations is usually limited and highly monitored. Managers and youth workers are often the ones who give permission for access to children (Hood et al., 1996) and they can influence children's attitudes towards the participatory process to an extent that cannot be foreseen or known in advance (Cree et al., 2002; Hill et al., 2004; Masson, 2004). Aldgate and Bradley (2004) highlighted that many workers/researchers feel powerless when they realise that access to children and young people depends often on the good will of significant adults, such as service providers or carers. This might even deter some people from proceeding with the participatory activities, since they may have to compromise on their inclusion criteria.

"…only Stefanos (the psychologist who works at the institution) could encourage me to do or say more."
(Boy, 14yrs)

Children in care, especially children at risk, are more difficult to access, because adults consider them to be very vulnerable and want to protect them from harm (Berrick et al., 2000). Powell et al. (2009) argued that adults may reject child participation without even knowing what it is about and that the nature of the topic in question is an important determinant of access to vulnerable children and young people. A topic that is considered to be sensitive can be controversial and cause a series of reactions (Liebling & Shah, 2001). Sensitive topics are *'Those that either seem threatening, or contain an element of risk in some way… [and] include areas which are private, stressful or sacred, or potentially expose stigmatising or incriminating information'* (Liebling et al., 2001). When addressing sensitive topics, it is important to consider what information about children and young people might be inaccessible.

Adults who want to engage vulnerable children in participatory activities, such as for research purposes, should ideally aim to approach organisations that meet specific criteria:

- Have practiced child participation;
- Demonstrate a degree of organisational commitment;
- Have undertaken some informal or formal evaluation of the participatory process;
- Have a relatively low national profile;
- Reflect a wide range of agencies that provide services to children and young people;
- Include both statutory and non-statutory work;
- Cover a wide geographical area;
- Include a broad range of children and young people of different age groups (e.g., 10–22 years old);
- Include diverse groups of children and young people;
- Cover a broad range of participation;
- Encompass varying degrees of involvement.

Even adults who work with and have unrestricted access to children and young people should be aware that they may tend to favour those who are more vocal or willing to do things and exclude children and young people who are more likely to be shy, express contradictory views or have disabilities. It is important that adults empower all children and young people to express themselves freely and to ensure them that whatever they say will be kept confidential and will not affect their well-being. It is also important to ensure that children and young people who have not been included in the participatory process do not feel rejected, especially if they have experienced violence, abuse, and neglect. Finally, adults need to consider what happens when some children or young people cannot meet the requirements of the task at hand. Do they decide to exclude them from the participatory activity and if so, how will this make them feel?

So far, we have referred to adults who want to work with children and young people with certain characteristics that are known and attend specific services, organisations, or institutions. However, it is not always known which children and young people to approach and recruit. For instance, it is challenging to identify young pregnant women at risk, because they are less likely to access services than older women and have fewer resources to help them leave abusive relationships. This means that adults often need to be resourceful in finding ways to identify and recruit children and young people, especially when they do not know where to locate them. For example, in order to identify young carers (young people under 18, who give support to family members) to form a support group, Baker and Lewisham had to distribute posters in schools in the area. Identification of children and young people at risk for gang involvement was based on an assessment triangle that was used for screening purposes (Hawker & Hanson, 2010). Teachers and community or youth workers have assisted in identifying young people who have witnessed violence in the community (Byrne et al., 2005). Finally, adults who wanted to identify and contact vulnerable children and young people have adopted an 'open door' approach through continuous contact, while a lot of work was necessary to sustain a meaningful working relationship with vulnerable young people over time (Pearce et al., 2003).

It is difficult to ensure that children who engage in participatory activities are representative of the whole population (Bala & Sinnasamy, 2006) but at the same time it is important to ensure that young people in the group represent the views of other young people (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003), especially since the organisations select which children and young people they will approach to engage in participatory activities. Organisations may choose the children and young people who have more experience with participatory processes, who are more able and willing to express themselves, or who have been for a long time, members of the organisation. This is often done in an effort to help the adults get more out of the participatory process, but it may hinder the participation of children and young people who may have communication problems or different points of view.

"I don't think that my opinions are the same with those of other children, since every individual sees things from his own perspective." (Girl, 22yrs)

Identifying participants: the views and experiences of young people

The young people in the *You Respond* workshops indicated when identifying young people to participate in activities or projects:

- It is important to be clear what method is used to identify young people. For example, the head of the unit etc.

- Some young people felt if the head of the organisation had agreed to the participatory project it would be safe.

- If others have suggested their names then the young people should be consulted and have the right to decide for themselves if they want to be involved – before their names are put forward.

- It is all too easy for staff to identify the most mature and articulate young people whereas others have as much right to participation.

- The young people questioned whether they could represent any particular group because each individual is unique and they would not want to speak for others in case that they said or did something wrong.

"I knew that I could trust you, because if you were not good, then they (the director of the institution) wouldn't bring you here" (Girl, 17yrs)

Identifying participants: key messages
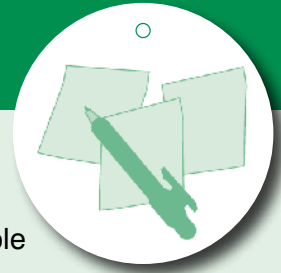
- Identifying and recruiting the children and young people to engage in participatory activities requires careful consideration, most importantly facilitators should be honest with the young people as to why they are being approached.

- As the initial selection of young people is likely to be dependent on service providers, if one is approaching an external organisation, it is important to give very clear and specific information about the nature of the project and the young people one wishes to target.

- When engaging in participatory activities within an organisation it is important not to prejudge which young people would be best placed to participate.

Identifying participants: exercises

Identifying participants for a research project

Aim: to identify factors that you need to consider when accessing young people to participate, for example, in a research project

Materials: paper and pens

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions

Imagine that you want to organise an important social event and you want to invite as many people as you can. Consider:

- How would you decide who you would like to invite to this event?
- How would you locate them (e.g. phonebook, internet, facebook, mutual friends)?
- How would you make sure that you did not forget anyone?
- How would you trace people that you have not heard from for a long period of time? How will you be sure that they have received your invitation?
- How will you make your invitation more attractive?
- How will you try to make sure that they will get back to you?
- If you cannot afford to have all of them, which ones will you choose and on what grounds?
- If you are wishing to access vulnerable young people could you use similar methods?
- What would be different and why?

Identifying participants for decision-making processes

Aim: to identify factors that you need to consider when identifying children and young people to participate in decision-making regarding services provision.

Materials: paper and pens

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions

Imagine that you are head of an organisation supporting vulnerable children and young people and you have been forced to cut back on resources to meet the new financial situation. Consider:

- How would you decide who to involve in the decision-making process?
- Would you consider their age, gender, experiences, communication skills, disabilities?
- How would you be sure that the ones you chose are representative of all service users?
- How would you justify your decision not to include some vulnerable children and young people? Could this decision affect your future relationships?
- How would the fact that you ask them to make some distressing choices influence your selection processes?

Identifying participants

Aim: to identify factors that you need to consider when identifying young people with a view to a participatory project within an organisation where the young people are service users

Materials: paper and pens

Time: 60 minutes

Instructions

Make the point that the effectiveness of participatory projects depends on identifying the right young people to participate in the project. This process can be challenging and this exercise is designed to explore some of these challenges.

Divide the participants into small groups and provide them with scenarios. You may wish to develop your own depending on the settings in which participants are operating or you may wish to use and /or adapt some of the following. These are specifically designed for participants who have had some experience and are wishing to explore more complex issues.

Imagine that you are the senior management team of a large child welfare organisation. The media have criticised you for failing to meet the needs of adolescents who are living with violence and you want to develop your services to take the views of service-users who fall into this category into account. The managers have sent out an email to all staff asking them to give them the names of young people they know who are living with domestic violence.

You are running a small residential unit with eight young people and two members of staff have identified there is an issue regarding bullying and want to develop a unit policy to try and begin to address this. They have suggested doing this by bringing together the three young people who are being bullied.

You run a youth organisation and there is a very enthusiastic group of young men who are keen to set up a users' committee to manage the day-to-day running of an after school club. The after school club is used by a diverse range of young people including groups of vulnerable young people such as girls who have experienced sexual violence. These groups keep themselves to themselves and the young men are not aware that groups of vulnerable young people attend the after school club.

Each of these scenarios raises different issues in relation to identifying young people to engage in participatory activities. Ask the participants in their small group to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed approach to participation and consider more effective ways of identifying young people to participate that is more inclusive without being coercive.

"I did not agree (to participate), because I was not asked."
(Girl, 17yrs)

"It did not take much thought (to consent to participate); every person who has a view would like to participate."
(Boy, 21yrs)

Consent: findings from the literature

Informed consent is given on the understanding that it can be withdrawn at any time (Van Beers et al., 2006). It is important to ensure that informed voluntary consent is obtained from children and young people prior to their participation in any activity (Alderson, 1995; Morrow & Richards, 1996), *'because it shows that a transaction was not based on deception or coercion'* (Fraser, 2004, p. 22). In order to give informed consent children and young people should have all the available information. For example, if we invite a child to contribute to the development of a child protection policy, we must inform him how much time it will take, what he has to do and only then ask him for his 'informed consent' (Jackson & Wernham, 2005).

"You gave us the information when you came in"
(Girl, 9yrs)

We need to obtain consent from children and young people to use any information, photographs, videos, digital images, or artwork. If, say, we want to gain consent for taking a child's photo and using it for publicity purposes, then we have to inform the child as to how we will use the photograph and provide him with the opportunity to refuse (Jackson et al., 2005). Informed consent only makes sense if children and young people understand that they have the right to refuse to participate (Kirby et al., 2003). Formal consent should also be obtained from parents or carers (Lansdown, 2005). However, it should be stressed that parental consent to a child participating in an activity does not absolve the agency from ensuring that the child is not exposed to risks (UNICEF, 2002). Moreover, it is worth considering when some children would prefer not to inform their parents that they are engaging in participatory process, and whether their wish should be respected (IDS, 1995).

So, adults have to think of ways and methods to obtain informed consent from both children or young adults and their parents or carers (Laws et al., 2002). Issues of informed consent are more complex for children who are in state care and have been placed in residential or foster care settings, and where legal responsibility is shared between the state and parents (Molin & Palmer, 2005). Children and young people in care are often denied the chance to engage in participatory activities because of their perceived vulnerability (Berrick et al., 2000). Moreover, it is often the case that services are under critical political and media scrutiny that makes the overstressed staff less willing to further expose the service and professionals working in them, denying thus consent for children's and young people's participation (Butler & Williamson, 1994; Heptinstall, 2000).

Ethics committees, organisations, professionals, parents, caregivers and teachers are usually approached initially to provide consent (Butler & Williamson, 1994; Hood et al., 1996). These gatekeepers influence consent and can constrain children's participation (Cree et al., 2002; Hill et al., 2004; Hood et al., 1996; Masson, 2004; Miller, 2000). However, it is essential that children and young people also agree to participate. The English Gillick case (*Gillick* v. *West Norfolk* and *Wisbech Area Health Authority*, 1986) determined that competent children under the age of 16 years can provide consent. Therefore, it is argued that children's consent to participate should be related to competence, rather than age (Alderson, 2001). Although there is a predominant trend in some cultures and contexts to infer that especially children but also young people are incapable of making decisions regarding consent (Miller, 2000; Morrow & Richards, 1996), research has established that even preschoolers can provide informed consent if approached ethically (Bone, 2005; Hedges, 2002; Smith et al., 2005). For example, children who are too young to
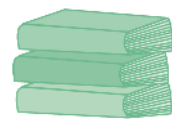
provide written consent, can be given the option to be free to volunteer to participate each day in the proposed activities, when activities are offered on a long-term basis (Lansdown, 2005). Furthermore, if children cannot give consent from a legal perspective, then we can obtain their assent, which is another form of agreeing to participate in certain types of services. For instance, social workers who endorse the assent process make children feel empowered by involving them in family decision-making processes (Barsky, 2009). It is essential also to give children time to consider their involvement in any participatory activities and to give their personal informed consent to it (Feinstein et al., 2004). The preparation of child-friendly information materials helps to involve children in the consent process. Information sheets can usefully include a statement of children's rights as participants in projects and activities. However, verbal explanations are also important in all cases. Consent by children and young people must be seen as an ongoing process and therefore it may be crucial to ask for it at different stages of the participatory engagement (Feinstein et al., 2004).

Social workers, researchers and practitioners working with children and young people often bypass an informed consent process before group's first joint meeting in order to avoid repeating information to each individual child (Corey & Corey, 2006). One problem, however, with this approach is that some children who have questions may hesitate to express them in front of others, in which case their consent will not be informed. It is worth considering also the case of long-term projects where some children and young people may leave the groups and new ones will join in. In order to reduce frustration that derives from repeating information, prospective members may be briefed in advance about the group's goals and activities and provide their consent before joining the group (Barsky, 2009).

"They just told me to go to a room and talk to some ladies."
(Boy, 10yrs)

Informed consent does not just educate children and young people about their rights and responsibilities, but it also lays the background for future action that a social worker may need to take (Hepworth et al., 2010). Therefore, although it is important to ensure and clarify that everything is confidential (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003), children and young people also need to understand that if they disclose something compromising, then it will be reported to the corresponding authorities (Hasley et al., 2006). There are cases where social workers have to breach confidentiality, but this should be done only for compelling reasons and again under certain circumstances. For example, social workers are legally compelled to report child abuse (for more info see Hepworth et al., 2010). The latter warrants special care, since issues of confidentiality are even more important for children who have been victims of violence (Ahlen et al., 2003). Social workers who will continue to work with children whose confidentiality they breached, need to take all the necessary steps to preserve the helping relationship and this may pose a great challenge (Hepworth et al., 2010). Sometimes adults working with children and young people may find that children and young people themselves breach confidentiality for example, when they put their names on their drawings), and that they as adults, have to take the steps necessary to avoid the breach (Feinstein et al., 2004). Finally, when dealing with issues of confidentiality, it is important to consider the role of the adult. For example, a trainee social worker has to discuss the case with his/her supervisor and this should be made clear to the child or the young person from the beginning of the consultation (Barksy, 2009; Dolgoff et al., 2009; Hepworth et al., 2010; Webb, 2003).

"It is difficult to trust people that you see for the first time, but people like you, who care for children are worth trusting."
(Boy, 19yrs)

"How can I trust you, since I've known you only for 3 hours total? Although you seem nice ladies."
(Girl, 10 yrs)

Adults who want to work with children need to allow enough time to get acquainted with them and to earn their trust. A practical first step might be to carry with them some documentation that they can distribute to young people in order to brief them and get their informed consent. The documentation that adults need to carry with them depends both on the needs of children and young people and on the legal regulations of different agencies and services. Adults need to have with them information about the nature of the project that should be presented in a child-friendly way (Barsky, 2009). Children and young people are more likely to trust an adult who is introduced to them by a person that they already know. Although some children feel more comfortable to talk to an adult who shares the same characteristics with them for example. gender, ethnicity, language, and so on, others may feel more at ease with an older or experienced adult even of the opposite sex (Alderson, 1995; Morrow & Richards, 1996).

"I know that you are good; if you were not they wouldn't bring you here."
(Girl, 17yrs)

"Your young age and the fact that you are not wearing strict clothes made it easier for me to trust you."
(Girl, 22yrs)

"I was provided a lot of information; how it started, when, why."
(Boy, 11yrs)

Consent: the views and experiences of young people

From the *You Respond* workshops with vulnerable children and young people:

- It is important to confirm that young people have given their informed consent and not to presume this is the case if this was negotiated through a third party. For example some of the participants in the workshops were just told to go to a room and talk to some 'ladies' whereas the facilitators were under the impression they had given informed consent.

- One cannot presume that young people understand the term 'participation'. Therefore, it is useful to provide them with examples of what participation means so that they can make an informed decision as to whether to engage in the activity/project.

- Most young people said that they agreed to participate in the workshops because they believed that they could make a difference and felt confident because they had been told prior what was expected of them.

"I understand all the exercises; they were easy, to the point, fun, manageable, interesting."
(Boy, 12yrs)

Consent: key messages
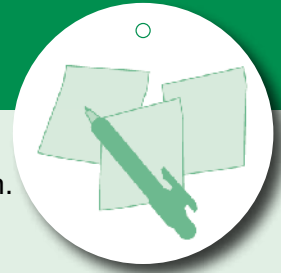
- Informed consent can be obtained from children and young people only if they are presented with all the necessary information. This is essential, even if one has the consent of parents, carers, or institutions.

- Obtaining consent is an on-going process throughout the participatory process.

- There are differences in the ways that different organisations go about obtaining consent or that different cultures perceive and practice consent procedures. It is therefore important that facilitators make themselves familiar with the different approaches and follow them as closely as possible, without compromising your ethical integrity.

- It is important to be explicit about the boundaries to confidentiality. For example, a facilitator may need to share information if they have concerns that a young person is the victim or perpetrator of neglect or abuse.

- Children and young people value openness, honesty, and a friendly atmosphere during the briefing and they appreciate being reminded that they can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Consent: exercises

What do young people need to know to give informed consent?

Aim:	to develop awareness of the information that you should provide to young people in order to get their informed consent
Materials:	paper and pencil
Time:	10 minutes

Instructions

Consider how you felt when you were interviewed about a job and then write down all the information you had and what you needed in order to decide whether you wanted to take the job or not.

- Could you make decisions with missing information?
- How did you try to get the information that you wanted?
- Did you feel the process was transparent or just a typical procedure?
- How can you be certain that you will provide young people with all the information that they need?

Factors to consider when obtaining consent

Aim:	to develop an awareness of the processes for obtaining fully informed consent
Materials:	paper and pencil
Time:	30 minutes

Instructions

You are working in a children's unit and have been asked to organise a meeting for all those living in the unit, to obtain their views on the way the unit is run. Consider:

- Do you assume that all the young people will all attend willingly and that they know why they have come to the meeting?
- How can you make sure that your assumption is correct?
- What happens if you find out that they did not come willingly?
- Do you allow them to leave?
- Can this affect your job/position?

Having considered these questions how could you inform the young people about the meeting ensuring that they are willing attendees?

Obtaining informed consent

Aim: to develop an awareness of the meaning of fully informed consent and relevant local processes for obtaining consent

Materials: flipchart paper and pen. Local and /or organisational policies and procedures regarding obtaining informed consent

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Introduce the exercise by stressing the importance of obtaining informed consent. Divide the participants into small groups and ask them to consider the quotes made by facilitators below. You may wish to adapt or vary this list.

I'll only give them a brief outline of what this project is about. If I tell them too much it may put them off.

My manager has said all the service users need to be involved so I've got no choice about who is included.

I know if I mention that Marie is involved it will put some of the others off attending so I won't tell them.

I've really got to get their views or I'll be in trouble I know they like me and they'll come along and participate because it's me.

I've told them briefly about the project, I'm not sure they really understood, but I think the idea of the vouchers for participating has encouraged them to attend.

I think you can go overboard on this consent stuff. If they say they are happy to participate surely that is enough.

Ask the members of the small groups to consider each of these quotes in turn.

What issues do they raise about the facilitator's approach to participation?

If a member of your team said these things to you how would you respond in a way that would ensure they considered issues of informed consent.

Alternative

The facilitator reads out each quote and acts as an advocate for this approach and gets the group to argue against it.

Identifying and addressing individual needs to promote active and meaningful participation: findings from the literature
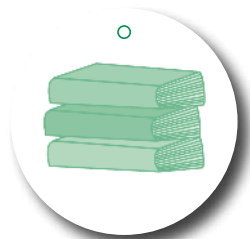
(See also working with young people to promote participation in Module 4)

In order to avoid social exclusion and discrimination, adults working with children and young people need to ensure that all social groups are offered the opportunity to get involved in the participatory process, in accordance with their cognitive and emotional abilities. Participation is meaningful when a non-discriminatory approach is adopted, which ensures that all children and young people (regardless of their class, gender, ability, language, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion, etc.) have an equal opportunity to be involved (Feinstein et al., 2004). O'Kane (2003) has argued that to be meaningful and effective, child and youth participation requires acknowledgement that children's evolving capacity, experience and interest play a key role in determining the nature of their participation. Adults therefore, need to be aware that different groups of children may have different needs and that the cultural context constitutes an important determinant factor (Lansdown, 2005). When planning meetings with young people adults need to consider whether the timing of the meeting clashes with busy times for young people; if the location is appropriate and the physical and safety needs of young people are met; if the facilitator is the appropriate one for the specific group; and if the format and the style of any written material is suitable for young people (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003).

Inclusion of marginalised groups of young people is very important in order to assure equal opportunities for all young people (Children & Young People's Unit, 2001; Sinclair & Franklin, 2000). Accessibility of all aspects of the environment is required if disabled young people are to participate in public decision-making (e.g. Cavet & Sloper, 2004).

It is important to acknowledge significant issues relating to the health, disability or violent experiences of children and young people by discussing them openly in order to avoid assumptions and lack of recognition of their needs (Cafcass, 2004). Listening to children and young people should be an ongoing conversation and not just one where children and young people are asked their opinion about a specific topic (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Boyden (1997) has argued that although adults are supposed to protect children from violence, many children suffer because of the actions or omissions of significant adults in their lives. Since overcoming stressful life events involves beliefs, feelings, competencies, and actions, children should be allowed to express their own opinions regarding their protection. It should also be stressed that there are cultures where violence is a cultural practice. However, although local traditions or culture may explain some acts of violence and they should be mentioned as root causes, this does not mean that the national context justifies violence (Jacomy, 2008).

"I felt you were giving me constantly the chance to express myself, knowing that you were listening to me and you did not just expect me to finish in order to move on." (Boy, 15yrs)

It is important to remember that the success factors which contribute to the involvement of children and young people in participatory activities need to be considered at all stages of the process; not meeting children's and young people's needs at every stage could result in them disengaging from the process.

A six step guide to assist practitioners in this process is detailed below:

Step one: age

Consider the topic and its relevance for the age group you are trying to engage. According to Driskell (2002, p. 56), *'this will have a big impact on the scope and depth of the participatory activities you undertake. Consider the age of participants in relation to the preliminary goals and expected outcomes identified for the project'*. The facilitator is usually responsible for drawing together a plan outlining all stages of the participation process. In this plan, it is essential that the age of the participants is identified, because this will influence the way the facilitator works with the group. If, for example, the group is looking at a particularly sensitive issue then it might be more advisable to work with older young people, because they are more likely to in cope with the issue.

Step two: young people's level of understanding of participation

It is important to recognise that the participatory experiences that young people have will be variable, and therefore it is important to establish at the start what is meant by participation in this particular situation. It is also important to make explicit the role of the facilitator particularly in relation to creating a safe environment. *'Children are not only more impatient than adults but their very dependency on adults for the fulfilment of even simple needs is great that one can hardly expect them to cooperate in a programme that does not, from the onset, address these needs seriously'* (Nieuwenhuys, 1997, p. 240). From the start of the process, the facilitator may find it useful to identify the varying levels of understanding of the children and young people in the group. Some members of the group may have already been a part of a decision-making process and therefore have a clear understanding about what is needed for success. Other more vulnerable young people may have had very little opportunity to engage in a structured participation programme, and may find it difficult participating in any activities. The facilitator needs to provide a clear understanding to all participants. This may mean repeating information several times in order for all of the children and young people to understand.

Step three: size of group

Adults need to consider both the level of engagement of children and young people and what they, as adults, expect from them. This will help shape the number of children and young people they wish to engage, as there is the danger that over-sizing a group may result in negative experiences as the voices of young people may not be heard resulting in further disengagement and possibly heightening children's and young people's vulnerabilities. Much literature has asked the question: *'How many young participants can you realistically involve, given your staffing and financial resources?'* (Driskell, 2002, p. 56). However there is no easy answer to this. The literature suggests that smaller groups work better for youth participation because all of the participants can engage and become more comfortable quickly. However, if the group is too small vulnerable young people may feel pressurised to engage at a level beyond their comfort zone

Step four: methods and resources

Consideration also need to be given to the resources used to engage children and young people and obtain the information required by the facilitator, considering the three steps identified earlier. Some authors argue *'Lack of time, danger, scarcity of facilities or opportunities are sometimes only perceptions and not real barriers. Also, problems relating to cost and transport are sometimes overstated, when certain positive activities provide for some transport and subsidised fees'* (DCSF, 2009, p. 24). Facilitators need to remain clear about all obstacles which may prevent successful participation throughout the process.

Step five: past experiences

Facilitators should take into account the past experiences of young people and to try make the current experience a positive one. One where children and young people can see benefits and positive outcomes. *'Evidence shows that parents are highly influential and are capable of both encouraging and discouraging participation.'* (DCSF, 2009, p. 31). In some cases, children and young people may have experienced negative participation from the family home where they have been left out to fend for themselves, where they may have been neglected or where they may have experienced abuse or the favouritism of other siblings. A large amount of research has documented the difficulties when working with vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised children and young people. According to Powney et al. (1997), *'The most vulnerable were least likely to participate in organised youth activities'* (Powney et al., 1997, p. 34). This research also highlighted that providers and facilitators find it very difficult to engage with young people deemed most at risk. This has sometimes led to young people who are hard to reach being left out of participation programmes, because it is easier to engage with universal young people who are not facing difficult issues. In recent times, governments have focused their attention to working a lot more with these vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. When vulnerable children and young people are engaged in participation processes the results can be very rewarding because of the positive outcomes which result when the facilitator adopts a coaching/ mentor role. Facilitators will find it useful to take into account the past experiences of the participants in order to consider alternative methods of working later in the process and these should be identified as part of the project plan. Again, according to Powner et al (1997), *'Promoting self confidence and self esteem allowed young people to take control of their lives and be less influenced by negative experiences. Interaction with adults provided positive role models and opportunities to discuss personal issues'* (p. 4). Building a rapport, Module 4, the barriers are considered in detail.

Step six: diversity, ethnicity, religion and culture

The aim of participation should be to enable young people to develop holistically, to work with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential. Meaningful participation takes place when you '… treat (s) young people with respect, valuing each individual and their differences, and promoting the acceptance and understanding of others, whilst challenging oppressive behaviour and ideas' (Mainey, 2008b). Though there has also been much literature about creating a diverse group for participation, there has also been many *'Concerns about deficits regarding the participation of young people from socially excluded groups'* (Aldgate & Statham, 2001). Research has shown that socially excluded groups have been isolated by other members of the community resulting in bullying. *'Communities may themselves routinely exclude, for example, minority ethnic groups, children with disabilities, lesbian and gay young people, and others who are disapproved of for whatever reason. All these groups are often subject to bullying and are of course equally likely to experience violence in the home, school, or other institutional settings as other children.'* (Laws & Mann, 2004, p. 38). The selection of participants to create a highly diverse group is one of the more difficult challenges for the facilitator: '*The selection of child delegates is always likely to be problematic, the aim must be to do it as well as possible in the circumstances…however, selected, strong consideration should be given to ensuring diversity of representation in terms of age, gender, religion, urban/ rural residents, levels of (dis)ability, ethnic origin, geographical region and social economical background'* (Save the Children, 2004, p. 14). Facilitators need to make special efforts to support hard to reach children and young people, who may find it more difficult to fully engage. Laws and Mann (2004, p. 38) make this point very clear by stating *efforts will be needed to involve excluded children, and work must be done to support children and young people in order to build confidence to participate.*

Establishing a contract and clarifying mutual expectations

It is important to agree on ground rules that could be set at the beginning of the activity in order to be certain that all the involved parties have a clear understanding of what is going to happen. Mainey (2008a) proposed the following ground rules that should be communicated to children and young people right from the start:
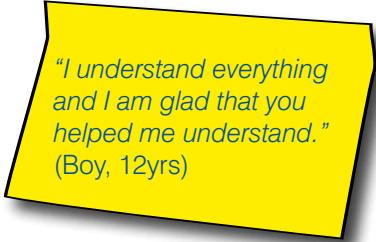
- listen to each other;

- take turns and don't speak all together at once;

- respect the opinion of others, even if they disagree with you;

- do not use bad language do not bully anyone;

- do not answer questions you don't want to;

- ask if you do not understand something. Once young people are engaged in participatory processes they need to be clearly informed about what to expect (Lightfoot & Sloper, 2003), as well as the extent to which they can influence decisions (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000).

> *"We must not laugh at people who make mistakes or say something wrong; we must not all talk together at the same time."*
> (Girl, 17yrs)

> *"We all have different opinions and we need to respect them, whether they come from friends or not."*
> (Boy, 21yrs)

Clarifying task and process

Before the activity begins, adults need to consider how they will explain to children and young people the nature of the task and anticipated outcomes (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children, 2005). Lansdown (2005) argued that adults need to clarify to young people the aims of the project and the extent to which they can influence the outcome. Moreover, Feinstein et al., (2004) have argued that in order to ensure meaningful participation adults need to check that the task is well-understood using both verbal and non-verbal means to communicate and that it is important to start from scratch and help children find the proper way to express themselves. Finally, Littlechild (2000) claimed that it is important to ensure that young people are given full information about the system they are entering, including practical details of who will support them during the process and how, who will be informed of the outcomes and ways in which the work of the group may be utilised.

"I understand everything and I am glad that you helped me understand." (Boy, 12yrs)

Rewarding young people for participation?

Before adults start a project, they should consider whether children and young people should be rewarded for taking part and how (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children, 2005). This can be a very sensitive issue that should be negotiated with the organisations in advance. Rewards often constitute a way to recompense children and young people for their time and acknowledge their contribution using tangible rewards, incentives or recognition. Renumeration is financial reward that could be decided on the basis of the level of responsibility and commitment required from them, any training that they may need to attend, their age, and their status as volunteers or as employees. Each organisation, institution and cultural context may hold different ideas on the best reward for children and young people depending on the types of projects, the available resources and the favoured approaches. Gifts and rewards even in the form of vouchers may result in loss of benefits and be subjected to tax, which should also be seriously taken into account. However, even if providing rewards could be optional, travel, substinence, overnight accommodation, childcare, and loss of earnings costs should always be reimbursed or provided. Children and young people should be involved from the beginning in any choices regarding the most appropriate form of reward and this could enhance the participatory culture (www.participationworks.org.uk).

One of the main objectives of renumeration is to make sure that no child or young person is out of pocket from his/her participation. Children and young people should be rewarded for offering opinions on proposals and ideas; attending consultation events, advisory groups, project/service meetings; receiving and delivering training; getting involved in research, design, and development of services; participating in focus groups or in young persons' interview panels (www.eap.ac.uk).

A reward is something given in return for a service, while an incentive is something that encourages effort or action (Baker, 2004). Incentives for participation could: be learning new skills; increasing their self-confidence; meeting other young people and making friends; having fun; voicing their opinions; making a difference in services for young people; engaging in training or development opportunities; and personal achievement (Baker, 2004). Examples of rewards for participation are: celebration or leisure activities and events; letters or thank you cards; nationally or regionally recognised certificates; media promotion; service changes; receiving feedback for comments/participation (www.rubothered.co.uk/rewardsguide).

Identifying participants' needs: the views and experiences of young people

The participants in the *You Respond* workshops with vulnerable children and young people found that:

- It is important that the activity takes place where the particular group of young people feels safe and comfortable and consideration is given to the specific needs of those with physical disabilities, such as access.

- If participants do not feel confident, contributing verbally, facilitators should use non-verbal approaches to promote participation. For example, drawing, visual exercise that are not dependent on language and communication skills. Some young people said that they liked ranking exercises because it took the pressure off talking and allowed them more time to think and express themselves.

- Facilitators should recognise that young people have to lead lives outside the participatory activity and other commitments may impact on their ability to participate. For example, there may be time clashes. When this cannot be avoided alternative methods should be considered to ensure the young person can still participate if they so wish, for example, through questionnaires, separate session.

- Sometime events that have occurred elsewhere may impact on the young person's level of participation and they may well be quieter in some sessions than in others.

Identifying participants' needs: key messages

- The activities one selects should be informed by the individual needs of the children and young people, as well as the level of participation.

- Particular needs of some participants may only become apparent during the course of the activity it is therefore important to be mindful of levels of engagement and any barriers that prevent individual participation with back-up plans to meet particular needs that may arise.

- Activities that are structured around drawing, artwork, photos or group activities can take the pressure off young people and can address potential communication problems.

The success of:

- Participatory activities involving vulnerable young people can be significantly influenced by detailed planning and preparation.

Factors to consider include:

- What type of 'reward' is appropriate.

- The individually needs of the young people.

- Their understanding of the task and process.

- Ensuring the impact of past experiences are considered.

Identifying participants' needs: exercises

Developing awareness of difference

N.B. Can be used as a group exercise

Aim: to develop awareness of issues related to diversity and discrimination

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions

Read the following statements:

A young person in a wheelchair cannot attend a youth event because there is no access.

A child is not allowed to discuss with his parents where they will go on holiday.

A young girl does not attend school because she has to care for her mother who is an alcoholic.

Black teenager is the only one in a group for young people who have witnessed domestic violence.

Consider:

- Are these acts of discrimination? Why/why not?
- What are the possible causes of these behaviours?
- How would you feel if you were the recipient of these behaviours?
- What can you do to avoid making young people feel discriminated against when you are working with them and trying to engage them in participatory processes?

Factors that influence

Aim: to develop awareness of issues related to micro- and macro-levels of influence on people

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 25 minutes

Instructions

Imagine being at the centre of a solar system. Now, try to give a name to the planets that revolve around you, keeping in mind that the ones closer to you can exert more influence. These 'planets' can represent people, institutions, legislations, cultures, societies, and many other factors that have an impact on your life. How many of them can you influence? How do you feel about the factors that you cannot influence?

Taking diversity into account

Aim: to develop awareness of issues related to diverse needs and abilities of children and young people

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 25 minutes

Instructions

You want to organise a conference for young people and intend inviting 50 young people. Consider:

- What should you take into account bearing in mind differences in diversity, gender, disability etc?
- How would you try and make yourself aware of participants' needs?
- Is it possible to meet everyone's needs?
- On what grounds will you make your decisions as to which needs can be met?
- Do you think that you can be fair?
- How will you explain to some young people if their needs cannot be met?

Addressing the challenges faced by facilitators when working with hard to reach groups

Aim: to develop awareness of what one needs to consider when working with hard to reach groups

Materials: paper and pens

Instructions

The local town/city council is keen to involve young people in local decision-making. They have a problem with graffiti and vandalism and have asked you to establish a group of 10 young people from the ages of 14–21, who have shown interest in improving the physical conditions in the local area. Some of the young people have experienced participation at the highest level, where they contributed to decision-making. Others have experienced little to no participation. From the 10 young people 3 are from the care system, 4 have been engaged in the criminal justice system, and the final 3 have always been actively involved in formal participation structures and are seen as high achievers at school. There are 5 males and 5 females, however, the ethnicity and culture of the group is very diverse, i.e. 3 young people are from an Asian background, 4 young people who are white, 1 young person who is duel heritage and 2 young people who are black Caribbean. It is important to note that the academic level is very varied and there are also some strong language barriers. The group will be working together for 6 months meeting weekly.

Consider:

- What are some of the key issues you will need to address in order to promote effective participation of all members?
- What can you do with the members of the group to facilitate effective participation in light of these issues?

Recognising and working with difference

Aim: to develop awareness of issues related to diverse needs and abilities of children and young people

This exercise works better with experienced staff

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 75 minutes

Instructions

Introduce this exercise by indicating that each child will have different needs depending on their past experiences. Invite the group to think about the different life experiences that will impact on young people's ability and willingness to participate in a particular participatory project.

Once they have done this ask them to indicate:

- Which of these would be immediately obvious to a facilitator who was inviting a young person to participate in a project?

- Could be obtained by getting young people to complete a consent form which includes a section on particular needs.

- Which needs may not become obvious until the participatory activity/project has begun.

Having completed this part of the exercise divide the participants into small groups (you will need an equal number of groups).

Ask each group to think of a scenario where a need of a young person became apparent during the early stages of a participatory project.

Once they have done this ask them to write the scenario at the top of a sheet of flipchart paper and pass it on to another small group.

Each group should now have a new scenario.

Ask each group to consider the scenario and answer the following questions:

- What could you do to address this need without dis-empowering the young person?

- Is there anything you could have done during the preparation process that would have enabled you to have identified this need?

Ask each group to present their scenario and their answers to the two questions.

Draw from the group the key learning points.

Addressing the challenges faced by the facilitator when working with hard to reach groups

Aim: to develop awareness of what one needs to consider when working with hard to reach groups

Materials: flipchart paper and pens

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Give a presentation that covers the factors that facilitators should consider when planning to work with groups of young people. Following the presentation divide the participants into small groups and give each member a copy of this scenario or another that is relevant to the participants.

The school is keen to involve young people in local decision-making. They have a problem with graffiti and vandalism and have asked you to establish a group of 10 young people from the ages of 14–18, who have shown interest in improving the physical conditions in the school. Some of the young people have experienced participation at the highest level, where they contributed to decision-making. Others have experienced little to no participation. The group is diverse in terms of ethnicity, and gender and two participants are wheelchair users, moreover, the academic level is very varied and there are also some strong language barriers. The group will be working together for 6 months meeting weekly.

Provide each small group with a checklist of the variables that they should consider when working in a participatory way with young people. Include:

- Age
- Young people's level of understanding
- Size of group
- Methods and resources
- Past experiences
- Diversity, ethnicity, religion and culture

Ask members of the small groups to consider:

- How would the variables impact on the potential for the group to work together?
- What are some of the issues that as facilitators they would need to address and why?
- How could they begin to do this?

Once this task is completed, take feedback from each group and draw out key learning points.

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Working with children and young people in participatory projects

Module

4

As has been identified in Modules One and Three of the Guide children and young people benefit from being involved in all aspects of a participatory project, preferably from the beginning, reflecting their involvement in your services. Involving young people in all aspects of the work may build young people's skills and confidence, and provide valuable directions to evaluation, for example by identifying outcomes that are relevant to them and approaches that work well for other young people.

However, you will need to be realistic about the extent to which young people can be meaningfully involved in stages of the project. Make sure children and young people understand how their input will direct the evaluation or not. Involving children and young people will take considerable time and effort from all those that are involved in the participation work.

This section of the training Guide examines:

1. Group process and implications for practice

2 Beginnings

- Build a rapport
- Ice-breakers
- Establishing ground rules

3 Working with groups

- Methods

4 Endings and feedback

- The need to monitor and evaluate the process

Working with young people to promote participation: findings from the literature

Group processes:

When young people come together for a participatory activity, irrespective of whether it is a one-off event or a number of meetings over a period of time, they form a group. Members of the group will influence and be influenced by others in the group. This will affect the way they feel about the group and the way they behave. The more comfortable and supported young people feel within the group the more they are likely to actively participate. The challenge for the facilitator is that different young people will have different needs and the facilitator will have to balance meeting the needs of a particular individual with the overal needs of the group. Maslow (1968) has identified a hierarchy of needs and this is a useful way of considering the needs of individuals joining a group designed to promote participation. They include:

- Psychological needs: practical information about the group and the setting.
- Safety: knowing what is expected, ground rules.
- Belonging: opportunities to find out about other members and establish links.
- Self-esteem: feeling their contributions are valued.
- Self-actualisation: feeling that they have made a difference.

In order to promote effective participation it is important that the facilitator pays attention to group process. There is a general agreement in the literature that groups go through different stages of development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Bion, 1961; Benson, 2010). At each stage the task of the facilitator changes. Below we discuss the group processes and the task of the facilitator at each stage.

Forming

This is the first stage when individuals come together to 'form' a group. At this stage individuals may feel anxious about participating in the group and will look to the facilitator for reassurance and guidance.

The task of the facilitator at this stage is to create a safe environment for participation. This can be done by establishing ground rules and using ice-breaker exercises.

Storming

Once the group is formed members test out the boundaries. It may mean young people engage in behaviours that go against the ground rules. At this stage the facilitator has to make clear what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and may have to challenge any unacceptable behaviour in order to create a safe environment and to promote participation amongst the more withdrawn members.

Norming

The group begins to settle down and norms or patterns of behaviour become established. At this stage the role of the facilitator is to reinforce behaviours that promote participation and challenge behaviours that do not (e.g. ensuring that certain members do not always dominate group discussions by encouraging others to contribute).

Performing

This is when the group is most productive and working well together to achieve its goals. The facilitator can encourage risk-taking either through methods used to promote participation or by aspiring to higher levels of participation. This is the time when members are likely to feel sufficiently confident to provide feedback to, and challenge the facilitator.

Mourning

This is the final stage of the group process and describes the period when the group comes to an end. At this point members may begin to dissociate from the group and fail to participate as they had done earlier. The task of the facilitator at this stage is to ensure that members leave the group feeling positive about their contribution and the value of participation in the particular activity.

Forming: creating a safe environment

Children and young people need to experience a safe, welcoming, and encouraging involvement for active participation. The efforts of the facilitator to create a positive environment for the participation of children and young people influence the quality of their participation, as well as their ability to benefit from it. Meeting places that are child-friendly make children and young people feel relaxed and comfortable and provide them with the resources that they need while being accessible also to individuals with disabilities (Save the Children, 2003).

Lansdown (2005) notes that creating a safe environment should be a priority for facilitators. This is particularly important when working with vulnerable young people. More specifically, facilitators need to:

- ensure that children are not exposed to any kind of harm, abuse or exploitation either before or after the duration of the project;
- inform children and young people where they could go to seek help in case they experience violence or abuse;
- train staff to react in case children and young people disclose that they are victims of violence.

Children could be asked to identify the place where they would feel safe and comfortable meeting with the adult in order to share their thoughts and feelings with other members of the group (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). When working with vulnerable young people, it is important to ensure that the setting offers a sense of physical and emotional security (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003).

Build a rapport

Boyden and Ennew (1997) have made some useful suggestions designed to help adults who work with children get the best possible results:

- try not to have preconceptions about the research or participatory process;

- be open to what you see or hear even if it contradicts your attitudes and expectations;

- realise that we all make mistakes and that we should learn from them and not ignore them; recording those mistakes might be a good idea;

- do what the young people are doing in order to manage to fit in (for example if the children are sitting on the floor join them);

- become an active listener who respects and values the opinions, knowledge, experiences, feelings, analyses, and thoughts of every young person;

- accept what the others tell you even if you disagree and try not to impose your views on them;

- although it will be important to share the material that you gathered with fellow adults, keep in mind that you have promised anonymity and confidentiality;

- make sure that your voice, body language, and attitudes are not threatening the young people;

- allow time for the young people to give their answers and share their ideas (if you rush them, they may provide hasty and inaccurate answers);

- do not be tempted to provide solutions that you were not asked for and do not make promises that you cannot keep;

- allow room to the young people to express themselves.

- when working with vulnerable young people, it is very important to choose facilitators who are acceptable to the young people involved (Ministry of Youth Affairs Te Tai Taiohi, 2003).

McNeish (1999) identifies some of the factors that magnify barriers to participation for young people who are victims of violence: they are less likely to have the self-esteem and confidence to participate; if their views were not taken seriously in the past, they are less likely to want to participate in the present; if they were mistreated by adults in the past, they are more likely to distrust adults who attempt to engage them in participation; negative assumptions and stereotypes for these groups may be stronger than for other children and young people; young people may be put off participation if they had previous problems interacting and communicating in groups.

Ice-breakers

The use of ice-breakers is an important element to the involvement of children and young people because they break down barriers and establish a starting point to build relationships. *'Icebreakers are often used to encourage people to open up or feel comfortable, invite participation in a group activity, and stimulate inclusion. However, an ineffective ice-breaker can create discomfort or tension, straining rather than energising a group dynamic.'* (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2000). Research shows that the use of ice breakers needs to take into account the physical and emotional needs of the young people involved and should take into account cultural and religious barriers they may face as well. If ice-breakers are successful they often lead to *'respectful participation, children can improve their self esteem, their confidence and self worth'* (O'Neill, 2008, p. 4). When working with young people ice-breakers can be used to inform young people about the project and encourage them to take more responsibility to lead and shape the participatory process.

Facilitators can use ice-breakers to improve their relationship with children and young people. They are also a good way to self-reflect and monitor a young people's style and approach of engagement. Good advice is to *'Approach the selection of an ice-breaker as if you were choosing a training technique or strategy –*

keep in mind the important factors such as understanding the individual and group needs of your members, relating the activity to the content and format, and knowing the limitations of your location' (The Center for Non-profit Development and Pluralism and Corporation for National Service, 1999, p. 1). Many young people who participated in the workshops described past experiences of participation where the facilitators used the same ice-breakers which created boredom and led to disengagement from the children and young people. Therefore, facilitators need an arsenal of ice-breakers which are creative and can be tailored to meet the needs of a specific group. Sapp and Goh (2007) argue that there are lots of benefits to having a collection of proven ice-breakers for use with a group and they suggest that ice-breakers are motivators and should generate a relaxed learning environment which leads groups into the topic discussion and helps to clarify individual goals and objectives.

Establishing ground rules

Once young people are engaged in participatory processes, it is important from the onset to establish a clear set of ground rules. *'Involving adults, children and young people in establishing ground rules for consultation events is a key element of ensuring that participation is a positive and safe process for everyone involved.'* (Lithgoe, 2002, p. 21). This is taken further by Pitcher (2007, p. iii) who adds that when participants are involved in the establishment of ground rules the facilitator can remind them of the rules later on during the participation process, if they end up breaking the rules set out at the start. This allows the facilitator to take a degree of ownership over the group which could prevent disruptions and disagreements. When establishing ground rules it is important that the whole group (for example both adults and young people) negotiate a procedure for handling cases of repeated breaking of the code of conduct or the ground rules set. It is very important to *'Be clear around the ground rules and the consequences if not adhered to'* (Youth Council for Northern Ireland, National Youth Council of Ireland, Child Safe and Leargas, 2007, p. 9). If a procedure is negotiated, agreed upon and everyone signs the agreement it makes it much easier for the facilitator if in the code of conduct is not adhered to, given that everyone was involved from the start in agreeing on the ground rules.

It is clear from working with children and young people that they want to work with the facilitator to establish the ground rules. They also recognise the need to have clear parameters for communication both for the children/young people and the adults/ facilitator(s), in order to ensure that a strong sense of clarity is achieved. When establishing the ground rules it is important for the facilitator to recognise and acknowledge the different use of language and how it has implications on those engaged with. Ground rules establish a basic code of communication and expectations which form the *'first test of collaboration, allowing for information sharing and organising of the participation process'* (Tompson & Elmendorf, 2005, p. 176, cited in Gray, 1989 and Dale & Hahn, 1994).

Some basic elements which need to be considered are:

- Active Listening – make the effort to hear what young people have to say and provide them with different vehicles, media and opportunities to get their opinions across.
- Mutual Respect – be genuine in your approach and demonstrate young people's opinions have much importance and value as those of others.
- Jargon Free – make sure information and documentation is simple and clear.
- Honesty – be up front about expectations and limitations of the project.
- Create a Safe Environment – where young people feel comfortable and confident to share their ideas.

Examples of basic ground rules include (Mainey, 2008a):

- listen to each other, take turns and don't speak all together at once;
- respect the opinion of others, even if you disagree with them;
- do not use bad language and do not bully anyone;
- do not answer questions you don't want to;
- ask if you do not understand something;
- everything you say is confidential.

Forming: the views and experiences of young people

The young people in the *You Respond* workshops thought:

- Since first impressions seem to be instrumental in creating a trusting relationship that will allow children and young people to express themselves openly and honestly, the contract should be introduced in a friendly and relaxed manner.

- It is important to check out at the start of the activity that children and young people appreciate the purpose of the meeting and there are no misunderstandings about process and commitment.

- Since the notion of participation is quite complex and cultural differences, past experiences of participation, and family upbringing influence the level of understanding of children and young people, it is important that one does not presume an understanding of the term.

- Ground rules are helpful in creating a safe environment and therefore need to be in place.

- Young people should be involved when creating a code of conduct or establishing the ground rules as this increases ownership and a sense of belonging.

"I was provided a lot of information; how it started, when, why." (Girl, 16yrs)

- Young people were clear that at times some ground rules have to be in place irrespective of their wishes, for example when there are health and safety or safeguarding implications, however, they should still be informed about these rules and why they are in place.

- When children and young people are disabled physically or mentally or are highly vulnerable with complex needs, facilitators should establish ground rules in a way that enables these young people to participate.

- All the young people said a safe environment should encourage freedom of speech.

- The young people in the workshops acknowledged they were influenced by stereotypes although they did accept that it is unfair, since all people deserve to get a chance. Young people were less likely to trust people who wear suits or a uniform; it is easier for them to trust women than men, and people who smile; they pay attention to eye contact, non-verbal communication and body language.

- First impressions count. Young people indicated that if they have a good first impression of someone, then it is easier to trust him/her and see his/her actions in a more positive aspect. The opposite happens in cases where they form a negative first impression. Therefore, it is important to create a good impression that will help the facilitator build a trusting and productive rapport.

- Young people made judgments about others in the group based on their own personal experience about clothing, personality, and social dynamics.

- Ice-breakers are a useful way of getting people to talk, however, if children and young people have already worked with the facilitator on a previous occasion then they may be seen by young people as a waste of time.

- Ice-breakers help to start the group formation process where relationships can be established. It is seen as a starting point to introduce children and young people to an informal, friendly atmosphere where everyone is included.

- The facilitator must be careful when choosing which ice-breakers to use with the group, because they may have already been used as mentioned earlier, or they may not support the needs of the group.

- Ice-breakers can be seen as a critical opportunity by children and young people to accept the facilitator into the group.

Seven golden rules

Drawing on the experiences of the young people who participated in the *You Respond* project seven golden rules were identified:

- Remember the need to create a balance between the facilitator and the children and young people.

- Young people to lead when establishing rules of engagement.

- Provide appropriate training and support so the facilitator knows what they are doing.

- Don't exclude any young person because they have different needs to you.

- Make sure you have tailored your project to young people's needs. For example, the need for translators where there are language barriers.

- Use flexible ways of working such as using activities, games, music and listening to what young people need.

- Remember to keep young people informed on decisions and the outcomes of their involvement.

Setting the scene: key messages

Young people's understanding of key tasks and processes is essential for meaningful active participation.

- Following children and young people's participation in the workshops, it is clear there is a need for the facilitator to firstly assess the young people's needs and capacity.

- The contract that sets the basic rules assists the creation of a trusting relationship.

- Children and young people expressed the need for codes of conduct and the establishment of ground rules to be a shared responsibility.

- Ground rules set at the start of the process provide both young people and the facilitator with clear expectations.

- Effective engagement depends on the facilitator informing all members from the start, of the intended aims and expected outcomes from the process, so there is a high level of clarity thus reducing the risk for confusion later on.

- Creating an environment that helps children and young people feel safe enough to ensure active meaningful participation through freedom of speech is essential.

- A safe environment is even more essential for children and young people who have been victims of violence.

- Children and young people want their meeting places to have facilities and resources that will help them satisfy their needs rather than those of adults.

- Just as young people may hold stereotypes it is all too easy for facilitators to have pre-conceptions about young people, for example those that will be disruptive.

- The facilitator should not make promises that they cannot keep to young people, for example regarding the outcomes of the project.

- Facilitators should understand young people who are victims of violence may be more reluctant to engage due to previous experiences of being bullied etc. which may affect their confidence and self-esteem.

- Icebreakers should be a safe starting point to relationships development and group formation.

- When using ice-breakers consideration should be given to the physical and emotional needs of children and young people.
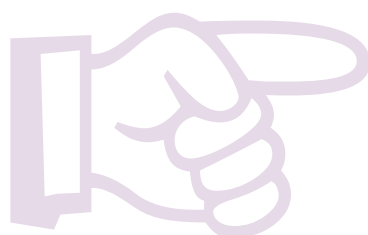
Setting the scene: exercises

Establishing a rapport (adapted from Crowley & Cunnigham, 2008)

Aim: to develop awareness of issues related to establishing a good rapport with children and young people in order to encourage them to engage in a participatory event

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions

Think of how you, your peers and the general public would describe a child or young person who is:

- Roma
- Immigrant
- Living with a mother who is in a lesbian relationship
- Victim of some form of violence or abuse
- Living in a child-care setting
- Practicing a different religion
- Physically disabled
- Mentally disabled
- Shy, withdrawn
- An adolescent parent
- A girl
- A boy

Consider:

- How did you feel about the language that you used?
- Did you use positive or negative stereotypes?
- How would this person feel if he could hear this language?
- Do you think that you should change your perceptions about these people – and if yes, what would it take?
- Would your perceptions shape your expectations of the young people you work with? Would the expectations of young people revolve around the corresponding information that they have about you?
- How can stereotypes influence the relationship between you and young people or the dynamics between young people?
- Having reflected on this, what are the implications for the way in which you select and inform young people regarding a particular participatory event?

Clarifying task and process: the facilitator's perspective

Aim: to develop awareness of facilitator issues related to clarifying tasks and processes related to child and youth participation, as well as their role

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions

Consider the following questions in relation to a project, workshop or activity that you have in mind that will involve the participation of young people.

- Why are you involved in this activity?
- What do you expect to achieve?
- What do you want to ensure and what do you want to avoid?
- What do you ask young people to do?
- How can you inform and engage them in a 'child-friendly' way?
- How can you enhance young people's understanding of the nature of the activities and the participatory process?

Creating a safe environment

Aim: to develop awareness of the importance of providing young people with a safe environment that will enhance their participation

Materials: paper, pencil and pens

Time: 25 minutes

Instructions

- Close your eyes and think about a place that made you feel safe as a young person.
- Where was this place located?
- What was the layout of the place?
- How was it decorated?
- What kind of facilities did it have?
- Who else could have access to this place?
- What made it so special?

Then open your eyes and using pens draw it as vividly as you can. What does this tell you about the type of environment a young person requires to engage in a participatory activity?

Getting started: the use of ice-breakers

Aim: to recognise that different types of ice-breakers are required in different situations

Materials: paper and pen

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions

You are facilitating a group for children who live in residential care who are going to move into new accommodation from different children's homes. These young people, between 10–13 years of age have a range of behavioural problems resulting from experiencing violence and can be both verbally and physically violent. You have been asked to bring these young people together to consider how they would like to furnish the common rooms in the new accommodation. The young people have met previously but this is the first occasion that the group has come together in this way:

- Keeping in mind the ladder of participation from earlier in the Guide, what level do you consider to be appropriate when working with this group?
- How could you use ice-breakers as a way to start some form of communication with individuals to form a group?

Provide a list of the benefits of ice-breakers you could use as a tool to begin the participatory process in this situation.

Bearing in mind the possible past experiences of these young people, are there certain ice-breakers that you do not think would be appropriate?

The use of ground rules

Aim: to recognise the advantages of establishing ground rules

Materials: paper and pen

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions

Imagine that you work for a community–based organisation that works with young offenders and are about to set up a group for young people that have been identified as engaging in acts of anti-social behaviour and acts of violence towards other young people. The six young people have been told that attending your group weekly for ten weeks is an alternative to a custodial sentence. You have identified, through some initial research you have conducted on the local environment, that the young people will only engage at the first levels of Hart's participation ladder. Use the above information:

- What would be some of the issues that you think you are likely to encounter when attempting to bring these young people together?
- With these issues in mind, what would you want to see in a code of conduct setting out clear expectations for both the young people and your colleagues who will assist you whilst working with these young people?
- What do you think would be the most appropriate way of setting up this code of conduct whilst attempting to take a participatory approach?

Any meaningful ground rules need to be accompanied by sanctions that are applied if the rules are not adhered to, with this in mind consider:

- What would you be wishing to say to the young people about sanctions?
- What sanctions would you have at your disposal?
- Do you need different sanctions for different types of breach of ground rules?

Creating a safe environment that promotes participation

Aim: to identify what young people feel they need in order to feel confident about participation

Time: 60–75 minutes

Materials: Cardboard boxes, catalogues for furniture and household appliances and accessories, old magazines, scissors, tape, marker pens, dolls house furniture, miniature figures, lego etc.

Instructions

Introduce the exercise by explaining that young people will only actively participate if they feel safe. This exercise is designed to get views as to what would make young people feel safe.

Divide participants into small groups and give them a box which is to be thought of as the 'house of participation' (again adapt language and image locally).

They should make a small door in the box (alternatively this could be done beforehand). Ask them what they think young people need in order to be able to go through the door to participate in a project.

They can write or draw or stick images on the box to describe the kind of things they would need. For example, to know about the project, who is going to be there, what they will need to do etc.

Once this is done ask them to go through the door and think about what they think young people need to feel safe:

Physically for example room layout, type of room

Emotionally for example who would be there

What would they also need if they are to feel valued? for example refreshments, people knowing their name and being welcoming?

Ask them to use the materials they have available to them to decorate their box to create a safe environment that reflects the above.

Then ask them if there are any additional things they would want to put into the box if the project is focusing on sensitive issues such as violence.

Give each group an opportunity to describe to the larger group what is in their box and why.

Variations

You may wish to give each small group a particular example of a participatory project and ask them to develop a 'house of participation' with this particular project in mind;

or

Give each group a particular age group, disability etc. to consider and then compare and contrast the different houses to bring out variations in needs.

Getting started: the use of ice-breakers

Aim: to recognise that different types of ice-breakers are required in different situations

Materials: a ball of string

Time: 75 minutes

Instructions

Ask all group members to stand in a circle with one member volunteering to tie the string around their waist. The facilitator can set the tone if there is reluctance to engage in this exercise. Ask them to tell the group their name and one interesting fact about themselves. Once they have done this ask them to throw the ball of string to another member in the group who will follow the same routine as the first person.

You should end up with a 'web' joining all members together.

Once this is completed, ask the participants to reflect on the value of doing such an exercise.

Try and draw out the perceived benefits:

- This exercise demonstrates the uniqueness of the group
- The need to work together
- With additional members the web would be different, thus demonstrating group dynamics can change.

Once they have done this, divide them up into pairs or if time is short hold a large group discussion designed to reflect on their own feelings about doing this exercise. For example, did they feel embarrassed etc?

Drawing on these feelings, what are the implications for using this exercise with groups of young people, taking into account: experiences of violence disabilities, gender and levels of confidence etc?

Invite the pairs/group to consider the implications in terms of the way different types of ice-breakers should be used, in what circumstances and with what groups of young people.

The value of ground rules

Aim: to recognise the advantages of establishing ground rules

Materials: flipchart paper and pens

Time: 40 minutes

Instructions

Introduce this exercise with a brief presentation about ground rules/rules of involvement.

Divide participants into small groups and give each group a sheet of flipchart paper and pens. Ask them to draw a puzzle format. In each piece of the 'puzzle' invite them to indicate a do or don't relating to using rules of involvement.

Ask one group to feedback and as they do this other groups mark off areas they agree with. Then ask the second group to highlight additional areas or 'dos and don'ts' they do not agree with. Continue until each small group has contributed.

Take general feedback about what this exercise has taught the participants about the use of rules of involvement.

Getting started

N.B. The first part of this exercise can also be used to get participants to think about what they need to do prior to a participatory activity.

Aim: to consider how to start a participatory activity

Materials: sufficient copies of the scenario below for all group members, the scenario below flipchart, paper and pens

Time: 60 minutes

Instructions

Introduce this exercise by emphasising how important the first half hour can be in setting the tone for a participatory activity. Divide the participants into small groups and give them the following scenario:

You are a support worker for an NGO, a local school has contacted you about three travelling families that has moved into the area. The school has told you that there are fifteen young children aged 7–11 now attending the school but as the families have moved from location to location the children are very disengaged with staff and fellow pupils. They have also been subject to significant abuse and harassment in these various locations.You have been asked to spend a day with the young people to try and establish from them what the school could do to try and engage them more in the life of the school.

You are thinking of using the Golden Rules (described eailer) and ice-breakers to get started. Consider:

- What would you need to do before the one day event?
- Can you think of an ice-breaker that would assist in engaging the young people and establish a degree of trust between you and them?
- This is a group who knows each other well: what are the implications in terms of using rules of involvement?

Ask each group to share their responses and their ice-breaker exercises. If you have sufficient time the group could actually try out each exercise.

Then take general feedback about the challenges of starting activities if vulnerable groups of young people are to be actively engaged in participatory events.

Performing: factors to consider

Engaging young people in participatory activities

Flexibility is important (Bell et al., 2002; Coombe, 2002), as well as the use of a variety of methods and approaches (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Lightfoot & Sloper, 2003). The selection of appropriate methods is also very important for the success of participatory projects (Save the Children, 2002). In comparison to individual methods, collective methods, such as group discussions and role play or drama, enable groups of children or young people to feel more comfortable because they can reduce the role and power of adults. Another advantage of using collective methods is that they provide information from interaction as they reveal how children react to one another. Ennew and Plateau (2004) argued that collective methods are not always appropriate to addressing sensitive or personal issues, since some children do not wish to talk in the presence of others or cultural influences determine the willingness of young people to speak in public. Finally, collective methods give an advantage to outspoken individuals, but they may disadvantage more quiet ones.

"Role plays and fun activities encouraged me the most because they are more energetic."
(Male, 16yrs)

Plateau et al. (2004) said that since it is not ethical to ask children directly about painful experiences, it is important to avoid using questionnaires or interviews and to employ indirect methods that give children the option to withhold information or to respond in ways that do not awake painful memories and cause more harm. Examples of such methods are drawings, role plays, and puppets that make children externalise experiences without reliving them.

"Freedom of expression was the main element of the meeting."
(Girl, 22yrs)

Children and young people may feel uncomfortable or afraid when meeting with the facilitator. It is important to acknowledge significant issues relating to health, disability or violent experiences of children and young people by acknowledging them openly but in a general way in order to avoid assumptions and lack of recognition of their needs (Cafcass, 2004). Listening to children and young people should be an ongoing conversation and not just an one-off consultancy where children and young people are asked their opinion about a specific topic (Clark & Moss, 2001).

The literature pays more attention to formal than informal mechanisms for engaging children and young people in decision-making (Testro & GForce Reference Group, 2006). Informal mechanisms include constant dialogue, observation, listening to spontaneous communication and participating in joint activities, while formal mechanisms include consultations, regular group meetings, and suggestion boxes (Kirby, 2003). The *Having a Say* report showed that young people are more interested in informal interactions, attitudes, and relationships, while adults focus mainly on the suitability of formal structures and processes (Spall et al., 1998). In general, children and young people develop better if engaging in more informal activities. Various studies have demonstrated that children and young people disengage from formal processes and thrive in informal settings with more positive outcomes, feeling more comfortable and with increased control over the participation process.

"I have been engaged in lots of levels of participation, but prefer the top because it encouraged me the most to use drama and art, which I prefer because I like to be expressive."
(Male, 17yrs)

It is not only essential to offer children the right to be heard but also to take their views and opinions seriously. When children are encouraged to express their views through visual means, adults should provide them with the opportunity to interpret their own work without trying to impose their meaning (Lancaster, 2003). Equal attention should be paid to attributing the right meaning to the words that children use (Sinclair et al., 2002). If young people are involved in research projects, for example, it is also appropriate to involve children and young people in the analysis of the data from the project by drawing up some key messages from the initial analysis of the researchers to take back to the participants to explore whether they agree with the findings of the researchers (Mainey, 2008b).

The selection of appropriate methods is very basic to the success of the project. *'Interestingly, Johnson et al, (1998) suggest that one of the biggest problems faced by facilitators is keeping the momentum going and not losing the child's attention.'* (Coad & Lewis, 2004, p. 32 cited in Johnson et al.,1998). When working with the young people it can sometimes be hard to keep them interested, for example they become bored and disinterested because the same method is being used each time. Sometimes young people disengage because the language is complex and not child friendly. Laws and Manns (2004, p. 48) agree with this and suggest that *'The main thing you need is not a specific technique, but a child friendly approach'*. This is why it is important for the facilitator to fully understand the needs of the group at the start of the process, because some children and young people will be high achievers, able to understand complex issues and topics, while others such as younger children or disadvantaged groups of young people, may not and therefore fail to understand.

"Using fun methods is a good way to keep everyone interested." (Girl, 16yrs).

Methods for practitioners to use in participatory group activities

N.B. Guide can be adapted for use in participatory activities

Facilitators should be very versatile in their selection of activities and tailor the activity to the needs of the group, taking account of group process. For example, it is inappropriate to use a challenging method at the start of a group. Some children as described above, relate better to approaches that are more creative whereas others focus more when given written methods. *'Different activities should be used to suit different ages, interests and abilities. The key is to provide space for those involved to think ideas through and to ensure everyone has fun. Some may find it easier to show what they like by using arts or crafts whereas others may prefer to write or talk about their ideas'* (Boyson, 2009, p. 3).

Listed below are some suggested methods designed to promote participation. The advantages and disadvantages, drawing on young people's views and experiences are included.

Written methods

This approach is good for use with groups of school-aged children who are literate and can express themselves. Examples of written methods are life histories, written checklists and rankings, sentence completion and self-completed questionnaires.

Advantages

- Can be seen as an ideal opportunity to reflect upon past experiences and therefore allow the child or young person to feel more relaxed, especially if they know that the written notes will not be seen by anyone else, thus an exercise used almost like a personal diary account.
- If the child or young person is shy then this can be seen as a good method to engage with them.

Disadvantages

- This method will not be suited to everyone, maybe because they cannot read and write and therefore will feel very vulnerable and left out.
- child or person may not feel comfortable with writing something down so that others can read it.

Life histories

This requires members and the group to share experiences drawing on their past histories. This can be done using timelines, strip-cartoons or narratives.

Advantages

- Young people can relate to each other's experiences.
- Help the facilitator generate a stronger understanding about the group.
- Also helps to understand the behaviour of the young people in the group.

Disadvantages

- Work better in smaller groups or even one to one, so not good for larger groups.
- Facilitator needs to be highly trained and skilled because of possible disclosures.
- If the group has not finished building relationships it can cause increased vulnerability and disengagement.

Young people stated in order for life histories to be a success the facilitator has to create a safe environment where there is a strong sense of trust. If the environment is informal, it would allow young people to relax and feel safe and secure.

Sentence completion

The facilitator begins a sentence, for example 'A good facilitator always ….'

Advantages

- Easy and simple to understand.
- Less time consuming.
- Good to use for larger groups.

Disadvantages

- Does not provide much choice in some situations.
- If not completed openly then young people may be directed to an answer.
- Young people may not be clear how this method will lead to their views being heard.

Written checklists/ranking

The facilitator provides a list, for example a list of features associated with effective facilitation, and invites the young people to comment on their value or rank them in order of importance.

Advantages

- Clear and easy to understand.
- Can be more helpful when working with young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- The ranking order for statements will be unique to each person.
- Will lead to further discussions if completed successfully.

Disadvantages

- Depends on what you are ranking, may be difficult with sensitive topics.

Questionnaires

Here, the facilitator provides each participant or group of participants with a list of questions. These can be open or closed or use a Likert scale.

Open-ended questions can produce longer, more detailed and more accurate responses from school-aged children and adolescents than other types of interview questions (Cronch et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2000; Lamb & Fauchier, 2001; Lamb & Garretson, 2003). Cued invitations (such as "you said that… tell me more about that") are more instrumental in producing more words and more details than asking closed questions (Sternberg et al., 1996).

"Formal methods are okay sometimes, but using them too much in participation can be boring and less beneficial."
(Girl, 16yrs)

Advantages

- Usually easy to understand.
- An opportunity to ask more young people for their views.
- May help lead to a wider understanding for the facilitator.

Disadvantages

- Are not useful for sensitive topics.
- Do not allow the facilitator to generate detailed responses.
- Less variety and therefore can seem boring for young people.
- May not get many responses.

It is evident from all of the advantages and disadvantages which have been identified by young people who have worked on the *You Respond* project, that written methods are usually perceived as boring, but can sometimes be a good opportunity for participation when working with larger groups of young people. Written methods are a good method for facilitators who are starting to work with a group; they tend to promote participation at the lower levels, where a group is just starting to get to know one another. The young people acknowledge that written methods that use images, pictures etc., are good to use with vulnerable young people and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Recall/stories

This is an attempt to gather information about past events or experiences. Stories may be factual or fictitious, however, they still provide the facilitator with a great opportunity to explore individual experiences. *'In small groups each participant has a chance to share a story…it is known that storytelling often bonds the group emotionally'* (Gosling & Cohen, 2007, p. 24). Story-telling works better when there are small groups of 3-5, because it provides everyone with an opportunity to get to know one another better and build stronger relationships. Listed below are the advantages and disadvantages of using recall and storytelling, as seen by the young people who were involved in the workshops:

Advantages

- This method would be more useful for smaller groups rather than larger groups of seven people or more because it would limit the time and depth of each story or recall and would allow individuals to become bored.
- It is seen as a good way to engage people and can be quite relaxing because it is an opportunity to share with others.
- It is a powerful method for encouraging individuals to engage at the start and end of the process provided the group feels safe and allows case studies to be produced about the fears, anxieties and then the achievements and benefits.
- It is an expressive method which helps to build self confidence because it is equipping children and young people with the opportunity to actively listen to one another along with feeling confident talking in front of others.

Disadvantages

- There needs to be a focus for the recall or the stories otherwise it could lead to no progress.
- It could destroy the relationship in a group if someone tells a story which hurts another due to past experiences. This means that there is a dependency on the facilitator to make sure sensitive issues and confidentiality are dealt with appropriately.
- There could be cultural and language barriers in the group which could prevent true participation and means some members of the group feel left out.
- There has to be a sense of trust already between the group members in order to share.
- It may not always be appropriate for young people who have been victims of violence.

Single images, or a set of images, drawings or photographs

Used to stimulate discussion with groups or individuals. This method can be particularly useful with participants who have difficulty in expressing their views or with the exploration of sensitive topics. Pictures can also be used in ranking exercises.

Single images, or a set of images, drawings or photographs are often used as a tool to stimulate discussion with groups or individuals. This method can be particularly useful with young people who have difficulty in expressing their views when exploring sensitive topics. Since pictures can also be used in ranking exercises, young people could, for example, be provided with pictures of potential adults and asked to rank them in order of preference. Adults should ensure that young people see from the drawings what the young people would like them to see, since no visual image should be taken for granted. Using the recall adults could, for example, encourage children and young people to remember the characteristics of adults who did (or did not) engage them in a meaningful participatory process and include the recalled characteristics in a chart. Groups of children who have shared the same experience with the same adult could possibly give a more detailed description of this adult through collective memory sharing (Ennew et al., 2004).

"We have created mind maps, questionnaires and video recordings to evaluate projects we have been involved in." (Male, 17yrs)

Advantages

- There is no right or wrong answer; it allows the individual to express themselves in their own way which suits their needs.
- It is seen as a much more personal method which helps to build confidence and self belief.
- It is also seen that there can be less effort made by children and young people to achieve something good.
- It is a good method for acquiring the opinions of children and young people in a timely manner.

Disadvantages

- May encourage less group participation and more individual working; therefore it may take longer to build strong group dynamics with trust.
- It may cause individuals distress if faced with a picture or photograph linked to any negative past experiences.

Discussions

Ideal for identifying the knowledge, ideas, values, beliefs, and attitudes of a group. It should be agreed from the beginning how long the discussion will last (not less than one and not more than two hours) and a list with the proposed ideas, topics or questions should be distributed to all the participants. A facilitator and a note taker are also essential.

Focus group discussions are defined as facilitated discussions on a given topic, which are ideal for identifying the knowledge, ideas, values, beliefs, and attitudes of a group. Focus groups can be used because they reduce the power of the adults and empower children by providing them with greater control over the whole process. The shortcoming of focus groups is that they do not ensure confidentiality and anonymity and this might inhibit some children from active participation. The members of focus groups should share similar characteristics and groups should take place in a quiet location without interruptions or spectators, ideally where young people can sit comfortably in a circle. It should be agreed from the beginning how long the discussion will last (not less than one and not more than two hours) and a list with the proposed ideas, topics or questions should be distributed to all the young people (Ennew et al., 2004).

Advantages

- If there is a clear structure in place then it would encourage all group members to engage openly and honestly, but this is very dependent upon the structure and the skills of the facilitator.
- It can be seen as an opportunity for children and young people to broaden their own knowledge and understanding of a topic because it may be the first opportunity to see the topic from a different point of view and therefore broaden one's horizons.

Disadvantages

- Some members could take-over the discussion.
- If some members feel strongly about the subject then it could lead to arguments and even violence relating to differing view points.
- If there has not been a clear purpose set, then the discussion could waste time and lead nowhere.
- This is another method which works better with a medium sized group of between 5–10 members because if the group is too small then there may not be enough discussion and if the group is too large then the activity may get lost because of too many differing points of view leading to a breakdown of the structure.
- Strong members of the group may make others feel like their opinions are wrong and therefore cause the young person to feel vulnerable.

Small group discussions

Advantages

- It is more intimate and therefore allows stronger relationships to be formed.
- Everyone involved in the group is more likely to understand why they are there and how their views will impact.
- Will feel like a safer, more comfortable environment when relationships have been formed due to the small number of young people involved.
- Young people will feel more able to contribute to the group.

Disadvantages

- Less variety in relation to views, therefore a need for a diverse group.
- Not always a true representation of the wider range of views of young people.
- Can sometimes be too intimate and therefore cause individuals to start to disengage.

Forums/larger group discussions

Advantages

- Allow for more variety in relation to the group and therefore the views of young people.
- An opportunity to learn from others and therefore broaden horizons.
- An opportunity to learn about other cultures, beliefs and experiences.

Disadvantages

- Can sometimes be intimidating for young people.
- Some young people may feel left out of the group.
- It is very difficult to cater for everyone's individual needs.

Campaigns

This method of participation is usually used if young people want to make a stand on a particular issue, such as the closing of a youth club. It means finding methods to engage with the wider community and others affected by the issue. The purpose of a campaign is to influence the views of the decision-makers.

Advantages

- An opportunity for lots of people with similar views to share their opinions with others.
- They make more people aware of the issue being raised.

Disadvantages

- Can get out of control if not managed well.
- Can encourage violence rather than prevent it.

Presentations

Young people make their views known to a particular group, such as policy-makers by presenting their opinions using PowerPoint, addresses etc.

Advantages

- Relate to a variety of learners.
- Are good for visual impact.
- Easy to understand.
- If animation is used it can be engaging for young people.
- It can help young people to understand the issues.

Disadvantages

- Difficult preparing presentations at right length pitched at right level.
- Will depend on the skills of the facilitator.
- Does not provide young people with strong opportunities to contribute to decision-making.
- Can be nerve-racking making presentations.
- Requires skill, confidence and lots of practice runs.

Creative methods

Creative methods such as logbooks, photo or video diaries allow people to look at their situations in a new way, and so generate new information (Mainey, 2008). Drawings and other visual methods are an ideal way for breaking the ice and getting motivated for later discussion, giving voice to shy children or approaching a difficult or sensitive topic. Hill et al. (1996) suggest that *'young children and pre-adolescents may find drawing an opportunity to express fears, feelings, and sensitive issues'* (Coad & Lewis, 2004). Drawings were used as one of the activities in the *You Respond* workshops and young people found them to be relaxing almost like a therapy; however, when it came to sharing their findings with the larger group they pointed out that it can sometimes be difficult for other people to understand the intended message because everyone has a different perception and interpretation of a drawing which could lead to an element of confusion. The young people have suggested that the benefits of using creative methods to encourage participation are:

Advantages

- It is an opportunity to express yourself in an abstract way, which leads to an element of fiction rather than reality, thus providing some children and young people with an opportunity to escape from elements of their lives and provides a degree of anonymity.
- It is a good way to build relationships between the group members, where young people can support one another and build confidence and trust with each other.
- It is a good way for sharing emotions and feelings.

Disadvantages

- Some young people may find the use of creative methods patronising stressful or unsafe and choose therefore to disengage.
- There is a strong case for disengagement where children and young people prefer not to use creative methods because it may not appeal to them that they feel they will do it wrong because of low self-esteem or that it leaves them feeling vulnerable.
- Using creative methods is open to wide levels of interpretation and therefore could be difficult to analyse the actual outcomes from the process.

Drama and role play

This is good to use in order to explore sensitive topics; it is important to ensure that there is a good relationship between the participants and the facilitator. Save the Children (2000) suggest that children may find it easier to communicate through drama and oral techniques such as role play, storytelling, drama, puppets and music rather than answering direct questions (verbally or in writing). Young people in the *You Respond* workshops stated that they were shy; however, because they had to present their findings dramatically they all actively engaged and shared ideas and said that they had fun, because it made them work together developing characters. Therefore, drama can be used to breakdown barriers to participation especially in relation to young people who do not engage as much because they are shy. On the other hand, some children and young people may feel threatened because they have got to present, which could lead to the fear of making mistakes, forgetting lines or being embarrassed in front of their peers. Listed below are the advantages and disadvantages produced by the young people in the *You Respond* workshops:

Advantages

- It is a creative method which allows young people at differing levels of the participation ladder to work together and support one another.

- The use of drama and role play can be seen as interpersonal, because it allows group members to bounce ideas off one another and work together, where as something like drawings can be seen as intrapersonal especially when drawing on your own because it is a way of expressing something within.

- Drama and role play may be the only way a child or young person feels comfortable expressing something. This can be the same for any of the other methods, which is why it is essential to use a number of methods.

- Drama and role play tend to add humour throughout the process because you use drama games to support the progress. This is where members can laugh and encourage one another because there is a strong bond in place.

- It is a good visual method to demonstrate emotions and feelings.

Disadvantages

- Once again there needs to be a focus and most of the time a script in place to show the finished piece.

- Some individuals may be inclined to take over because they are good at drama therefore meaning others are left out and stay at lower levels of participation and sometimes even disengage totally.

It is clear from the views of young people that creative methods including drama/role play add enjoyable elements and variety to group participation. However, these methods tend to work better when working with young people who are experiencing the higher levels of participation, the reason being that there has to be a sense of self-esteem and confidence for the young people to become involved. It will be highly unlikely young people who have experienced some form of violence will have high self-esteem and confidence levels, and therefore will require more simplistic methods to allow them to start to understand participation.

Producing a DVD

Following discussions with young people who engaged in the workshops it was clear that the above methods could be used to produce a DVD which provides a strong visual representation of the process, outputs and outcomes of a project. This can be a very powerful resource to share with other professionals and agencies about the impact of the project and a good way for the group members to revisit their achievements.

The young people identified a number of stages of development for the production of a DVD.

1) The facilitator needs to establish the group of young people who will work on the project. This would be the same as establishing a group at the start of a participation process. Opportunities should be provided to work behind the scenes for those who are not sufficiently confident to be filmed.

2) The group should then identify a focus point or consider the key message they wish to convey on the DVD.

3) There should then be time allocated to researching the topic and gathering the information and deciding upon the methods to use, bearing in mind the funds available for DVD production.

4) At this point it would be good for every member of the group to have a clear role such as preparing scripts; identifying a film crew so that progress can be made against but also in the production not only in terms of participating in the DVD. This is an important stage of the process because it is an opportunity for young people to take on responsibility and ownership of the DVD with the support of the facilitator.

5) Following this the next stage would be to film or produce any component parts which will make up the DVD. It is important that those being filmed know what they need to do and have had plenty of opportunity to practice before filming. The person who is filming should be familiar with the aim of the DVD and methods used, such as talking heads!

6) Once the DVD has been produced it is a good idea to get it checked by all the members and other professionals, young people and organisations. Following this, any amendments can be made and then the DVD fully produced. The young people should be involved in any decision re cut etc.

7) The DVD would then need to be publicised and advertised to its intended audience.

8) One of the final stages would be to circulate the DVD and then to finally set a date for an evaluation of the resource DVD which would help further work in the future.

Advantages

- It gives children and young people a strong sense of pride and achievement once the DVD has been finished. It also provides them with something visible to take away from the process which can be used to help in future programmes or with their careers.

- The process of producing a DVD helps to equip children and young people with a wide array of additional skills such as filming, directing and planning.

- The production of a DVD requires different skills and therefore encourages the group to build strong relationships and team work and therefore allows every member to actively engage.

Disadvantages

- It is expensive to produce a DVD.

- It is time consuming.

- It could lead to more powerful individuals taking more of a lead on the process if the facilitator does not manage the process.

Social networking websites and vitual groups

The young people who have participated in the *You Respond* project spoke highly of new methods of engagement when working with young people, such as the use of Facebook and Twitter. The use of these methods can promote positive participation in an informal way and there would not be a need to conduct regular meetings, if young people and facilitators are communicating via, for example web pages and blogs. As with all of the other methods below are the advantages and disadvantages as stated by the young people:

Advantages

- Can be used with lots of young people and therefore attract and engage a wider audience.

- It is a very accessible method to engage with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

- It is a good method to share information easily, without the need to meet.

- Less intimate and therefore may appeal to those with low self-esteem.

- It is also easy to keep in contact with the new social groups when the project has finished.

- Young people's views can be gained quickly and easily.

Disadvantages

- May not always be a safe environment, therefore the facilitator must adapt the safeguarding setting to meet the needs of the group.

- It is open to cyber-bullying, which could cause a risk to young people.

- Internet pages can be hacked into easily.

Methods: the views and experiences of young people

The young people in the *You Respond* workshops indicated the following:

- Young people need opportunities to get to know each other and the facilitator and feel safe and comfortable: this should be taken into account when identifying methods that can be used at the start of the participatory process.

- It is clear from the workshops with young people that, a preferred method is difficult to identify because everyone has different needs; there should be a range of methods used throughout the participation process to cater for these different needs and encourage stimulation and growth.

- One method alone is not enough. Variety is important to make sure that there is something for everyone.

- Methods should take account of the topic, context, environment and the facilitator and be fit for purpose taking these into account.

- There should be as much flexibility as possibile enabling children and young people to decide what methods and measures should be used throughout the process.

- Using informal methods such as music, arts and drama brings together the group so that everyone can get involved and interact with new people.

- Formal methods can be boring because they can take too long, meaning children and young people start to disengage.

- Young people use different methods of communication such as social networking sites and these should be taken into account when deciding on appropriate methods.

Methods: key messages
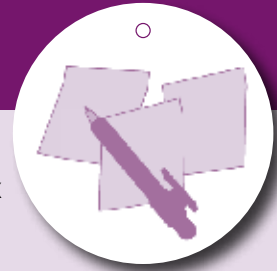
- Young people prefer informal methods of engagement such as art, drama and music, because it is seen as an opportunity to relax whilst meeting new people and achieving the project outcome. However, it is important that using these methods does not put young people on the spot so that they feel awkward or embarrassed.

- Using open-ended questions encourages a more detailed response from children and young people.

- Informal methods of engagement enable children and young people to feel comfortable, because the focus is on them; meaning the role and power of the facilitator is reduced. This provides children and young people with a stronger sense of responsibility and leadership throughout the process, which in turn should lead to positive outcomes such as improved self-esteem and confidence.

- Higher levels of participation strongly encourage positive participation where there is shared decision-making between adults and young people.

- A key question relates to power dynamics, at each level of participation there is a need to establish who initiates/controls each of the decisions which are made. When reaching higher levels of participation the power base usually is shared between both the facilitator and the young people; the lower levels the power base is with the facilitator.

- It is clear from research, along with the views of young people, creative methods such as life histories, drama, role play and art tend to work better at the higher levels of participation, where young people are strongly engaged in the decision-making process. The use of creative methods provides young people with a strong opportunity to provide more detail. More formal methods tend to be used for young people's participation at the lower levels, because they tend to focus much more on seeking and obtaining young people's views.

Methods: exercises

Matching needs and methods

Aim: to begin to identify how an assessment of group need should inform the selection of methods

Materials: pen and paper

Time: 45 minutes

Instructions

You teach young people with complex learning needs from the age of 11–14 in a classroom of 10. Over the last week a pupil from the group has been showing a change of behaviour from being very vocal to now not engaging in class discussion at all; you have also noticed this young person is being bullied by other pupils in the class. You have shared your concerns at a recent teachers' meeting, where the head teacher has tasked you to look at this issue at an individual level with the young person and at a class level to prevent further issues occurring.

Consider:

- Would you use different methods for working with the young person on their own as opposed to the group and if so why?
- What factors would you take into account when identifying appropriate methods?

Devise a programme indicating what you would want to achieve and the methods you would use for:

a) working with the young person

b) working with the class

Exploring methods that promote participation

Aim: to begin to identify different methods that are designed to promote participation and ways in which they can be used

Materials: pens and flipchart paper, magazines, coloured paper, small boxes, glue, scissors etc.

Time: 90 minutes

Instructions

Part One

Begin the session with a brief overview of the different methods one can use to promote participation.

Divide the large group into smaller groups and give each group a sheet of flipchart paper headed with a pre-selected method.

Ask each group to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the particular method, paying particular attention to the following questions:

- Is this method suitable for all ages, abilities and disabilities?
- Could this method be used with a group of vulnerable young people who have never met before?
- What is required of the facilitator to make this an effective method that promotes participation?

Take feedback from each group and pin the sheets up so that all members of the group can read the responses.

Part Two

Back in small groups give each group a scenario, for example:

There have been a number of fights between gangs in your local park at night and the town officials have asked you to bring together a group of 12–15 year olds who have never met before to consider how their local park could be made safer at night. The group have developed some rules of engagement and completed an ice-breaker where they learnt a little about each other. You now want to do an activity that will provide you with information about their concerns about safety issues in the park but you want it to be innovative and engaging.

This group of 14–16 year olds have been living in the same residential unit for some time and know each other well. There are a couple of dominant characters and one who says very little but complains to staff that they never have a say in anything. The young people are being asked how they would wish to spend a donation of £/€500. Think of a method that you could use that would ensure that the views of all the young people are taken into account.

You are working with a group of 8–10 year olds in a weekly after school club for children who are young carers. The children have got to know each other through play etc. but you now want them to learn that they are not alone and they are all young carers primarily for parents who have alcohol and mental health problems. You are therefore trying to identify an appropriate method that you can use at the next two hour session that will achieve this.

Draw the groups' attention to the different materials you have made available and ask them to devise an activity that would be suitable for their particular scenario.

Once they have done this ask them to present their scenario, describe their activity using the following headings:

Aim	Time	Materials	Instructions

and then provide a demonstration of their activity.

The facilitator can collate all the activities and then circulate the activities using the format above.

Taking account of storming: adapting methods to meet group needs

Aim: to begin to identify methods that can be used if issues arise within the group.

Materials: pens and flipchart paper

Time: 90 minutes

Instructions

Begin this session with a brief presentation of the different stages of group development and explain that it is the responsibility of the facilitator to address issues that indicate members of the group are 'storming'. Then divide the participants into small groups and give them one of the following scenarios (you may wish to vary this depending on the participants and their jobs):

You have asked the members of the group to engage in an activity, all but two boys are happy doing this until the boys start saying they are 'bored' and will go if you do not do something more interesting. The others begin to join in and say they too are bored.

You made it clear at the start of the group that you would not tolerate racist comments and find that during a small group activity that involves writing the sheet from one group is covered with racist comments.

An animated discussion is held on promoting participation and the group discuss ways in which to apply this to their particular unit. The discussion turns from being animated and useful to becoming aggressive and you are concerned it may end up in a physical fight between members of the group.

Ask the members of the small groups to consider how they would manage each of these situations and encourage them to try and use innovative methods to address the issue.

Ask each group to present their issue and the way in which they decided to address it.

After each group has presented ask for general feedback on the lessons learnt.

N.B. This exercise can be adapted to provide an opportunity for members to consider the appropriate leadership style required to address the issue.

Exploring methods that take account of group processes

Aim: to begin to identify appropriate methods for different stages of the group processes

Materials: pens and flipchart paper

Time: 90 minutes

Instructions

Begin this session with a brief presentation of the different stages of group development and explain that different methods need to take into account the different stages of group development. For example, a challenging method that requires young people to disclose significant personal information would not promote participation if used whilst the group was still forming. Then divide the participants into small groups and give them the following scenario (you may wish to vary this depending on the participants and their jobs).

You are bringing together a group of young girls aged between 13–15 years of age from different classes in the same school to develop a campaign within in the school designed to raise their awareness to relationships where boys can be abusive. The girls are coming together for two days.

Ask the members of the small groups to design the programme for the day to include activities that take account of forming, storming, norming, performing and mourning. Inform them that they will have to present their programmes, describe their activities and explain how they take account of the group stages of development.

After each group has presented their programme ask for general feedback on the lessons learnt.

Exploring methods that take account of level of participation

Aim: to begin to identify appropriate methods for different forms of participation

Materials: pens and flipchart paper

Time: 90 minutes

Instructions

Begin this session with a brief presentation of the different types of participation and provide an overview of the different methods that can be used to assist engagement of young people in the participatory process. Then divide the participants into small groups and ask one group to think of a scenario that involves consulting with young people, a second group to think of a scenario that involves young people in decision-making and the third group to consider sharing power and responsibility with young people. Once they have thought of the scenario ask them to consider which would be the most appropriate methods to use with their particular scenario in mind and how they would adapt the method to fit the needs of their particular scenario. For example, consulting young people on leisure facilities in the community could be done through a questionnaire online.

Invite each group to present their scenario and selected methods and ask for general feedback on the lessons learnt.

The facilitator may wish to collate all the methods discussed and reproduce as a hand-out for the participants.

Endings and feedback

Endings and feedback: findings from literature

Adults must make sure that children and young people are guaranteed ownership and sustainability of all processes involving children (Feinstein et al., 2004). Young people should be given the chance to check the accuracy of the adults' version of any output and to be consulted on the validity of their interpretation (Laws et al., 2002; Plateau, Beazley, Bessell, Ennew & Waterson, 2006). Adults who want to facilitate effectively should paraphrase the young person's statements to make sure that what s/he has said has been accurately understood; summarised accurately the discussions so that main points are highlighted; and feedback is prohibited to the young people about the outcome of the meeting (Gosling & Cohen, 2007).

It is essential not only to give children the right to be heard but also to take their views and opinions seriously. It is also important to make sure that when children are encouraged to express their views through visual means, adults provide them with the opportunity to interpret their own work without trying to impose their meaning (Lancaster, 2003). Equal attention should be paid to attributing the right meaning to the words that children use (Sinclair et al., 2002). It is also appropriate to involve children and young people in the analysis of the data from the project by drawing up some key messages from the initial analysis by the adults to take back to the young people as a group to explore whether they agree with the findings of the adults (Mainey, 2008).

> " (Providing feedback) enables me to correct something wrong that I might have said and it gives you also the chance to ask me if there was something that you did not understand."
> (Boy, 21yrs)

> "(Providing feedback) gives me the opportunity after all this time to rethink about the meeting and with clear head to be able to think more objectively what happened during the meeting and to what extent my answers were correct and realistic."
> (Girl, 22yrs)

> "I can help more children and I feel important knowing that you value my opinion."
> (Boy, 19yrs)

> "You make children feel worthy and able to express themselves without any fear whatsoever."
> (Girl, 12yrs)

The need to monitor and evaluate the process

An important part of the participatory process is the need to ensure a strong degree of monitoring and evaluation. *'Although the outcomes of consultation are important, many also stress the importance of the process'* (Hill et al., 2004, p. 83). It is essential at the beginning of the process for the facilitator to establish with the group a process for monitoring the success of the programme. This will include identifying if goals and objectives have been completed in line with the overall aim. *'In supporting the development of children's organisations regular monitoring has been recognised as crucial to its sustainable development…An initial assessment or baseline is required at the start, in order to identify impact later as well as to identify how children and young people's participation changes over time'* (O' Kane, 2003, p. 44).

Earlier in the Guide mention is made of the need for the facilitator to produce a preparatory plan which includes the needs of the group, the aims, goals and objectives, and the resources which will be needed. It is also a good idea to put into the plan how one is going to monitor these. This will either be documented as outputs which are qualitive measures such as percentage increase or the use of statistical information, or it could be the identification of possible qualitative outcomes, which are the softer measures such as the increase in children and young people's self-esteem and confidence or the acquisition of communication and leadership skills. A good way to record outcomes is the use of a case study which tells a story much like a reflective diary, discussing distance travelled and impact achieved. *'Evaluating the work of your project is one of the most important ways you can ensure the future of your project. Funders and other key stakeholders will always want to see evidence of the success of the project's work'* (Save the Children, 2005, p. 9).

It is not only important to identify the impact on children and young people, but also equally as important to focus on the impact on the organisation. Cavet and Sloper (2004, p. 618) state the *'most glaring gaps in the evidence is the lack of evaluation of work undertaken, especially as regards any impact on service development from the involvement of young people'*. There is no point in undertaking activities with young people if there is no impact for either the children and young people or the organisation. The best programmes are those which achieve outcomes and outputs for both the children and young people along with the organisations and the wider community.

Another crucial area, when engaging children and young people, is the need to inform all participants about the results and impact of the process. *'Follow up as part of the larger process of engaging children and young people. So much effort and resources go into organising and planning consultations with children that, sometimes, very little thought is given to the concrete and systematic follow up of processes'* (Save the Children, 2003, p. 75). When working with young people in the You Respond workshops they identified the need to be informed about changes as a result of their involvement. If no feedback is given it could lead to children and young people feeling disappointed and thus possibly not engaging in future programmes.

Endings and feedback: views and experiences of young people

Findings from the *You Respond* workshops with vulnerable young people indicated:

- Young people need to know exactly what to except from a project in terms of length of time, the way in which projects will end and the feedback they can expect.

- Feedback on every stage of the process made them feel that their opinion did matter.

- When not certain what points young people are trying to convey it is preferable to ask clarifying questions, check out and obtain instant feedback.

- When providing feedback to others outside the project it is important to report exactly what young people said rather than an interpretation of their words.

- Young people may feel sad or angry about projects ending. This may become evident through a drop-off in attendance, anger towards the facilitator and reduced cohesion amongst group members.

- It is really important that facilitators keep any promises they made to the group about post project activities. If planned activities do not take place as anticipated young people should be kept informed.

Endings and feedback: key messages
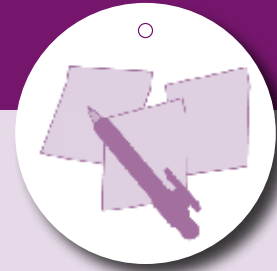
When children and young people are informed that they will have the opportunity to provide feedback, they feel that their involvement is active and meaningful.

Young people who have experienced violence may well have also experienced abrupt endings to relationships and decisions made without consultation etc. It is therefore particularly important with this group of young people that careful attention is given to preparing young people for the end of the project and ensuring that any promises regarding feedback etc. are kept.

When evaluating the effectiveness of a participatory project it is useful not only to consider the quality of the end product, such as in our case this Guide, it is also useful to identify the benefits to young people. This can be done through reflection by the young people themselves on the impact of participation through case studied examples of changes in attitude and behaviour.

Young people may feel sad and angry that the group is coming to an end. This is most likely to occur if the group was a positive experience for them. These feelings may be expressed by a reduction in attendance, hostility towards the facilitator and a reduction in group cohesion. Careful preparation and acknowledgement of these feelings can help young people.

Endings and feedback: exercises

The importance of feedback

Aim: to develop awareness of the importance of providing young people with feedback about the outcome of their participation

Materials: paper and pencil

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions

Think about personal experiences of participation in any kind of activity. Consider:

- Did the people who organised it ever come back to you with the results?
- Did they ask whether what they understood was what you actually said or did?
- How did that make you feel?
- What could you have contributed at this point to the process?
- Did lack of feedback make you think that you were wasting your time and that your opinion was not appreciated?

What could you do to avoid young people feeling negatively about their engagement in a participatory activity?

In their shoes, the importance of feedback

Aim: to develop awareness of the importance of providing young people with feedback about the outcome of their participatory activity.

Materials: flipchart paper and pens

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions

After a brief presentation on providing feedback divide the participants into six small groups.

Give the following written instructions to three different groups so that each group has a different set of instructions but do not indicate to the other groups what these instructions are:

You are working with a group of young people aged 13–15 years of age to identify with them effective ways for managing bullying in schools. The funding for this project has suddenly ceased so you send them each a letter cancelling the next meeting of the group, give them no further information and telling the young people you will get in touch re further meetings but you never do.

You are working with a group of young people aged 13–15 years of age to identify with them effective ways for managing bullying in schools. The funding for this project has suddenly ceased so you hold a meeting with the group to explain the situation and thank them for their involvement but explain nothing will be done with the work they have completed to date.

You are working with a group of young people aged 13–15 years of age to identify with them effective ways for managing bullying in schools. The funding for this project has suddenly ceased so you hold a meeting with the group to explain the situation and then explore with the young people what should happen next.

Ask the members of these groups to imagine they are the facilitators making the particular decision and ask them to consider what personal, professional and organisational factors may have influenced their approach. For example, feeling angry, embarrassed, not having time to meet with the young people etc.

At the same time give one of the scenarios to each of the remaining three groups and ask them to imagine they are young people who have been told about the end of the project in this particular way. Ask them to consider:

- How do you feel?
- How do you think you would respond to the situation?
- How would you feel about becoming involved in new participatory projects?

Once everyone has completed the task take each scenario in turn and ask the group that were facilitators how they feel and also the group that were young people.

Go through each scenario with feedback from the groups and then draw out best practice in terms of giving feedback.

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