NEW WORLD MADE BY KIDS

ADULT FIRST?

A guidebook for child-related professionals and adults to learn about children's right to participation & how to hear the voice of children clearly.
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A GUIDEBOOK FOR CHILD-RELATED PROFESSIONALS AND ADULTS TO LEARN ABOUT CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION & HOW TO HEAR THE VOICE OF CHILDREN CLEARLY
LIST OF CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS
PUBLISHED BY
THE HONG KONG COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

Children’s Rights Hand Book

“Adults First!” Leaflet

A Child’s Eye View of the UNCRC

Kids’ Adventure

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

The Hong Kong Chapter

UN Concluding Observations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child

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ADULT FIRST?

A GUIDEBOOK FOR CHILD-RELATED PROFESSIONALS AND ADULTS TO LEARN ABOUT CHILDREN’S RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATION & HOW TO HEAR THE VOICE OF CHILDREN CLEARLY
“To all adults who share the same vision of building a better society for children”

If you are a lawyer, judge, police, social worker, community worker, psychologist, caregiver, residential officer, prison officer, teacher, medical doctor, nurse, civil servant...
or
If you are working with, and for, children under the age of 18,

then this book is for you.
Foreword

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

While we witnessed the enthusiastic efforts of children to make their voice heard in the community, the efforts made by adults have been far less in comparison. We, however, do not wish to see the existence of such gap, as experiences tell us that children rely very much on the help of adults, in particular child-related professionals, in order to actualize their rights in the system. For this reason, we came up with the idea of publishing ADULTS FIRST! By drawing from child participation international standards, steps and approaches, as well as real life stories collected in different settings, we hope to encourage adults and child-related professionals to find out more on how they can better listen to children in their work so as to find out their needs, challenges and expectation.

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

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

Message

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

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

Holding children development dearly to our heart, the New World Group has dedicated great efforts in fostering whole-person development by supporting education programmes that cultivate children in the five essential aspects of virtues, intellect, physical development, community engagement and appreciation of the arts. New World Group has been funding the New World Springboard programme in collaboration with various NGOs since 2002, with an aim to develop unwavering determination and sportsmanship in the under-resourced youth through continuous sports training. A wide array of activities has also been organised to enlighten the young minds, enable self-discovery and motivate them to seize opportunities to achieve upward mobility. Complementing this effort is the New World New Youth Internship Programme, through which the New World Group has provided full sponsorship and job experience in Mainland China for nine consecutive years.

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

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

Dr CHENG Chi-Kang, Adrian | Executive Vice-Chairman & General Manager | New World Development Co., Ltd.
SHOOTING THE MYTHS

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

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

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

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

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

Sven Ariid via, Astrid Strandbu, Amy Holfan and Nigel Thomas, 2010
"If children are allowed to participate today, they will rise against us tomorrow."
"If children have rights, what about mine?"

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

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

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

Lesson quoted by Svein Arild via Astrid Strandbu, Amy Heiban and Nigel Thomas, 2010
“Children should only enjoy welfare, but not human rights. They should fulfill their responsibilities and obligation before they can enjoy human rights.”

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

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

Linton & Boulding, quoted by Edmund, 2010

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

Child Participation in Decision-Making: The Case of the Philippines, By Charlotte Mallinson, Published in: Atlantis, Volume 15, Issue 1, 2010

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

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

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

Benson et al. quoted by Edmund, 2010

SHOOT THE MYTHS AND GIVE CHILDREN A BRIGHT BLUE SKY!
The ladder of participation is not meant to be climbed from the bottom to the top! We SHOULD NOT climb the first 5 steps as they are BAD participation practices. For the rest of the steps, we hope you can support children’s participation whenever it is possible according to the practical situation. GIVE CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY AND LET THEM FLY!

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

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

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

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

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

6. ADULT-INITIATED SHARED DECISIONS WITH CHILDREN
   - Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in making decisions.

7. CHILD-INITIATED AND DIRECTED
   - Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

8. CHILD-INITIATED SHARED DECISIONS WITH ADULTS
   - Children have the ideas, set up the project and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for the children to consider.

The Ladder of Participation is based on a ladder of participation created by Roger Hart in Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, UNICEF (1998).
I don’t know what to do...

Let me show you the way!
A checklist to measure if you are promoting or hindering children’s right to participation

**IS IT VOLUNTARY?**
True participation requires young people to see the value of doing it.

**IS IT EQUITABLE?**
Activities are in practice accessible only to rich or urban children, or only the “smart” ones are selected for meetings.

**IS IT VALUED?**
Children are made to demonstrate against their will, or forcibly ‘volunteered’ into committees.

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

**WHAT'S THE POINT OF IT?**
True participation means young people’s contributions have an influence and make a difference.

**DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**
Children are asked for contributions that are then ignored, not permitted to influence thinking or change conditions.

**DOES IT MATTER?**
Children are simply told what to do, they don’t really know or understand why they are doing it.

**ARE THE PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS FAIR AND CONDUCTIVE?**
The adults sit in chairs while children are on the floor; the rooms periphery or under the hot sun.
IS IT DONE IN A LANGUAGE THAT CHILDREN UNDERSTAND WELL?

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

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

ARE THE RULES FAIR FOR ALL?

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

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

ARE THEY ADEQUATELY INFORMED AND PREPARED?

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

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

ARE THE ALLOWABLE ROLES FAIR?

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

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

WHAT’S THE LEVEL?

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

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

IS IT HONEST?

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

WHAT HAPPENS AFTERWARDS?

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

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

IS IT SAFE?

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

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

Where do you stand on the list? Where you stand is important as you could STRENGTHEN or WEAKEN children’s right to participation!