

# Report of Early Years Consultation with Young Children on the DE 0-6 Strategy



## **Introduction**

The foreword to the Early Years 0-6 Strategy proposes that:

"Consultation on this Strategy is an important opportunity for you to ensure that the issues, challenges and actions contained in this report are fit-for-purpose for the people we must serve, our children, our future"

The broader context for consultation and engagement with young children is enshrined in the UNCRC, particularly in Articles 12 and 28 and in General comment 7.

### **Article 12**

**The child has the right to express his or her views freely about everything that affects him or her.**

### **Article 28**

**The aim of education is to help the fullest possible growth of the child's personality, talents and abilities**

### **General Comment 7**

**To comment on the specific features of early childhood that impact on the realisation of rights**

In designing a method of consulting on the strategy with young children in the 3-6 age group the challenge for Early Years was to facilitate meaningful engagement as well as a methodology that was age appropriate. We decided to focus on the tangible point of connection between the experiences of young children in early years settings and the broad focus of 0-6 strategy. Young children were supported to reflect on their experiences in playgroup, voicing their views and opinions through a range of creative methods. We designed and implemented the following methodology for engaging with young children.

### **Outline of Approach Used**

1. A framework for engagements was developed which was proofed to give a range of children's perspectives in relation to geography, community background, urban/rural, deprivation, race/ethnicity and which was realistic and deliverable within the timeframe September- October 2011.
2. Utilising Early Years membership network groups, we identified and scheduled early years settings to host children's engagement sessions.

3. Delivered 1/1 Briefing for Early Years leaders in all settings in order to ensure fidelity and consistency of information gathered.
4. Planned engagement sessions through Early Years staff members liaising with staff in settings.
5. Developed a child friendly interactive consultation guide for practitioners to use with children on the strategy which contained:
  - a summary of the purpose of the consultation and of the 0-6 strategy.
  - explanatory section on how to use the wish catcher with children
  - explanatory section on using persona dolls with children
  - detachable section to document responses

### **Early Years Settings who took part in the Consultation**

We held 4 Engagement Session with Children in playgroups/nurseries in each Board area during October 2011 as follows:

#### **Northern Area**

The Country Playgroup Ballymena

#### **Southern Area**

Aughnacloy Primary School

#### **Eastern Area**

St Oliver Plunkett Nursery School, Belfast

#### **Western Area**

Drumahoe Community Playgroup, Derry

We also consulted with 27 Traveller children throughout Northern Ireland through **Early Years Toybox project**.



## Methodology

A number of methodologies were used: The Wishcatcher/ Wishing bottles to capture children's perspectives on the **environment** of their early years setting and persona dolls to capture **children's experiences** particularly the emotions and feelings associated with coming to the early years setting.

- Session using the Wish Catcher on 'My Playgroup'/My Nursery/ My School as a way of engaging with some of the themes of the 0-6 strategy- eg quality, equity, transitions, parent partnership through the children's experience.
- Session with persona dolls on What I like/ What I would like to change about my playgroup/nursery again as way of engaging with some of the themes of the 0-6 strategy in a way that relates to young children's experience..

These methods offered ways of enabling children's creative and imaginative participation in consultation and are more suitable and accessible to young children than traditional public consultation methods eg questionnaires/focus groups.

We used the wish catcher and wishing bottles to capture the children's views of the early years environment, how they see that world. Through the wish catcher the children can identify what they like in their environment and importantly what they don't like or would wish to change.

*'The wish catcher offers young children an opportunity to articulate what could be better, different or changed in the world around them. The wish catcher provides a way to hear or hold children's aspirations whilst its defined, bounded space reflects the limitations of adults' ability to change a situation'*

The Wish Catcher, Penny Lancaster

Benefits of using the wish catcher as a consultation tool with young children

- The visual arts, painting, drawing and clay helps children think about and explore ideas from their own perspective;
- It enables creativity and self-expression;
- Provides an opportunity for young children to participate in improving and developing their environment and the services provided for them;
- The bounded space gives children power to think about their aspirations, their hopes for the future and potentially initiate or bring change themselves;

- Acknowledges and values children's hopes for the future even when it is not possible to meet their aspirations;
- Taking children's aspirations seriously helps to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem



*Traveller Children using the Wish Catcher with Toybox worker*

### **Persona Dolls**

*“Persona Dolls are a tool that allows children to express their emotions of being happy, angry or sad, to understand what other people feel, and to respect people with different identities and characters.”*

*Persona Dolls, Babette Brown*

Persona Dolls were the other consultation method used to engage children in talking about their experiences, in this case their experience of playgroup, nursery or school. Again this a meaningful and practical way of engaging young children around the themes of the 0-6 strategy as through their experiences we can access eg their perceptions of transitions, a key aspect of the 0-6 strategy.



*Primary school children engaging using the Persona Doll*

The persona dolls allowed a safe way of engaging with feelings because it is the doll rather than the child who can introduce the experience, eg 'Tom felt very shy when he came to playgroup. He didn't know anybody else and was too shy to ask anybody to play. Did anybody else feel a bit shy? What helped you to feel happier in playgroup?'

## Wishing Bottles



*Children making wishing bottles in playgroup*

The wishing bottles provided an interesting interactive way for children to reflect on their environment, a child centred self-evaluation. Children had fun preparing the 'wishing bottles' mixing food colouring or paint with water and glitter or stuffing bottles with crepe paper. In this way children are using their creative and scientific skills to construct their own evaluation tools.

Most of the children understood clearly the idea of putting eg a green bottle at something they liked and a yellow bottle at something they wanted to change. Some children found the concept of something they didn't like/ wanted to change more difficult to understand and focused only on those things they liked.

It is important to remember that for all of the children, the engagements took place in October, ie during the settling in period when everything in the environment was new to them. A number of practitioners felt that this exercise would be worth repeating at different stages throughout the year, to engage the children's reflections on their environment on a regular basis.





*Child placing the wishing bottles 'I like the wood area, I like making things with a hammer'*

## **Wishcatcher**

The children helped the adult position the wish catcher and this created lots of conversation:eg

- I love the colours
- It's like a rainbow
- It's like long hair
- It's like a skirt

The adult explained the concept of the wish catcher and how it was similar to the dreamcatcher that was already in the room. Then they discussed all the things they would wish for.

They then drew pictures of their wishes

- I would like a hamster or a rabbit- some animals in the classroom
- Some animals in the water area
- Cushions in the book area
- Bubbles in the water area
- Big comfy cushions in the book area



- A table in the home corner

The children pegged their drawings on the wishcatcher, with the help of an adult.



*'I would like cushions in the book area' 'I would like bubbles in the water area'*

## Key Messages from the engagement sessions with young children

- **The responses from children reflected a positive awareness of and initial experience of playgroup/ nursery/ school.**  
*'School is big' 'School is happy' 'We play games in special shoes in the big hall'*
- **The responses from children reflected positive feelings about their setting as well as the capacity to problem solve around feelings associated with transition.**  
*'I have this many friends (holds up fingers)' 'He could play football with me' 'If he was shy he could get his sister to bring him in'*
- **The responses reflected children's experiences of play and learning opportunities both indoors**  
*'I like listening to stories' 'I like the block area to build a house' 'I really like the Fireman costume'*  
  
**.....and outdoors**  
*'I like playing in the muck' 'I like the sand area and the big diggers' 'I like putting on my wellies to play in the stones'*
- **The responses reflected children's capacity to reflect on and evaluate the environment of their Early Years setting.**  
*'I really like the fish' 'I like the sand table and the truck' (girl's response) 'The home corner, I like the babies best' 'The wood area, I like making things with the hammer'*
- **The responses also demonstrated children's capacity to reflect on aspects they would like to change**  
*'I want to change the sand. The sand is too muddy. We need dry sand' 'I like the kitchen the best. I like to do the dishes. We need dish clothes and a drying cloth' 'I would like comfy cushions in the book area'*
- **The responses from more marginalised children, specifically Traveller children reflected a positive awareness and initial experience of playgroup/nursery/school**

*'You can play with everything. Sometimes we go swimming. You can paint, there's books and jigsaws and footballs.'*

*'I love my teacher'*

*'The scooters and the footballs, dinners, you get fruit. I like everything about school. I like the games in the homework bag.'*

*'I want my brother to come to my class and sit beside me on the chair. My uniform is nice.'*

**It is important to note that the timeframe for consultation September-October 2011 was during the 'settling in' period for these young children. While this was challenging, this means that the consultation is reflective of children's first impressions of the setting. A number of the settings proposed to repeat the exercise later in the year to reflect children's changing experiences.**



## Appendix 1

### Summary of Children's Responses using Persona Dolls

#### Can you tell Tom (Persona Doll) what school/nursery/ playgroup is like?

- School is big
- School is happy
- My brothers are here
- There are lots of things to play with
- You get your dinner here
- We play games in special shoes in the big hall
- I like my teacher
- Lots of toys and children
- I like the toys
- I love my teacher
- I like my school. I like colouring for my mummy for her birthday
- I like going to school
- Mrs Pepper is my teacher
- I like school
- I love my school
- I like it
- My mummy takes me
- I go with my sister
- My teacher is Mrs Early. I love school. I play with friends (named)
- I go with my sister to big school
- Play. I have snack, a sandwich. I don't get curry-I don't like curry
- The last time I was sick
- The bus comes
- Do you like my uniform? I like it
- It's cool
- I like to bring the wee toy helicopter we have
- I like I like it.
- I have this many friends (holds up fingers)
- It's nice
- Child looked at me and smiled
- Pram
- Sand I built a sand castle and the car knocked it down
- Lego, blocks
- The cars
- I paint

**Tom is a bit shy coming to playgroup/school/nursery, what would make him happy?**

- Make a funny face
- Take him to the seaside
- Give him a baby to play with
- Play with him
- Make him funny
- Take him to the goldfish
- Take him to the play park
- He could draw a picture
- Shake his hand
- Give him a hug
- Give him a kiss
- Get his sister to bring him in
- I love my school
- He's my friend
- What's wrong with Tom?
- Why is he sad
- I go to Kentucky with my mummy and daddy
- I will make Tom a necklace
- I will let Tom play with me
  
- We could play with him
- He could find somebody to play with
- He could play with my brother
- My brother doesn't want to play with me he wants to play with the other boys
- He could play football with me
- Me and Rebecca could find someone else to play with

**Tom loves building and making things with blocks. Can you tell Tom about what you like to do?**

- I like cutting
- I like hide and seek
- I like the park
- I like the slide
- Playing in the park
- On the slide
- I like the trains
- I like the babies
- I like the babies too
- Playing with teddies

- Playing with toys
- Playing in the sand
- Playing with the teddies
- Playing in the sand
- Getting my key
- Playing with balls
- Playing with sand
- Playing with blocks
- Playing with lego men
- I like listening to stories
- I love painting a picture
- I love dressing up as a princess
- I love going to the park on the slide
- I like the little men
- I like the drawing area
- I like the paint area
- I like colouring in
- I like the writing area
- I like the block area to build a house

**Tom likes playing outside as well. Can you tell Tom about the things we do outside?**

- On the bikes
  - On the motorbike
  - I like playing in the muck
  - I like the sand
  - I like the see saw
  - I like playing in the snow
  - I like the sand
  - I like the see saw
  - I like the snow
- 
- We play on the slide
  - We go on our tu-tu train
  - I love the fireman Sam pole
  - I love playing football with my daddy
- 
- Slide
  - Truck
  - Lorries
  - Buggies
  - Slide
  - Bikes



- Tractors
- Sand
- Spades
- people
- I like the sand area and the big diggers
- I like the outside area and to build a house in the sand
- I like putting on my wellies to play in the stones
- I like the paints outside and I paint mummy a picture
- I like playing on the scooters outside , I have a fireman Sam scooter at home
- I like getting my wellie boots on

### **Wishing Bottles- things we like in our early years setting**

- I really like the fish
- I really like the Fireman costume (green bottle in dressing up area)
- I like the fish
- I like the sand table and the truck (girl)
- I like pink (placing bottle in art area)
- The home corner, I like the babies best
- The home corner, I like the wee seats
- The computer area, I like playing games
- The computers, I like painting on it
- The writing area, I like writing letters
- The writing area, I like making a card to mummy
- The writing area, I like writing my name
- The wood area, I made an X
- The wood area, I like making things with the hammer
- The stampers, I like making a picture and colour it for my brother
  
- I love dressing up
- I love babies
- I love building a house

### **Wishing Bottles- Things we would like to change**

- More difficult puzzles
- How about colouring in sheets? (in art area)
- I want to change the Bob The Builder bench
- I want to change the sand. The sand is too muddy. We need dry sand
- I want more books
- I really like the witch puzzle

- More Halloween puzzles
  - I want to change the bottles
  - I like the kitchen the best. I like to do the dishes (green bottle)
  - We need dish clothes and a drying cloth (yellow bottle)
  - I'd like a skeleton costume in the dressing up area for Halloween
  - We could change the chairs to pink chairs
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- I don't like the block area because there are too many boys in it
  - I would like comfy cushions in the book area
  - I would like a big comfy cushion in the book area
  - I don't like the writing area because you have to keep drawing
  - I don't like the home corner
  - I don't like the paint area , there are too many paints in it
  - I would like more animals in the water tray
  - I would like some dinosaurs in the sand area
  - I don't like the construction area
  - I don't like the writing area
  - I would like animals on the tuff spot
  - I would like trucks and diggers in the water

## **Wishcatcher Setting II**

- Puts a 'T' on the tag for his name. I want a trailer for the tractor
- I wish I could have a baby in my daddies house, a star and a baby.
- My gran is bringing me a present from Norway
- I wish for babies
- I wish for Santa
- I wish for Spider man
- I wish for a big teddy
- I wish for a baby doll and pram
- Dr Who Toys
- I like Duplo
- Playing with teddies and dresses

- Playing with dresses and dollies
- Playing with jigsaws and building blocks
- Playing with boy's toys
- Food mixer
- Fairy wings
- Fireman Sam Ball
- Yellow outfit football
- Chocolate bar and blocks
- A tractor in the sand and a lorry and a wee tractor to play with
- I like playing in the kitchen
- I don't like boy's stuff
- I like writing on the table
- I like motor cars and tractors
- I would like a motor bike and dumper trucks
- Diggers
- Ducks, tractors cars buses
- Dolls, jigsaws and prams
- Wiggles, Spiderman, dolls, Fireman Sam
- Barney, Books, Washing machine, maybe Barbie

