

Participation of young children in child welfare and child protection: Guidelines for policymakers, managers and practitioners

In the context of child welfare and protection professionals struggle to genuinely involve young children. How does this happen in your organisation? Is there a need for transformation in everyday work with young children aged 12 years and under? Policymakers, managers and practitioners are responsible for developing and implementing action plans in an organisation. To facilitate this change in your organisation, the PANDA project offers these guidelines on how to start and succeed.



This document is part of the European Erasmus+ KA202 Project, "Participation and Collaboration for Action", acronym PANDA, Sept. 2020 – Aug. 2023. The project involves 4 European Universities: Artevelde University of Applied Sciences (Belgium), Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Norway), Queen's University Belfast (Northern Ireland) and Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain). It also involves 4 organisations: Growing Up (Belgium); Trondheim Kommune/Link (Norway); Voice of Young People in Care, VOYPIC, (Northern Ireland) and Fundación Secretariado Gitano, FSG (Spain).

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Introduction

The aim of the PANDA project is to promote the participation of young children (aged 12 years and under) in decision-making in a transnational context through strengthening professionals' collaboration with young children known to social services and especially children involved with child welfare and child protection services.

Led by 8 partner organisations comprising social workers, managers, policy officers, academics and trainers from four countries - Belgium, Spain, Norway and Northern Ireland - the project has three objectives:

- to increase the skills and knowledge of professionals by creating a media library;
- to support organisations to create the conditions necessary for participatory social work with young children by providing guidelines for policy officers and managers to support the implementation of a participatory approach;
- to provide trainers with new tools and methods in this area – (see Figure 1 below)

Figure 1: Project aims and objectives



As stated above, the PANDA project aims to come up with guidelines for policy officers and managers. In this document we outline what we believe may be useful to facilitate change in organisations and services. It starts with ‘The Golden Circle’ theory (Simon Sinek, 2009,2019) which notes ‘the Why’, ‘the How’, and ‘the What’ as points of departure to make changes in organisations and at the policy level. It is expanded with a set of questions to explore “the Why”, “the How” and “the What” in your organisation and continues with a series of principles to promote young children’s participation and the best interests of each child. Following on from this a chapter includes reflections on how to implement the changes in practice. Finally, we finish with a list of statements to facilitate specific learning and development in your organisation according to staff training and staff recruitment policy.

The guidelines may be useful in a range of organisations, both statutory and voluntary sectors, working with young children and families in contact with child welfare and protection services. However, the guidelines are also suitable for organisations that promote young children's rights and social participation in society in general and are intended to contribute to changes in public authorities, education and children's services. The guidelines are not designed as a user manual that must be followed to the letter; rather they are intended to be understood as inspirational and identifying goals to strive for across countries and cultures.

1 The Golden Circle theory

The Golden Circle theory (Sinek, 2009; 2019) is useful as a change management model and as an essential preparatory exercise. Embedding and sustaining a culture of participatory practice in a team or organisation is not easy. It is time intensive, resource intensive, and requires strong and steady leadership. Sinek is the author of several books on the topic of leadership, including 'Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action', which first popularised the Golden Circle theory (Sinek, 2009; 2019, p. 37) (see figure 2).

The Golden Circle theory explains how leaders can strengthen cooperation, trust, and change if they start with the 'Why', before going into the 'How' and the 'What' of their organisation.

WHY?

Sinek explains that 'Why', i.e. the motivation for an activity, is probably the most important message that an organisation or individual can communicate as this is what inspires others to action. Successfully articulating your 'Why' is an impactful way to communicate with others. The model suggests that it is all too common for very few people in an organisation to be able to articulate 'Why' they do what they do, their cause or purpose – why their organisation exists. Sinek's theory is that communicating 'Why' taps into the part of the listener's brain that influences behaviour, hence why the Golden Circle is considered such an influential theory of leadership. At an organisational level, communicating your 'Why' is the basis of a strong value proposition – the direct benefit or value to a client or customer – or in this case to a young child involved with welfare services.

HOW?

The next part of the Golden Circle theory addresses 'How' your brand achieves its 'Why' objective. This may include the processes or systems that separate your organisation from other organisations. However, few people within an organisation are generally able to describe how they do what they do or what it is that sets them apart from others or makes them special. This can be the framework that you are going to use, or the theoretical model your organisation is using to obtain their goal.

WHAT?

The final aspect of the Golden Circle is the 'What' - what your organisation actually does; what your organisation does on a day-to-day basis, for example, what services you provide. Most, if not all individuals within an organisation will know the 'What'. It is important to consider how your work, the practice, corresponds to the 'why' and 'how' that defines your organisation. What are we going to do to make your mission (why and how) come true?

For any leader or manager wishing to develop and embed participatory practice with young children it is important that the people within the organisation can describe what they do, how they do it, and most importantly why they do it.

Doing this exercise will help policymakers, managers and practitioners to focus on what is important and possible for their situation. It can help them choose which framework they are going to use to make their 'Why' possible. The Panda project does not promote one particular approach or model as a specific way of working. There are several ways in which a manager can develop this organisational knowledge to achieve the 'What', for example, through quality inductions for new employees, regular training and development for staff and volunteers, organisational communications (including newsletters, team meetings, strategic and operational planning and review processes, use of supervision and appraisal processes, and so on).

As a first step it might be helpful to consider some key questions to help explore the 'Why', the 'How', and the 'What' of your organisation, to determine your starting point and to develop a programme of action to embed participatory practice with young children. In chapters 3, 4 and 5 you will find a series of reflective questions to help you start your journey.

Figure 2: The Golden Circle (adapted from Sinek 2009).

The Golden Circle

WHAT

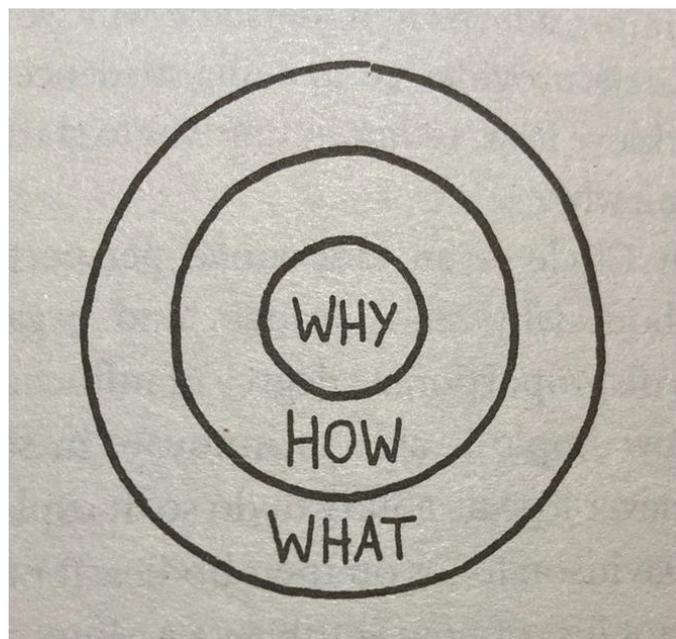
Every single company and organization on the planet knows WHAT they do. Everyone is easily able to describe the products or services a company sells or the job function they have within that system (Sinek 2009, page 39)

HOW

Some companies and people know HOW they do WHAT they do. HOWs are often given to explain how something is different or better (Sinek 2009, page 39)

WHY

Very few companies can clearly articulate WHY they do WHAT they do. By WHY I mean what is your purpose, cause or belief? WHY does your company exist? (Sinek 2009, page 39)



2 The 'WHY'

As already mentioned, professionals struggle to genuinely involve young children in child welfare work, hence transformation may be needed in your organisation. To support this reshaping process, we suggest below some pointers to reflect upon regarding the mission statement in your organisation. Also, you may want to reflect with your team on the 'Why'. This should be done while keeping children's rights (as defined in the UNCRC) and specifically their participation rights (articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13) in mind.

Questions to explore your organisation's 'Why':

- **What is the purpose of your organisation?**
- What is the existing mission and vision statement of your organisation?
- Does it include reference to young children, their rights, and/or their participation rights?
- Are all people in your organisation aware of the mission statement, i.e. do they all have the same mindset?
- Do they have a shared picture of the organisation's vision? If not, can one be agreed?
- When you speak about participation in your organisation what do you mean?
- What are the main issues in your cultural context regarding young children's participation?
- What are important values regarding young children at risk?
- What benefits do you think collaborative working between children and professionals could bring to your organisation?
- **Why is the voice of young children helpful?**
- Why have you chosen, or might you choose, to be a participatory organisation and/or have a participatory policy?
- Are you choosing to be a participatory organisation because you must, it is the law?
- What is your own motivation for endorsing a participatory organisation and/or policy?
 - Are you ready to listen to (young) children (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to support (young) children in expressing their views (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to take (young) children's views into account (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to let (young) children to join in your decision-making processes (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to share some of your adult power with (young) children (Shier, 2001)?

3 The 'HOW'

Policy makers, officers and the managers may need to become more conscious about how they organise and ensure the mission statement in their organisations is actively endorsed. To support the process of a greater awareness about ongoing processes that either promote or hinder the implementation of a participatory way of working with young children in your organisation, we suggest below some questions to reflect upon.

However, before going into these specific questions, we want to emphasise that young children may participate and have influence at the individual level, such as being involved in their own child welfare and protection cases (which is the main focus of the PANDA project), or they may be given a voice to influence the actual service provider organisation, as occurs in social, group and community participation.

Questions to explore the 'How' in your organisation:

- How is your organisation working?
- Which theoretical model or framework does your organisation use to achieve its purpose (the mission)?
- Do the ways you promote child participation contribute to your strategic goals and fulfil your mission statement?

- What principles does your organisation have regarding young children’s participation within Child Welfare and Protection Services (CWS)
- Is your policy/management supporting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children must be listened to (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children must be supported in expressing their views (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children’s views must be given due weight in decisionmaking (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children must be involved in decisionmaking (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions (Shier, 2001)?
- Is there a procedure that enables (young) children to join in decisionmaking processes (Shier, 2001)?
- Is there a procedure that enables (young) children and adults to share power and responsibly for decisions (Shier, 2001)?
 - In which aspects can the child co-decide, and is this transparent?

4 The ‘WHAT’

Organisations do a lot of tasks during the day and the week. The time we have at our disposal in a working day in a child welfare service is easily filled up with conversations with families and colleagues, meetings, recording and telephone calls. It is as if the tasks will never end. It is easy to be immersed in tasks without thinking more about whether the activities are in line with your organisation’s mission statement (the ‘Why’ of your organisation) or not.

To become more aware of what your organisation does on daily basis, and to become more analytical about this, we suggest some pointers to reflect upon to consider whether the activities benefit your organisation’s mission or not.

Questions to help explore the ‘What’ of your organisation:

- Are you curious about what is happening in practice?
- What does your organisation do to promote younger children’s participation in the child welfare field?
- Are you aware that you can find answers in practice?
- Do you consult your social workers/professional workers?
- How do you evaluate the trust between government, the organisation and professionals/social workers?
- What are the complicating factors? How do you deal with them?
- What is the task/role of the professionals regarding young children’s participation?
- Does your professional workforce work in a way that enables them to listen to (young) children (Shier, 2001)?
- Does your professional workforce have a range of ideas and activities to help (young) children express their views (Shier, 2001)?

- Do you ‘trust’ the competence of your professionals/social workers? ○ What competences do you expect your employees to demonstrate? ○ Which methods and tools do the professionals use when communicating with young children?
- Are the professionals adequately skilled to communicate with younger children?
- How much time on average do professionals spend with young children and their parents together?
- How much time do professionals spend with individual young children?
- Do younger children participate in decision-making about their trajectories?
 - Does the decision-making process enable your workforce to take (young) children’s views into account (Shier, 2001)?
- Do professionals involved with young children engage as collaborative partners or not?
- Do you ‘practice what you preach’ (= culture of organisation)?

However, your context, and more specifically children’s rights principles and methods related to the ‘How’, determine what your organisation can and will do to make the mission come true.

5 Principles to promote young children’s participation and the best interests of the child

Children’s rights are a specific part of the child welfare and child protection context. The UNCRC (1989) comprises *interrelated and indivisible articles* that define young children’s participation rights. These include articles 2, 3, 5, 6,12,13, 19 and more. Furthermore, the UNCRC is accompanied by General Comments which give detailed guidance (more of this, [see International legal framework and basic concepts regarding children’s participation, Brief for practitioners](#)).

According to Lansdown (2018) children can participate in decision-making in three ways: consultative, collaborative and child-led. All these ways may be appropriate; it depends on the context. The encounter between young children and professionals may start with consulting the child, and later, when reasonable, slides into collaborative and child-led activities.

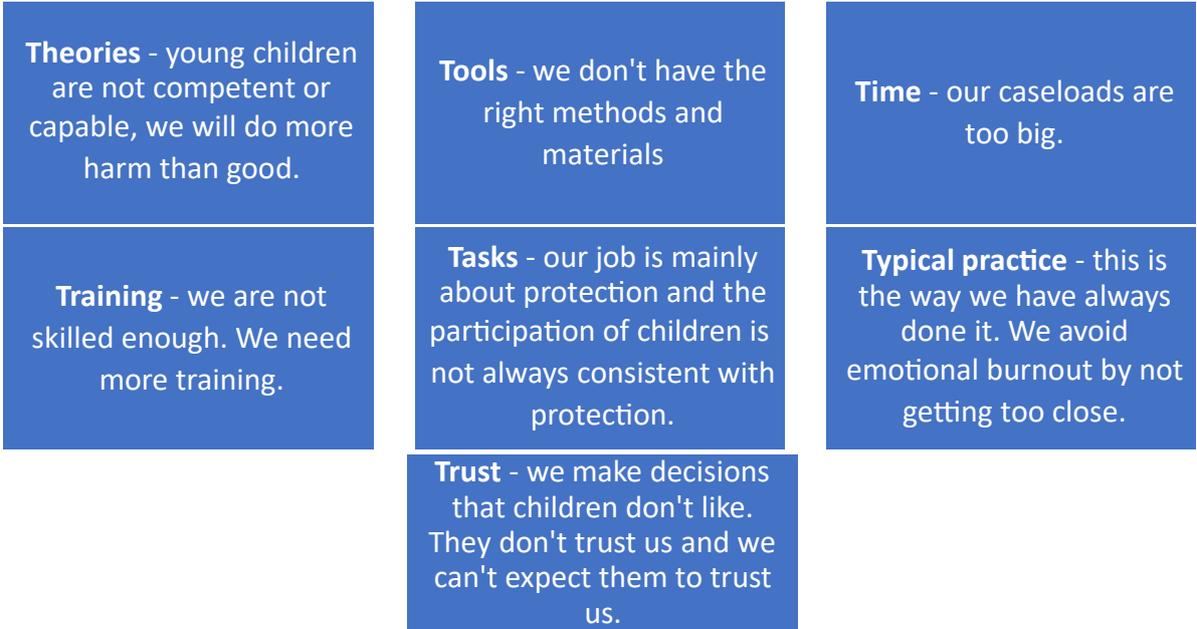
There is a lot of tokenistic participation with young children in child welfare work. To solve this problem the PANDA project promotes the concept of collaboration, to make sure that even young children become involved as collaborative partners. This means both parties (the child and the professional) enter into a process of co-creation, working through the issues together.

However, there are complexities in practice. These include:

- Fear relating to young children participating in decision-making processes - it might harm them, let them down, not meet their expectations.
- Can we include young (how young?) children?
- Are young children competent and capable?
- How do we include young children?
- How do we respect young children’s reluctance or refusal to participate (participation is a right, not an obligation)?
- What are the best ways of doing this?

In conversations with child welfare professionals Winter, (2009; 2011) found common barriers, labelled ‘the 7 ‘T’s’ as depicted below:

Figure 3: The seven 'T's'; taken from Winter 2009, 2011).



To help overcome such barriers as indicated above and promote young children’s participation we lean upon:

- the UNCRC (1989) which provides a worldwide guiding set of principles;
- the specific lists of practice principles outlined in the General Comment No. 12 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009, pp. 29-31, paragraph 134);
- the General Comment No. 14 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2013, pp. 1317, paragraph 53-79).

These are depicted in Figure 4 - Practice principles to promote young children’s participation rights and Figure 5 - Practice principles to promote the best interest of the child. The UN Convention and the practice principles form the guidelines for policy makers, officers, managers and practitioners, and inform the daily practice of professionals to ensure that they work in participatory ways with children. The combination of the participation rights and the best interests of the child should always go together.

Be transparent and informative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be given age -appropriate information • to be informed that to express views is free
Voluntary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be sure the child does not feel compelled to express views
Be respectful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be aware of children’s socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural context
Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the issues on which children are asked to express their views should be of real relevance for their lives • they must be enabled to address issues relevant to themselves
Child-friendly approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environment, working methods and tools must be adapted to children's capacities and competences
Inclusive to all children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including boys and girls and in particular marginalised children
Supported by training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adults need communication skills and be prepared to work collaboratively with the child
Safe and sensitive to risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adults have the responsibility to minimise the risk to children of violence or any other negative consequences of their participation
Accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children must be informed how their views have been interpreted and used • children must be given clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes

Figure 4: Practice principles to promote young children’s participation rights (taken from UNCRC GC NO. 12)



Figure 5: Practice principles to promote the best interests of the child (taken from UNCRC GC NO. 14)

6 Implementing changes - some practical advice¹

Implementing any new approach requires reflecting and learning at all levels in an organisation. In other words, it is a dynamic process or a learning journey². At the start, we determine what we want to see changed (desired future) and draw up plans and objectives, which are regularly evaluated and adjusted if necessary. Above all we want a realistic and achievable implementation plan.

However, implementation does not stand alone. One of the biggest learning points from the PANDA project is the importance of history, context, and culture and that we are all part of a greater system. Organisations are like living systems, operating with specific values in a particular culture. Choosing a theory, model, framework, or approach, especially when founded in a different culture our context, has to be done very carefully and consciously.

If we really want children and families to participate in Child Welfare Systems (CWS) and have a voice and become partners in co-creation, this requires a paradigm shift. The way people are engaged by services are shifting from a solution focused and strengths-oriented attitude. Choosing participation is like choosing a vision and this may, or may not be, congruent with the existing paradigms in your society, organisation or child welfare system. The same applies to the choice about a paradigm shift.

With any implementation it is important to make the desired practice possible, and to support it and safeguard it. An implementation process should be built around the practice; it is the practice that guides the implementation. With the implementation the aim is to enable, support, and secure the practice.

Strong leadership and obvious commitment from the leaders is required. Policymakers must give vision and direction, but they do not need to have every answer or solution. We like the phrase '*Be the wind under the practitioner's wings*', to depict what this should look like. To be able to learn new skills and new ways of working, an environment is needed that offers the staff necessary space and possibilities for trial and error.

Policy officers and leaders must '*walk the talk*' or '*practice what they preach*'. If we believe that participation should happen through collaboration between the parties involved, we must understand the strong influence of the parallel processes between employees at different administrative levels in an organisation. We must model collaborative ways of working and because this takes time, we need to slow down. We must let the process happen among the practitioners and let them think through the issues, leading them by asking questions, allowing them to reach solutions before we impose ours. Remember, '*Alone you may go faster, but together you go much further*'.

¹ The text in this chapter is based on Nele Haeden's testimony about implementing Sign of Safety in her own organisation Agency Growing Up, Flanders, Belgium. [You can download the whole story, Haedens, N. \(2023\). Implementation of Signs of Safety as a learning journey.](#) The European Erasmus+ KA202 Project, "Participation and Collaboration for Action", acronym PANDA, Sept. 2020 – Aug. 2023 <https://reacch.eu/>

² Implementing is reflecting. Evidence-based work and the implementation of interventions in youth care. Public Lesson 18/05/2011 by Dr. L. Boendermaker, Professor of Implementation in Youth Care at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

7 Learning and development in your organisation

The PANDA project does not set out a fixed action plan for the implementation of participatory work with young children, rather we are emphasising to policy officers and managers the importance of examining their ‘Why, ‘How’, and ‘What’, to create a common understanding.

Accordingly, it may be helpful to policy officers and managers to become informed about the competences, attitudes, knowledge and skills that are aligned with a collaborative approach when it comes to young children’s participation.

In Figures 6 and 7 statements that can help to support the staff recruitment policy and to map training needs among employees are laid out. The question to consider is whether these attitudes, knowledge and skills are part of the recruitment criteria in your organisation/service. Furthermore, are these attitudes, knowledge and skills part of staff?

Please note that children’s participation rights are not just article 12, but for article 12 to have effect articles 2,3,5,6 and 13 must also be drawn upon. Figures 6 and 7 both start with references to these interrelated articles and with reference to the most important UNCRC General Comments No. 7, 12 and 14 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2005, 2009, 2013).

The staff in any organisation are the most important resource for achieving participation through collaboration with young children. Practitioners are the ones who can learn new ways of working with children, so it is essential to have specialised professionals, as well as continuous training and supervision. This helps establishing a complementary and trusting relationship in which the child feels comfortable to express their concerns, interests, and circumstances. This way of working, in addition, can create synergies of collaboration and participation in teams that, without a doubt, will impact those who participate in their childcare actions. Organisations should promote the intelligence of teams (Cembranos & Medina, 2003) so that they build their ‘know-how’, by taking advantage of the collective knowledge and interaction of those responsible for integrating new learning. Working in this context can also significantly influence the culture of the organisation.

Figure 6: Reflection statements for recruitment policy and training needs in line with children’s participation rights.

Attitude	Knowledge	Skills
To be able to endorse UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 and the General Comments No. 7, No. 12, No. 14	Detailed knowledge UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 and the General Comments No. 7, No. 12, No. 14	Being able to carry out the different elements of UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 and the General Comments No. 7, No. 12, No. 14
An informative and open attitude to very young children (0-3 years) and (4-6 years)	Knowledge about young children’s social and cognitive development	Skills in how to give age-appropriate information to very young children
Seeing the child as a free human being endorsing the child’s right to privacy	Knowledge of the voluntary nature of expressing views	Skills to avoid compelling young children to express their views
Respect to all children; especially minority groups	Knowledge about cultural diversity among children	Skills to act respectful to all children; also, minority groups of children

Ability to bring the issues of concern to the table	Knowledge of the latest theory on young children at risk	Skills in making the issues of concern understandable for young children
Attitude to connect and interact with babies and toddlers	Knowledge about young children's capacities and diversity	Skills in play, activities and the use of different tools to support children expressing their views and communicate
Non-discriminatory attitude on the ground of disability, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, language, culture and heritage	Knowledge about the rights for disabled children. Cultural knowledge about minority groups of risk.	Skills in body language and the use communication tools
Seeing young children as partners to communicate and co-create with	Knowledge about young children's capacity to communicate and act collaboratively	Skills in communication with young children and in collaborative interaction with young children.
Recognising that participation may place young children at risk too	Knowledge about the possible negative consequences for children participating in child welfare on protection cases	Skills in making protection plans to avoid any harm, whenever the child is expressing their views
Ability to do the follow-up and inform young children how their views have been interpreted and used	Knowledge of participation models defining participation as being a process, more than a onetime happening	Skills in interpreting young children's expressions, gesticulations and children's language in general.

Figure 7: Reflection statements for recruitment policy and training needs in line with the best interest of the child

Attitude	Knowledge	Skills
To be able to endorse UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 and General Comments No. 7, No. 12, No. 14	Detailed knowledge UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 and the General Comments No. 7, No. 12, No. 14	Being able to carry out the different elements of UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 and the General Comments i No. 7, No. 12, No. 14 in a skilled, nuanced and discrete way
Persuasion that the young child's view is of great interest, also the one's with disabilities or belonging to minority groups	Knowledge about minority groups and children with disabilities	Skills in including and assessing children's views in relation to the principle of the best interest of the child
Recognition that every child's identity is unique	Knowledge according to marginalisation because of sex, sexual orientation, disability, national origin,	Skills in making connection and interact with children from different backgrounds
	religion and beliefs and cultural identity	

Beliefs according to the family units Recognition of the value of family preservation	Knowledge of the specific methods in the service that serves as a theoretical reference for practitioners working with children	Skills in how to persevere the value of the family in cases of unsafety.
Ability to ensure protection and care for the well-being of the child	Knowledge of the protection and care possibilities for the well-being of the child	Skills in protecting and caring for the well-being of the child
Ability to consider child's situation of vulnerability	Knowledge of the possible situations of vulnerability of children	Skills in acting in possible situations of vulnerability of children
Being sensitive to the child's health	Knowledge of the health needs of children	Skills in taking care of the health of children
Ability to give access to quality education	Knowledge of the education systems and accessibilities	Skilled in providing quality education for the child

Based on these two Figures (6 and 7) which differentiate between attitude, knowledge and skills in detail, we have worked out in short, the most important competences needed among staff to frame young children's participation as a collaborative process (see Appendix 4).

8 Epilogue

The guidelines presented in this paper should be adapted to your organisational context and to the group of children you are working with, for example, toddlers, children with disabilities, children from minority groups, children in contact with social services like child welfare, child protection and other organisations. The different parts of it may be applied in a flexible way. Your organisations may go through all the parts or just make use of specific components such as the questions to explore your organisation's 'Why' (see appendix 1).

Finally, we want to highlight that the implementation of participatory work with young children, is a process; it is ongoing work and not a one-off event. Organisations are always changing; some colleagues end their work and new ones apply for the vacant posts. The main task for leaders must always be to state the narrative about why your organisation exists, its vision and mission statement (the 'Why') must regularly be communicated to the staff, and the direction of travel must be discussed and selected (the 'How'). If the 'Why' and 'How' are made explicit in your organisation, figuratively speaking, the workforce can identify the 'direction of travel' and equip themselves to be safe on the journey. The workforce will feel motivated to learn new skills, share experiences with each other and collaborate to work on the collective mission and promote the organisational culture of participation and collaboration with children and within organisations.

9 Appendix

1: Questions to explore the 'Why' of your organisation

- **What is the purpose of your organisation?**
- What is the existing mission and vision statement of your organisation?
- Does it include reference to young children, their rights, and/or their participation rights?
- Are all people in your organisation aware of the mission statement, i.e., do they all have the same mindset.
- Do they have a shared picture of the organisation's vision? If not, can one be agreed?
- When you speak about participation in your organisations; what do you mean?
- What are the main issues in your cultural context regarding young children's participation?
- What are important values regarding young children at risk?
- What benefits do you think a collaborative work between children and professionals could bring to your organisation?
- **Why is the voice of young children helpful?**
- Why have you chosen, or might you choose to be a participatory organisation and/or policy?
- Do you choose to be a participatory organisation because you must, it is the law?
- What is your own motivation in endorsing a participatory organisation and/or policy?
 - Are you ready to listen to (young) children (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to support (young) children in expressing their views (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to take (young) children's views into account (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to let (young) children to join in your decision-making processes (Shier, 2001)?
 - Are you ready to share some of your adult power with (young) children (Shier, 2001)?

10 Appendix

2: Questions to explore the 'How' of your organisation

- How is your organisation working?
- Which theoretical model or framework does your organisation use to achieve your purpose (the mission)?
- Do the ways you promote child participation contribute to your strategic goals and fulfill your mission statement?
- What principles does your organisation have regarding young children's participation them having contact within Child Welfare and Protection Services (CWS)
- Is your policy/management supporting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children must be listened to (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children must be supported in expressing their views (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children's views must be given due weight in decision making (Shier, 2001)?
- Is it a policy requirement that (Young) children must be involved in decision making (Shier, 2001)?

- Is it a policy requirement that (young) children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions (Shier, 2001)?
- Is there a procedure that enables (young) children to join in decisions-making processes (Shier, 2001)?
- Is there a procedure that enables (young) children and adults to share power and responsibly for decisions (Shier, 2001)?
 - In which aspects can the child co-decide, and is this being transparent?

11 Appendix

3: Questions to explore the ‘What’ of your organisation

- Are you curious about what is happening in practice?
- What does your organisation do to promote younger children’s participation in the child the welfare field?
- Are you aware that you can find answers in practice?
- Do you consult your social workers/professional workers?
- How do you evaluate the trust between government, the organisation and professionals/social workers?
- What are complicating factors? How do you deal with it?
- What is the task/role of the professionals regarding young children’s participation?
- Does your professional workforce work in a way that enables them to listen to (young) children (Shier, 2001)?
- Does your professional workforce has a range of ideas and activities to help (young) children express their views (Shier, 2001)?
 - Do you ‘trust’ the competence of the professionals/social worker? ◦ What competences do you ask of your employees? ◦ Which methods and tools do the professionals use when communicating with young children?
 - Are the professionals adequately skilled to communicate with younger children?
 - How much time does the professional spend with the young child and the parents together?
 - How much time do professional spend with the individual young child?
- Do the younger children participate in decision-making in their trajectories? ◦ Does the decisions-making process enable your workforce to take (young) children’s views into account (Shier, 2001)?
- Does the professional involve the young child as a collaborative partner or not?
- Do you ‘practice as you preach’ (= culture of organisation)?

12 Appendix

4: Important competences needed among staff to frame young children’s participation to be a collaborative process

Competences according to UNCRC articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 (participation rights)

- Being able to inform young children in an open and age-appropriate way.

- Being able to let children express their views in a non-compelling way and with respect for their privacy.
- Being able to act respectful with children, also children from minority groups.
- Being able to act in a participatory way in situations of concern.
- Being able to interact with babies and toddlers by using adapted tools.
- Being able to interact with young children in a non-discriminatory way.
- Being able to interact collaborative with young children.
- Being able to make protection plans in a participatory way with children at risk.
- Being able to go through a participatory process with children.

Competences according to UNCRC article 2, 3, 5, 6, 12 and 13 (Best interests of the child)

- Being able to include and assess children's views in relation of the best interest of the child.
- Being able to make connection and interact with children from diverse backgrounds.
- Being able to act in best interest of the child in relation to the family's needs.
- Being able to protect and care for the child regarding its well-being.
- Being able to act in possible situations of vulnerability.
- Being able to take care of the child's health.
- Being able to provide quality education.

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