

Voice of the baby: A Reflective Guide for the arts

Starcatchers, Scotland's arts and early years organisation, in partnership with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Queen Margaret University, collaborated on a research project exploring current and emerging children's human rights approaches in the arts for infants from birth to three years in Scotland. An important element of the research was in defining the term 'voice' for infants from birth to three years. Through a survey of artists, the project gathered their definitions of the term and found that they consider reactions, parental interpretation, eye contact, dis/engagement and sounds to help represent an infant's 'voice' in artistic settings. Starcatchers' previous work in this area includes development of an engagement signals resource and video. Artists use these seven signals to identify what infants are communicating in creative play sessions and during theatrical performances.

The five areas of the Reflective Guide

Through the survey responses and a literature review themes were identified, such as when to play and when to distance, and how much the infant may still depend on their significant adult, all impacting on how an infant experiences their participation rights. Through observations of Starcatchers' creative sessions in action, the Reflective Guide's five areas emerged. Each of the areas must be considered together to ensure the effectiveness of the participation and meaningful fulfilment of infants' participation rights. The five areas are:

1. Curating the space – creating permission for play and creativity.
2. Building sensitive, informed relationships – warm, affectionate interpersonal interactions.
3. Navigating the identity by considering the artist, the space, and the people within it.
4. Respecting and validating the complex communication of babies.
5. Making time for young children to be heard.

The Kite Model

To further understanding of the participation rights of pre- and non-verbal infants, research led to the Kite Model, as shown in the Reflective Guide. This model reflects all the interactions present in a creative experience with an infant; their caregiver needs to be present for the infant to access and participate in the experience, and there may be interactions with other infants, other adults, and the materials available. The Kite Model is a visual aid, to support the planning and preparation of the creative space. Further resources will be created and shared by Starcatchers and available completely free of charge on their website.

Children's rights learning outcomes

This Reflective Guide is a practical tool to support workers in their understanding of infants' evolving capacity and how artistic environments can support the expression of their views on matters that affect them. It is an evolving piece of work, designed to be fluid within the changing landscape of children's rights in practice. The five areas of the guide aim to empower workers to ensure that the participation of infants is supported with the time, space, resources, and interactions needed, so infants feel confident to take part, whatever their support needs.



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