

# What do we mean by 'voice'?

## Rethinking what it means to collaborate with children about their play spaces.

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# Today's presentation

- Concepts of childhood and their implications for listening to children
- What can listening to children look like?
- Listening to children to transform Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)
- Children's voices in the context of nature play

# Thinking about children & 'voice'

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Article 12
  - States 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. (UNICEF, 1989)



How do you see children?



# We haven't always seen children as subjects with a right to a voice

- Roman law
  - Children are the possessions of the father (Hadley, 1991)
- 15<sup>th</sup> Century
  - Children should be seen & not heard
- Rousseau
  - Children are born innocent & should be protected from adults
- Locke
  - Children are 'blank slates'
- Recapitulation theory
  - Children represent an earlier evolutionary stage and are savages (Lesko, 2001)
- Behavioral theorists
  - Children can be 'programmed' to reproduce desirable behaviours
- Developmental theorists
  - Children are developing, immature, less rational & lack self control (Cannella, 2008; MacNaughton, 2003)

The background features two large, solid pink geometric shapes. On the left, a triangle points towards the center. On the right, a parallelogram is oriented vertically. The text is centered between these two shapes.

“Children’s lives are lived through  
childhoods constructed for them by  
adult understandings of childhood  
and what children are and should be.”

(Mayall, 1996)

How does the  
West see  
children?

# Images of childhood in operation

- Innocent
- Blank slates
- Savages
- Programmable
- To be programmed
- Future citizens
- Economic units



Implications  
for voice?



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What does it mean to  
honour children's  
participation rights?

# Children's rights in decision- making

- To be consulted
- To be given time & space to form a view
- To participate in making decisions that affect them
- To be represented respectfully & fairly
- To negotiate how they are represented
- To be able to opt out of consultations
- To know their views are taken seriously
- To be informed about outcomes quickly

(Lundy, 2018; Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne, 2011; Shier, 2001)



# Seeking older children's voices about Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)

- 10 children in Grades 5 & 6 from one OSHC setting (Banksia Gully) in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne
- 6 months in the setting
- Participatory methods
  - Children as co-researchers (Kellett, 2010)
  - Focus group activities
  - Individualised, self-guided projects (Clark & Moss, 2001)
  - Observer & play companion
  - Interviews

# Football stuck in a tree



# Children's 'voice' in the context of nature play

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Who they play with

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Where they play

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What they play with

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What they play

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Whether they play or not

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What risks they take

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What roles adults have in their play

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What play spaces are available?

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What do their play spaces look like?

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How do they access play spaces?

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Policies & laws that govern play

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## So what does it all mean?

- Children have a right to form & express a view about all aspects of their play
- Listening to children can provide startling insights
- Give children the power to influence decision-making
- Critically reflect on what aspects of their play children can influence
- Critically reflect on the images of childhood you carry & their implications for children's 'voices'



# Thank you!

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