

Child Friendly Cities & Communities



Meeting Minutes

Date: June 23 2022

Time: 9:30am – 12:00pm

Location: via ZOOM

CFCC Network Purpose:

We've come together as a network because we can imagine a world where children are supported and empowered to be active citizens, and individually and collectively, we can make a difference. In our network, we will discover new ways to lead our colleagues and our communities to become child friendly and share with each other examples of good practice.

Meeting Chairs:

David Godden (City of Darebin)

Vivian Romero (CQ University)

Justeen Fitzgibbon (City of Yarra)

Meeting theme:

Ethical and meaningful engagement with children What ethical or practical challenges have you encountered when engaging with children? What questions do you have about ethical and meaningful engagement?

Minutes:

1. **Guest speaker: Polyglot Theatre, Lachlan MacLeod and Sue Giles**

Engaging projects. This session discussed Polyglot's work, Voice Lab and the processes in engaging children in an ethical and meaningful way throughout their diverse menu of programs.

Voice Lab puts children at the heart of the consultation process- the child is actively engaged in the process from start to finish. The process is completely immersive with a 1:1 experience. Consent is sought and the child can rescind their consent at any stage of the process should they change their mind. Copies of consent are provided to the parent and to the child in hard copy. Meaningful engagement takes time and sometimes the quality of the data collected needs to be noted versus the quantity.

This link provides further Polyglot/Voice Lab information and an attachment has been

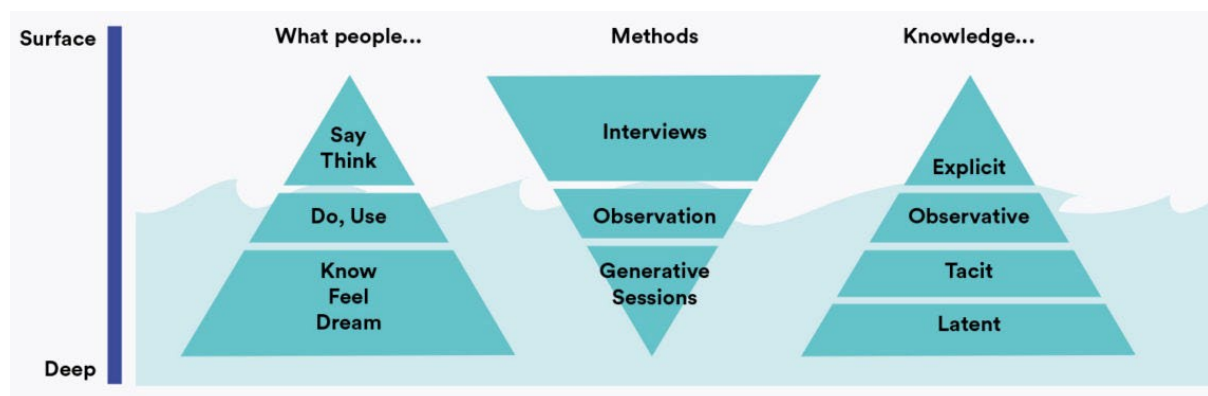
provided on the delivery email containing the content from Sue and Lachlan's presentations.
<https://polyglot.org.au/voice-lab/>

2. Guest speaker: Dr Bronwyn Cumbo

Research Fellow, [Digital Equity and Digital Transformations](#), Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University | [LinkedIn](#) | Twitter: [@broncumbo](#)

Children in research. This interactive session explored topics including: perception of the child and childhood; recruitment + consent processes; building rapport / trust - the role of 'least adult'; methods to draw on different styles of knowledge communication.

Bronwyn covered five Key considerations when engaging in consultation with children. Motivation- Benefit- Context- Method- Consent. Please view her presentation where she talks about Hart's Ladder of Participation and provides several models for engagement. For example, Francesca Zampollo's model illustrates what methods are best placed here to get the information being sought. See the attached slides from Bronwyn's presentation.



3. Sharing Tools and Resources

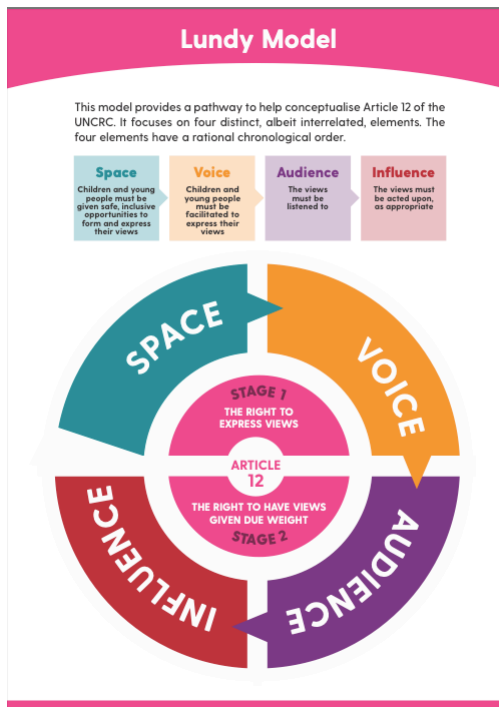
CFCC has a LinkedIn page, follow us to experience all things child-friendly.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/victorian-child-friendly-cities-and-communities/>

Some tools and resources that members of the Network have found useful include:

Lundy's Model of Participation

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lundy_model_of_participation.pdf



Tasmanian Guide to Engagement with Children: <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Guide-to-making-decisions-booklet.pdf>

International Association for Public Participation (iap2): <https://iap2.org.au/>

64 million artists! (for creative ideas) <https://64millionartists.com/thejanuarychallenge/>

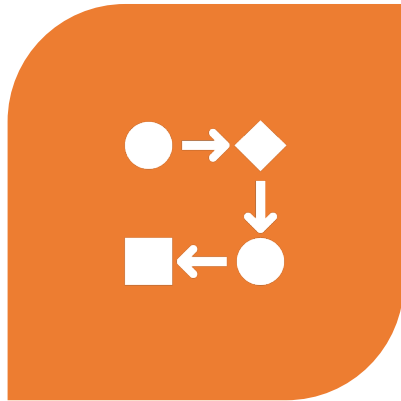
4. **Next meeting:** The next network meeting is scheduled for September 2022 – date to be confirmed.

What does ethical and meaningful engagement of children look like?

Dr Bronwyn Cumbo
Research Fellow
Faculty of IT, Monash University
bronwyn.cumbo@monash.edu
@broncumbo



Agenda



FIVE CONSIDERATIONS (10
MINS)



BREAK OUT GROUP
DISCUSSION (15 MINS)



WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION
+ Q&A (20 MINS)

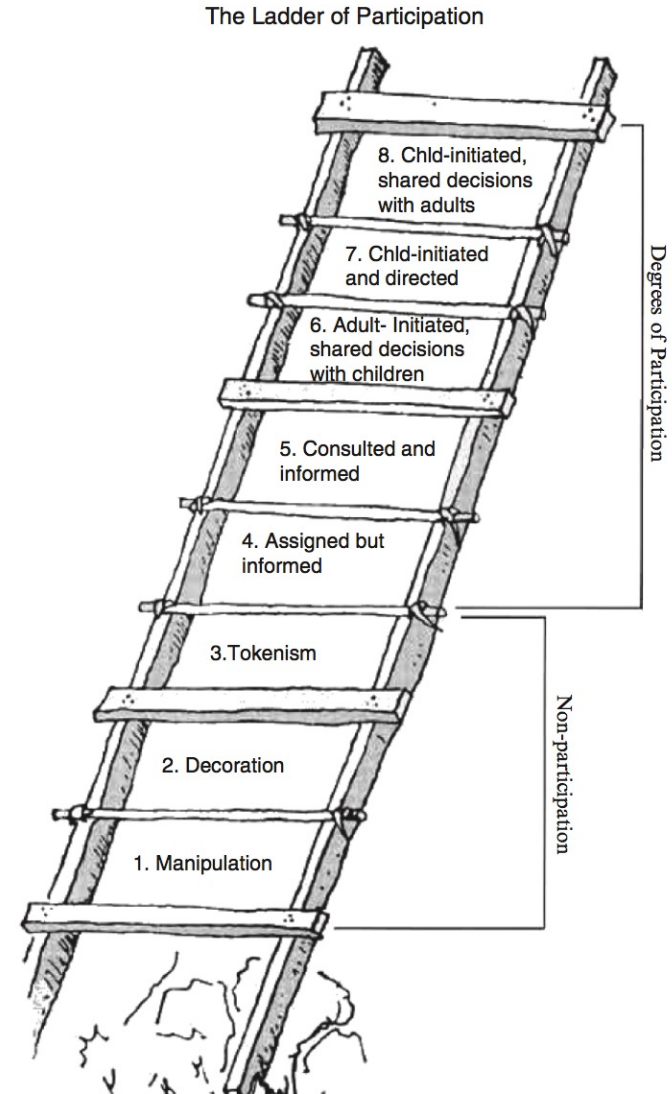
Five considerations when working with children

Motivation

Why am I are engaging children?

What value will it bring?

What will I do with the information they share with me?



Benefit to children

*Participatory processes
involve both mutual
learning & mutual
benefit (not harm)*





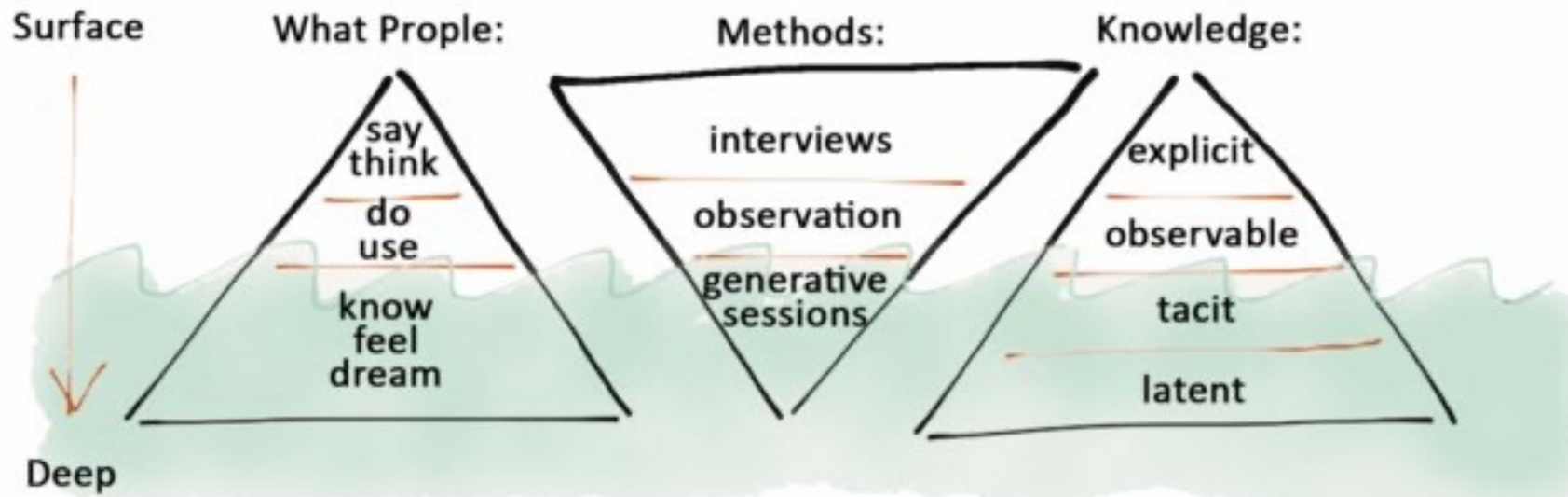
Context

Think about how the 'context' (e.g. location, people, associations) is affecting how children engage, and how you engage with them.

Methods

There are different forms of knowledge that can be evoked by different methods.

- *What is it I want to know?*
- *What methods are best placed to help me find that out with the time and resources I have available?*





Consent: How can we ensure genuine assent or consent from children?

I understand that my teacher and the researchers are interested in videoing me playing at kindergarten. I understand that the researchers would like to talk to me about what I am doing when I am playing.

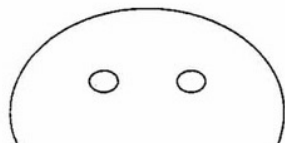
I would like to be videoed



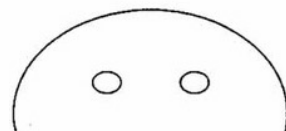
I would not like to be videoed



I would like to talk to the researchers



I would not like to talk to the researchers



Breakout groups (15 mins)

Group A (Odd numbers)

- What does meaningful + ethical engagement of children look like in my work?
- What are some 'best case' examples of meaningful + ethical engagement that we can draw from?

Group B (Even numbers)

- What are the challenges around meaningful + ethical engagement you've faced in your work?
- How can we improve children's engagement in your workplace, and generally?

Both groups: Should children be engaged if the constraints of a process mean it cannot be done 'properly'? Why / Why not??

Four questions to frame your discussions:

1. *Why are we engaging children? (motivation)*
2. *What are we planning to do with the information children tell us? (impact)*
3. *How can we best engage / learn from children? (consent + methods)*
4. *How are children process benefiting from the process? (benefit)*

Feedback & Q&A

Thank you

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@broncumbo



Lachlan MacLeod – Polyglot Theatre core artist and lead project director on Voice lab

<https://polyglot.org.au/voice-lab/>

Polyglot Theatre is a world renowned theatre company based in Melbourne that creates exceptional arts experiences for children and their families.

We facilitate meaningful engagement by placing children at the heart of everything we do.

We do this through engaging schools, Kinders, community groups & the public, as well as our own dedicated child-feedback group, PIPS, who allow in-depth testing and quantitative feedback from a consistent and diverse group of children associated with Polyglot.

And we reach the broadest range of children by placing our work everywhere from the world's most prestigious theatres, to the football grounds of regional Australia.

At Polyglot we are not simply creating theatre that we think kids should see; with children as a passive audience that is there to receive our wisdom. Our works involve the input of children from the inception of an idea, through development and testing, and then as active participants in the experiences that we create.

Our vision is of a world where all children are powerful: artistically, socially and culturally.

In our world children are both discerning audience: capable and deserving of high quality, meaningful and rigorous theatrical experiences; and creative collaborators: prodigious fonts of creativity and divergent imaginative thinking whose thoughts and opinions have real value.

Our work exists to give children the power to be in control, to have an effect and to experience freedom.

When thinking about meaningful engagement and ethics in relation to our practice, a prime example that comes to mind is our work with Voice Lab.

Voice Lab is an immersive, creative experience for children, one at a time, that encourages reflective thinking and the articulation of feelings, thoughts and opinions.

Through Voice Lab, children enter into an immersive individual conversational experience with a performer playing the character of Voice Lab: an artificially intelligent disembodied voice that asks them questions and is genuinely interested in their opinions.

Voice Lab is curious and pays close attention to what the children communicate, placing the child in the position of expert.

Voice Lab is a work that embodies Polyglot's vision to empower children. Its purpose is to listen to children's voices and use the information they provide to make meaningful changes that can improve their lives.

In a world where the child's voice is often unheard, Voice Lab provides a way for children to have a say about their present and their future.

Voice Lab provides meaningful engagement through a number of core elements. Time, attention, privacy and design.

Time - Voice Lab travels at the speed of the participant, allowing for long silences while the child takes time to think about what they have been asked and formulate a considered response in their own time.

Attention - Voice Lab is a one at a time experience. The child participating has Voice Lab's complete and undivided attention. Additionally, Voice Lab puts the child in the position of expert and is genuinely interested in their responses and the value therein.

Privacy - As Voice Lab is a one at a time experience, children are able to express themselves free from the influence of adults or peers, allowing for a more private environment where children can express themselves more freely and without inhibition.

Design - Voice Lab is a specifically designed theatrical experience, and as such it is an immersive, magical, enriching and transformational experience for those involved.

We know that Voice Lab is a prime example of meaningful engagement from the way that children respond to it. The experience is so effective that in the space of just 5 to 10 minutes children often become quite attached to the voice Lab character, and are able to share meaningful, considered, personal responses that might not have been as forthcoming in other contexts.

But what of the ethics?

In a work where we are creating a space where children feel safe enough to speak their unmediated opinions, while also audio recording their responses for future use and opening the door to situations where children may disclose sensitive information to our operators, how do we make sure of the ethical standards around our engagement?

Very early on we realised that the ethical standards around Voice Lab needed to be based around transparency, consent and privacy.

Firstly, we needed to be transparent with the children around what they were doing. If we are expecting them to be open and honest with us, and providing a space conducive to eliciting these sort of responses, then we needed to be open and honest with them in return. In practical terms, this meant informing the participants about for whom and for what purpose the information was being gathered, that their responses would be recorded and for what purpose those recordings would be used. To do this, we built in an opening statement of sorts that is tailored to each use of Voice Lab where the character lays out in clear language exactly these points.

What we didn't want to tell the children was that there was a human operator running the sessions, not a computer, as this character is a major element of the theatrical experience. And here is where it gets tricky. How do we reconcile this theatrical deception, with ethical transparency? And I think what was important for us to realise here was that we are a theatre company, and this experience is a theatrical one, and one where theatrical deception is a necessary part of the quality of the experience for the participant.

Secondly, the children needed to consent to what they were doing. And they also needed to be able to rescind that consent if they got to the end of the session and decided they didn't want anyone to hear their responses. We initially created hard copy consent forms for participants and their carers; one for the child and one for the carer; that explained exactly what the purpose of the experience was, that the child's voice would be recorded, and what that voice recording would be used for.

We also built in to the sessions themselves a bookending of consent questions. Beginning with a simple "Are you happy to stay and answers some questions" and ending after the final question with "Are you still happy for Voice Lab to use your words?"

To address potential issues around disclosure of sensitive information, we worked with one of our Voice Lab partners, the Satellite Foundation, to create a script of prompts to use during any such situations. These statements reassure the child that their safety is of paramount concern and that the disclosed information will be passed on to a real-life human for their safety.

Other ways in which we facilitate ethical engagement:

The Voice Lab character is non-judgemental, neutral, friendly, and lower status to the child.

Recorded responses are de-identified and stored securely.

Children can choose to engage as much or as little as they like and are equally valued.

A front of house person is there to act as a safety monitor, a reassuring face and also reiterates to the participant that they can stop and leave at any time.

Children can stop and leave at any point during the session.

Through transparency and knowledge, coupled with consent and the child being in control of their experience, Voice Lab manages to navigate a complex environment to maintain high ethical standards of practice that both inform and empower its participants, while keeping the theatrical magic alive.

Sue Giles AM - Artistic Director and Co CEO of Polyglot Theatre and President of ASSITEJ International www.polyglot.org.au <https://www.assitej-international.org/en/>

The focus Polyglot creates on children and power is a growing focus for many artists and organisations around the world. The idea of involving teenagers in consultation, feedback

and evaluation as well as artistic practice alongside adult professionals, is taking huge strides in Europe currently. With the European year of youth in 2022, the doors have been opened to greater participation and involvement of every level for young people. However, children are as yet to be considered in the same way as teens, with greater barriers to 'authentic' participation and less practice in this field. I believe that the work that has come from the youth arts sector in Australia, historically the basis for the Theatre for young audiences sector in our country, sets us up as leaders in this field of ethical and inclusive consultation processes with children. The Arts offer a different lens that empowers many ways to engage for children; inviting opinion and connection through design, performance and creative tasks, but mostly and importantly through play. It is play that changes the way we approach child participation. Play in all its forms; imaginative, role playing, structured, solo, shared, secret, dark – all these different languages of expression that powerfully place the child as an expert and lead adults into alternate methodologies.

The pandemic experience around the world has shifted the way many are thinking about the field of theatre and performance. Under stress and emergency, artists have morphed and re-evaluated their purpose and their role in their communities. Work created for children and young people has become more multifaceted, more connected to impact and more available to a broader audience. Access has become more important, as people realised the barriers to the arts experienced by so many – those without internet data or computers couldn't engage in school, let alone creative experiences. Safety of children and young people became a hot topic of conversation; with impacts on their mental health, as well as the increased use of online resources and platforms. Young children have had to learn how to be in shared space and in structure experiences and many of their adults are watching with concern the changes in behaviour – from lack of socialisation in young children to life threatening mental health issues in teens. Performance and theatrical experiences have the power to transform and transport, and to imbue a child with a sense of control.

With safety in mind, and ethical approaches, taking risks as an artist is more possible. The safeguards that training, experience and awareness of those involved put in place for any experience – whether for profoundly disabled young people in a dark space, or for tiny babies, or public interactions where children are encouraged to make their own choices and freely play without rules – mean that trust is part of the contract that the audience enters into when engaging with the arts. Trust is vital for the audience/participant to fully immerse themselves in an experience. Like tightrope walking – the setup, preparation and training are the things that allow for the impossible to happen.