

The Importance of Practitioners Respecting the Voice and Rights of Children

The aim of this paper is to provide professional practitioners with useful and practical information about children's rights and respecting their voice. The paper will include the National Requirements and Developments in Wales linked to the UNCRC. The purpose of the United Nations is for there to be peace and friendship, promote harmony and rights and freedoms.

The United Nations is an international organisation founded in 1945 after the Second World War by 51 countries committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights.' (United Nations, 2015).

The UNCRC 1923 draft declaration of the Rights of the Child. It is a declaration that children have basic human rights that should be respected and promoted. The UNCRC has 54 articles altogether which is broken up into 4 categories' in total. These are:

- The right to life
- The right to develop.
- The right to be protected.
- The right to participate.

(Unicef, 2016)

Articles 1 to 42 are based on the child and articles 43 to 54 are based on the implementation of the articles which is where adults and the government work together to ensure that all children get all their rights.

The UNCRC Law was brought into Wales in 2011 by the Welsh Government and the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure Act 2011 according to the Welsh Government (2015) which advises us on how children should be treated and how practitioners can implement this.

Article 3

“Article 3 (Best interest of the Child) The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.” (Downloads.unicef.org.uk 2021). Lansdown (2011) believes that children should be notified of any decisions that go against their wishes which shows respecting the child’s voice is important but at the same time doing what is best for them. Therefore settings should review the articles in the UNCRC to make sure that the principles are accurately put in place. If settings do this it means they are working in line with Article 3 in doing what is best for all children according to Children’s Commissioners for Wales (2007).

The Foundation Phase Framework (2015) aims to make sure children have a good start in life and that they have the best possible starting point for them to grow. Therefore it is the practitioner’s responsibility to ensure activities are appropriate, engaging and interesting which will allow children with social and emotional difficulties to be involved within the setting and activities that they have.

According to The Foundation Phase Framework (2015) practitioners must work together to support a child’s individual needs. Information sharing helps them do this to provide positive outcomes for children which could include teachers, parents and teaching assistants. This can be done through planning, observing and recording of children’s development which helps gather information about a child’s progression and learning needs. The Foundation Phase Framework believes that practitioners understand how children develop in order to plan an appropriate curriculum and incorporate the children’s needs.

Effective communication is important for support to be given which allows settings to find out information about the child which can be used to help support them according to the Children Act 1989. For example this could be the having knowledge of the child’s home situation and how it has impacted the child which is why it is important to build a partnership with the family.

Practitioners should consider the needs of the child and have strategies in place to support them. For example if a child has Social and Emotional difficulties Martin and Joomis (2007) suggest that practitioners have strategies in place such as a sticker chart which helps promote self-esteem as when they each something they get to put a sticker on the chart which gives them a sense of pride boosting their self-esteem which is part of Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs.

Article 12

Article 3 cannot effectively be put into place without taking into account Article 12. According to Unicef (2010) as Article 12 supports Article 3 this means that meeting Article 12 means that you have achieved the aims of Article 3 which promotes the importance of respecting the voice of the child.

Article 12 (respect for views of the child) Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life. (Downloads.unicef.org.uk 2021)

It's important to ensure that children are respected and their voices are heard and valued within the setting when making decisions that have an impact on them according to the Welsh Government (2014). The Every Child Matters initiative also voices the importance that children have the right to express themselves and share their opinions with others.

The Foundation Phase Framework (Welsh Government, 2015) promotes respecting a child's voice in line with Article 12. The Framework outlines that activities planned must allow children to communicate their ideas, values and beliefs about themselves and the world that is around them. Furthermore it claims that children must be involved in the planning process as it will encourage children to express their own ideas, feelings and views which will provide them with a sense of inclusion. This will allow them opportunities to ask questions and listen to the opinions of others around them which will help them become independent thinkers and learners.

Reggio Emilia's approach to learning also supports Article 12 as it emphasises the importance of children making their own decisions and practitioners using child-led activities within the childcare setting and that what they learn is based on their own interests (Reggio Children, 2021).

Maria Montessori's approach to play further supports Article 12 as it encourages children to make their own choices which prepares them for later life so they can be independent thinkers and learners (Learning Theories, 2017).

The Children Act 1989 says that children have the right to a voice and should receive help with decision making. A child's feelings must be taken into consideration when decisions are being made that will affect them. All adults, practitioners and multi-agencies should ensure that they are listening and respecting a child's voice as this will build trusting and positive relationships between them and the child (Children's Rights in Wales, 2021).

Article 31

Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities (Downloads.unicef.org.uk, 2021).

Children within childcare settings need to be given a variety of different activities to play, explore to enable children help their holistic development which includes their social, emotional, physical, moral and intellectual development. The Foundation Phase Framework says that activities should be available to children to provide them with new learning opportunities and a chance to experiment so they learn to think and learn independently (Welsh Government, 2015). Practitioners should cater to every child's diverse needs as this will help children a feel of belonging and inclusion in the setting. If this occurs it should encourage positive relationships to be created between the practitioners and children.

Children should be given a rich stimulating environment which has lots of challenges so they can explore, play and learn in the world around them. It is practitioners and settings responsibility to provide this environment with these challenges whether through a wide range of toys and activities which should be available for them to access (Welsh Assembly, 2002).

Maria Montessori's approach according to Learning Theories, 2017) is that children learn about the world around them through hands on experiences. It is Montessori's belief that classrooms should be filled with well organised and available learning materials that the children will find engaging and interesting so that they are eager and want to learn.

Article 16

Article 16 (right to privacy) Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation. (Downloads.uncief.org.uk, 2021).

The Data Protection Act 2018 (www.gov.uk, 2021) controls how your personal information is used by organisations, businesses or the government. Every single person has to follow this law with every workplace and childcare settings are no different as these settings often have personal information and data about every child and their family which must be kept safe and secure and all practitioners must follow the Data protection principles:

- used fairly, lawfully and transparently
- used for specified, explicit purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and limited to only what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
- kept for no longer than is necessary
- handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction or damage.

(www.gov.uk, 2021).

Each childcare setting has their own confidentiality policies and procedures that all practitioners should comply. This includes sharing information with appropriate people when multi-agency working and not discussing personal information about a child or their family outside of the setting. It is important to maintain confidentiality and to follow settings policies and procedures to help encourage a trusting relationship between parents and practitioners.

The Education Act 2002 states that practitioners must follow the settings own guidelines to elevate the welfare of children (Legislation.co.uk, 2021). The Foundation Phase Framework also promotes article 16 and the settings responsibility by stating that it is their duty to ensure that they maintain the welfare and safety of all children while in their setting (Welsh Government, 2015). The NSPCC (NSPCC, 2015) believe that maintaining a child's privacy is important and only information sharing with appropriate people and to maintain the welfare and safety of children.

Conclusion

To conclude the majority of the articles in the UNCRC it has made it clear throughout that the voice of the child is vital in respecting a child's rights. Therefore practitioners need to take into account children's individual needs and their opinions however keeping the child's safety in mind. These means that practitioners should plan appropriately using the National Framework and requirements which includes the Foundation Phase Framework (2015) but also taking into account legislations like the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Children Act 1989. If practitioners put this into practice it promotes the importance of following the guidance given in the UNCRC articles on how to allow children to be supported, grow and progress.

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