



HANDS UP MALLEE

HEARING THE VOICES OF MALLEE CHILDREN PROJECT GUIDEBOOK

DEVELOPED FROM: CHILDREN'S VOICES A PRINCIPLED FRAMEWORK
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AS VALUED
CITIZENS AND LEARNERS

HANDS UP MALLEE / MILDURA RURAL CITY COUNCIL

THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises that children's rights are an integral part of human rights. Australia ratified these rights in 1991.

The CRC consists of 54 articles and is guided by four fundamental principles:

- **Non-discrimination:** Children should neither benefit or suffer because of their race, colour, gender, language, religion, national, social or ethnic origin, or because of any political or other opinion; because of their caste, property or birth status; or because they are disabled.
- **The best interests of the child:** Laws and actions affecting children should put their best interests first and benefit them in the best possible way.
- **Survival, development and protection:** The authorities in each country must protect children and help ensure their full development - physically, spiritually, morally and socially.
- **Participation:** Children have the right to have their say in decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

We believe that hearing the voices of our children is an important step in:

- fulfilling the rights of local children
- ensuring that all children are heard equally
- their best interests being considered in place-based planning
- gives them an important avenue for participation

UNICEF'S FRAMEWORK AND VISION FOR CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES

A 'child-friendly city' is committed to the fullest implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It guarantees among other rights, the right of every young citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city
- Express their opinion on the city they want
- Participate in family, community and social life
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability

WHAT IS THE HEARING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN PROJECT? 4
 PROJECT PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES
 PROJECT SCOPE
WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR? 4
WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE EXPLORED WITH LOCAL CHILDREN? 4
GUIDING PRINCIPLES 6
CONSENT 7
 CONSENT OF THE CHILD THROUGH INVITATION
 INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND SEEKING CONSENT
 CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENT/CAREGIVER CONSENT
ROLES AND BENEFITS 8
LINKS TO CURRICULA AND QUALITY FRAMEWORKS 9
 VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
 LINK TO NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE
 POTENTIAL LINKS WITH THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM
PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS 12
 MEANINGFULLY CONSULTING WITH CHILDREN
 ENGAGING CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS
 WHY MULTIPLE MODES?
 CHOOSING THE MEANS OF ENGAGING CHILDREN
 EXPLORING THE THEMES
 LISTENING AND CAPTURING WITH MINIMUM BIAS
 DOCUMENTING THE CONSULTATIONS
DISCLOSURE 14
MATERIALS AND DATA COLLECTION AND STORAGE 15
 COLLECTION FOR ANALYSIS
ANALYSING AND THEMING 15
 CONSIDERING CULTURE FOR ACCURATE INTERPRETATION
FEEDBACK 16
 TO CHILDREN
 TO COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS
HOW THE INFORMATION WILL BE MEANINGFULLY USED 16
APPENDIX A - INVITATION TO CHILD 17
APPENDIX B - CONSENT LETTER 18
APPENDIX C - EDUCATOR REFLECTIONS 19
APPENDIX D - DATA/ASSET COLLECTION FLOWCHART 20
APPENDIX E - CREATIVE ASSETS IDENTIFICATION LABEL 21
USEFUL RESOURCES AND LINKS 22
REFERENCES 23

WHAT IS THE HEARING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN PROJECT?

Hearing the voices of children is a partnership project between Hands Up Mallee and Mildura Rural City Council aimed at carefully listening to and understanding what children aged 3-8 have to say about their lives and futures in our community.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. To inform the community, the Hands Up Mallee Community Aspiration, the Municipal Early Years Plan, and Local Government and services regarding place-based development.
2. To create a rich resource that can support communications and messaging to community about what children want and how to better listen to their perspectives.
3. To feedback to children their views in a meaningful and supportive way.

PROJECT SCOPE

The project aims to hear the voices of at least 450 children across the diversity of our community. We feel that people who are Early Childhood professionals and have an existing relationship with the children are best placed to hear their voices without bias or mis-interpretation.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide has been prepared as an invitation to Early Childhood Educators to join the Hearing the voices of children project and as a support to planning consultations with children.

WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE EXPLORED WITH LOCAL CHILDREN?

The central theme to be explored by children as part of the consultations is: ‘what is important to children in their communities and what do children wish for in their lives?’

The key themes that will be explored are:

- What do I like about where I live, learn and play?
- What don’t I like about where I live, learn and play?
- What do I imagine for my future?

Within these themes several questions to guide the exploration may be useful:

What do / don’t I like about where I live, learn and play:

- Where do/don’t I like to go most of the time?
- What do/don’t I like to do and see in those places?
- Who do/don’t I like to be with at those places?
- How do these places, people and the things I do make me feel?

What do I imagine when I think about:

- places I would want to go
- things I would like to do

Resources We Can Provide
 Feedback and reporting opportunities
 Interpretation and sharing of data and events
 Feedback to children

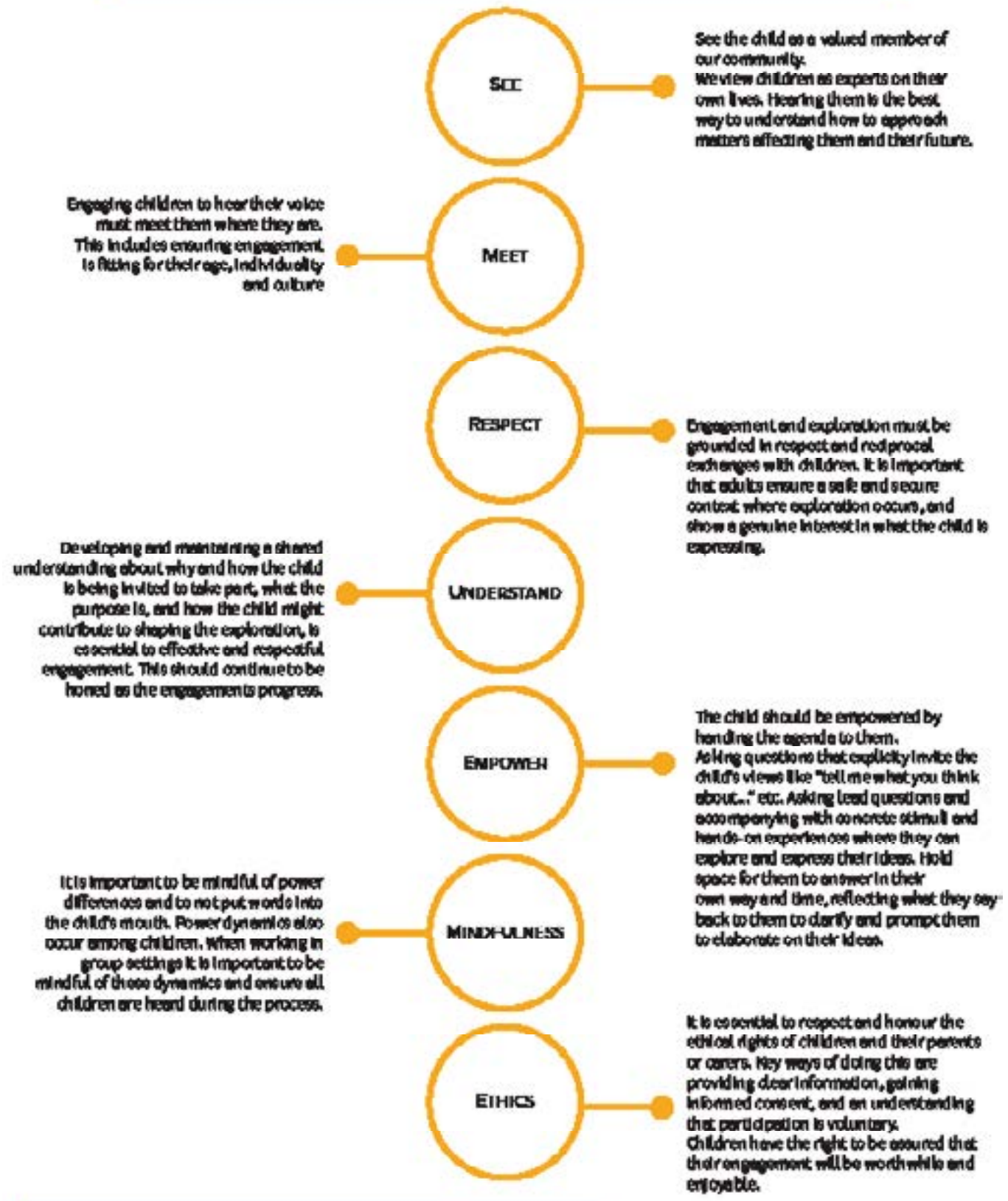
The voices of children project (Mildura LGA)

Steps To Choose Activity Questions
 Level of adult support
 Level of observer support required
 Ways to feed back views to children, based on what children said.

	What do I like about where I live, learn and play? What don't I like about where I live, learn and play?	What do I imagine for my future?
Key Questions	WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO BE, LEARN OR PLAY? WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO AND SEE IN THOSE PLACES? WHOSE VOICES DO YOU WANT TO HEAR? WHO DO YOU WANT TO JOIN? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE?	WHAT DO I WANT TO DO? WHAT DO I WANT TO BE? WHAT DO I WANT TO DO? WHAT DO I WANT TO BE?
Expand	ACCESSIBILITY AFFECTION SUSTAINABILITY	OPPORTUNITY AFFECTION BEING PROVIDED FOR
Discover	LEARNING & NEWNESS HUMANITY FEELING CHANGE	BELONGING SAFETY HAPPINESS
Inform	PLACES YOU KEEP EXPLAINED ADULT ALSO	OPPORTUNITY KEEP EXPLAINED ADULT ALSO
Method	ART OR PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS	MAGIC CARPET IMAGES

Film activities

Guiding Principles for Hearing the voices of children project (Mildura LGA)



Adapted from Children's Voice: A principled framework for children and young people's participation to reduce illness and improve health. Harriet and Henry's Institute, Government of South Australia, UNISA

CONSENT OF THE CHILD THROUGH INVITATION

Children should be provided with sufficient information in order to make an informed decision regarding participation, the formal invitation and its explanation form a key part of obtaining this consent.

Children who do not give consent must not be excluded from activities, and must be made aware that there will be no negative consequences for choosing not to participate. The views and information provided by children through the consultations are not the only reasons it is valuable to provide opportunities for children to have a voice. Participation itself demonstrates to children that they are valued members of our community.

In order to further foster mutual respect, it is important that children’s participation is voluntary and for children to be invited rather than expected to participate in the consultations. As consent is not static children should also be provided with the opportunity to flow in and out of engagement as they are comfortable, sometimes children will need a break from the activities before re-engaging.

It is suggested that site leaders, staff and educators coordinating consultations provide children with a formal invitation to demonstrate choice and respect. The invitation template is [attached in Appendix A](#). The adults coordinating the activities should explain to children, particularly those who are unable to read, what the invitation says, what activities the children might be involved with, and how the information children provide will be used.

Once consent has been obtained from the child consent can be sought from the parents for documenting the child’s voice and sharing their views and works.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND SEEKING CONSENT

It is essential that children’s participation is voluntary and parent/caregiver consent is sought for access to photos, audio or visual footage, children’s artistic works and views.

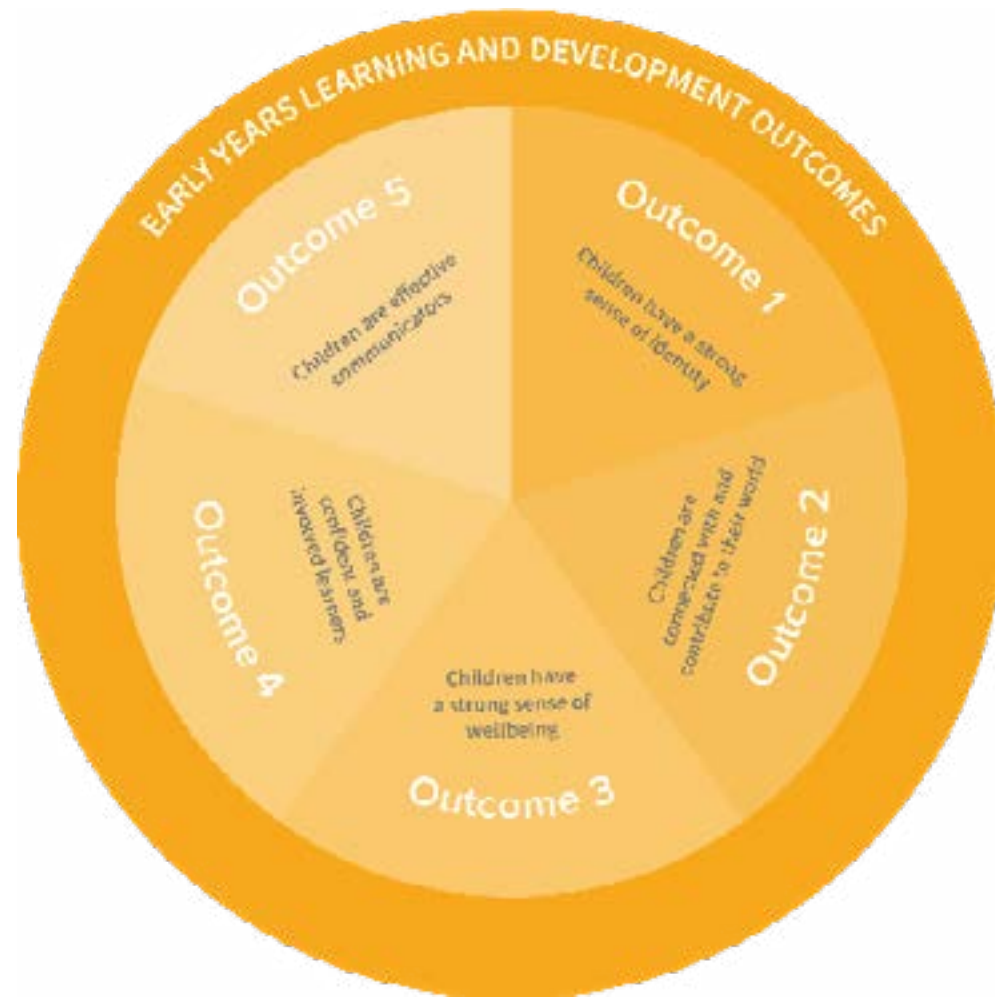
A letter for parent/caregiver consent is [attached in Appendix B](#)

CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENT/CAREGIVER CONSENT

Should some parents/caregivers not wish to provide consent for their children’s images, artistic works, views or other information to be shared, it is important to ensure that children are still provided with the opportunity to participate in the activities, particularly as the activities align with the learning framework of children’s education and/or care settings.

	Roles	Benefits
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about their right to be heard as an important community member Actively participate in developing community understanding of their wants and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feel validated as citizens through being asked and listened to about what matters to them
Early Childhood Facilitator / Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide children in a deep understanding of what the voices project is, to empower them to give or withhold consent Coordinate activity(s) / conversation(s) that support children to have their voice heard Facilitate the child’s contribution to community through the curriculum Encourage children’s leadership and active partnerships with other agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the children they work with more deeply through what they reveal Relates to Victorian Early Years Learning Framework and the Victorian Curriculum F-10
The Planning Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate planning Support facilitators / educators Theme, code and provide feedback Actively participate in developing community understanding of their wants and needs In consultation with children and educators work to provide an appropriate method and setting to feed information back to children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are better able to inform the community about what is important to children about their community and what they want for their futures Incorporate children’s views into key Municipal planning documents Amplifying children’s voices as a key component of the community led movement toward a connected community where families matter and children thrive

VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



LINK TO NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The Hearing the voices of children project also links with the new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Specifically, the National Quality Standards identify seven quality areas:

1. Education program and practice

- An improved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child’s learning and development.
- Educators and coordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.

2. Children’s health and safety

- Each child’s health is promoted.
- Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.
- Each child is protected.

3. Physical environment

- The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.
- The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.
- The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.

4. Staffing arrangements

- Staffing arrangements enhance children’s learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.
- Educators, coordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical.

5. Relationships with children

- Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.
- Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.

6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

- Respectful and supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.
- Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about childrearing are respected.
- The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.

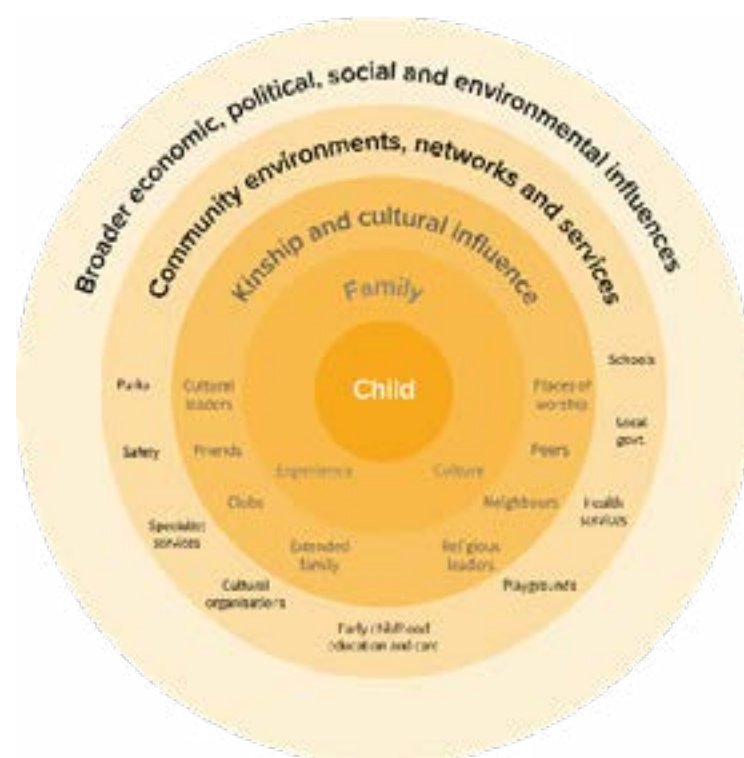
7. Leadership and service management

- Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.
- There is a commitment to continuous improvement.

POTENTIAL LINKS WITH THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Some suggested links with the school curriculum are below, the voices project could be linked with other areas to suit your school.

Curriculum Area	Details
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing and developing ideas Creating texts Interacting with others
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place, space and interconnection Places and our connections to them
Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore and express ideas Present and perform Respond and interpret
Critical and creative thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions and possibilities Reasoning Meta-cognition
Ethical capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding concepts Decision making and actions
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being healthy, safe and active Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing
Civics and Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government and democracy Laws and citizens
Intercultural capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural practices Cultural diversity



Ecological Model adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

MEANINGFULLY CONSULTING WITH CHILDREN

“WENEEDTOTAKETIMETOTHINKABOUTWHYANDHOWWEAREDOINGCHILDPARTICIPATIONBEFORERUSHINGAHEADONTHEONEHAND, AND AT THE SAME TIME WE NEED TO BE ‘BRAVE’ ENOUGH TO TRY IT, TRUSTING THAT WE WILL LEARN AS WE GO ALONG.” (Bray & Clacherly, 2009, p. 6)

The mindset taken when consulting with children is critical to success. The following mindsets are particularly important:

- Being prepared to look at what children can do, and seeing and making visible the competent child
- Understanding the child’s perspectives by seeing their experiences and realities through their eyes
- Having meaningful conversation with and among children through give-and-take dialogue
- Exploring with children what they mean and discovering and demonstrating depth in the child’s meaning
- Stepping back from doing to and for children and instead co-constructing experiences with children and providing scope for children to do for themselves, thereby letting the child’s sense of agency do its work
- Sustaining engagement with the child over time
- Making the child’s voice audible and their insights visible through authentic documentation.

ENGAGING CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

It is of high importance that the consultation strategies are inclusive of all children, including children with additional needs. It is therefore important to adapt strategies to best suit the needs of all children participating.

This includes understanding that the sensory environment may impact on the depths to which a child is able to fully able to participate and articulate their thoughts, and being prepared to adjust to provide an equitable environment.

In the case of non-verbal children it is useful to interview more than one adult who knows the child well to confirm that observations of what the child is expressing is consistent and hence represents a true reflection of the child’s voice.

Further considerations and strategies for consulting children with additional needs are identified in the ‘Useful resources and links’ section

WHY MULTIPLE MODES?

Consulting with children is more than a one-off event – it involves sustained engagement over time. What occurs before and after the consultations is as important as the consultations themselves.

Children’s voices lie at the heart of consulting with children. By ‘children’s voices’ we mean children’s expression of their meaning through talk and other ways, such as visual arts, dance, movement, song, music, poetry, photography, drawing, drama and writing – the “hundred languages of children”, to quote Loris Malaguzzi (quoted in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012).

We encourage that children’s voices are channeled through multiple modes so that children might express their meanings as fully and richly as possible.

CHOOSING THE MEANS OF ENGAGING CHILDREN

Early childhood education settings will have lots of ideas and activities that can help children explore the questions and themes such as:

- Through movement and role play
- Photography and information technology
- Art, music, dance and song
- Themed drawing and painting
- Diagrams, pictures, maps and paintings
- Story telling
- Dioramas

Planning and preparing children’s consultations to ensure the consultations are:

- Adequately resourced in terms of material, time and people support
- Appropriate for the children who engage in the consultations
- Involve sustained engagement over time and multiple means of expression
- Documented as the consultations occur
- Analysed into themes as authentically as possible
- Children’s key messages fed back to them
- Used to influence planning and decision-making

EXPLORING THE THEMES

The central theme to be explored by children as part of this consultations is:
‘what is important to children in their communities and what do children wish for in their lives?’

When undertaking consultations with young children it is important to frame the questions as themes to be explored and allow adequate time for exploration of the subject matter. On-the-spot questioning is not likely to engage young children or give them opportunity to express their views in the most authentic or meaningful way.

It should be kept in mind that young children may not have prior experience or understanding of the theme being explored. Therefore a process whereby children are able to develop an understanding and a view on a particular matter is the key to a consultation process. The subject matter should be broken down into its various elements to be explored to ensure a deeper understanding of the issues.

LISTENING AND CAPTURING WITH MINIMUM BIAS

Through whatever means children use, it is children’s voices that matter when consulting with them about issues affecting them. Children are insightful. Avoiding bias requires visible, active listening using all senses. It is important not to impose our adult frames of reference or put words in children’s mouths.

DOCUMENTING THE CONSULTATIONS

“Applying a child perspective means not just observing children and displaying visual artifacts concerning them on notice boards, but also talking with children about how they perceive visual documentation i.e., applying both a child perspective in analysing what is said about children and children’s perspectives capturing children’s own meaning making.” (Sparrman & Lindgren, 2010)

Documenting the consultations as they proceed is important to ensure that we capture the child’s thoughts and opinions with minimal reliance on recall or other methods that may inadvertently bias data collected.

Accuracy is helped by audio and video-recording; and reinforces authenticity through directly capturing what children say and express.

- Through filmed or recorded ‘snippets’ around observations
- Using a recording format
- On post-it notes or in a notebook as they talked with children
- Making sure that this documentation focused on the children’s words
- Photographs
- Stickers to record child’s age group, identifier and demographic

DISCLOSURE

If a child makes a disclosure about personal circumstances, concerns or issues that require follow up or support, facilitators and educators should follow their employers’ usual policy or process.

At the conclusion of consultations with children, it is likely there will be a high volume of data to organise and interpret. The data will likely include children's artistic or creative expression, as well as adult's written documentation of children's verbal expression. This information may also be from a range of consultations involving different staff and different consultation strategies, resulting in a variety of ways that children's voices are captured.

COLLECTION FOR ANALYSIS

Once all activities have concluded ensure all electronic documentation has been prepared for collection by following the Data/asset preparation for collection flowchart in [Appendix D](#)
Email hello@handsupmallee.com once you have completed your voices activities to arrange collection.

Final collection dates are from 23rd June to 28th June 2019.

ANALYSING AND THEMING

Hands Up Mallee has a working group consisting of people with Early Years training that will analyse and categorise what children say. Input from the practitioners who facilitated the consultations may be called for if there is any uncertainty in interpreting the data collected from children.

CONSIDERING CULTURE FOR ACCURATE INTERPRETATION

Where children are from an Indigenous background / identify as Indigenous the assistance of Indigenous community members or those close to the child will be sought in interpreting the data collected to ensure a valid culturally accurate interpretation is reached.

Where possible this personal insight will be gained for the voice children of CALD Backgrounds.

Personal insight may also be necessary if there has been trauma that may make an accurate interpretation difficult for the working group.

Children with a disability or neuro-diversity should be afforded the benefit of someone with a strong connection with them (both during consultation and interpretation) assisting to ensure that their participation is equitable.

TO CHILDREN

What happens after the consultations and data interpretation is as important as the process itself. Providing feedback to children (and all who were) involved in consultations, tracking the uptake and interpretation of children's messages, and communicating it back to the children and outward to broader community and stakeholders, are all key elements of the final stages of meaningful consultations.

During consultations, children's views on how they would like to receive feedback should be gathered, with the understanding that not all options may be viable. Children for example might like a public exhibition of the creative works created during the process, or an on-line space that makes the children's voices accessible.

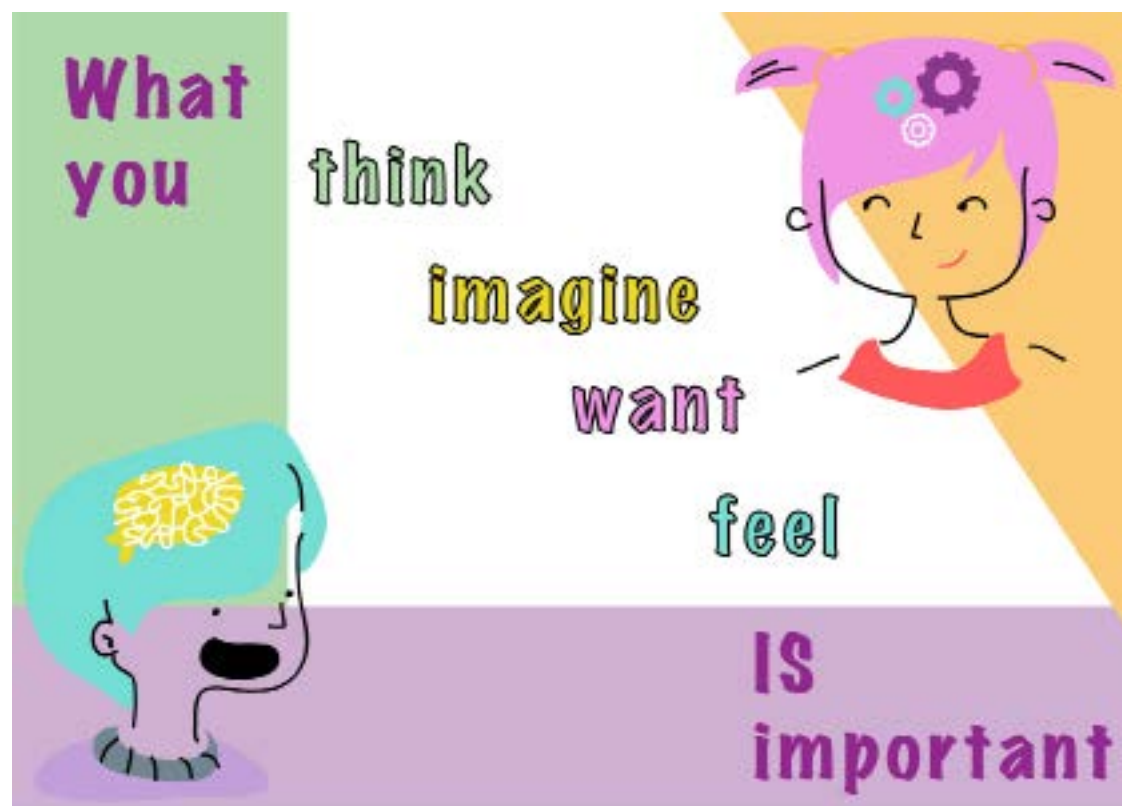
The children and all who were involved will be fully informed of the outcomes of their input. This is as important for adults as it is for children and demonstrates that children's input has been valued and that the relationship is a partnership.

TO COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS

A report will be developed to provide feedback to children, and to all who were involved in the consultations. It will also be available publicly so children's messages inform the broader community and stakeholders.

HOW THE INFORMATION WILL BE MEANINGFULLY USED

The report developed from the consultations will be used to inform the work of Hands Up Mallee in the Best Start to Life age range (3-8 years), the Mildura Rural City Council Municipal Early Years Plan, and will be publicly available so other services, businesses and community members are able to access it and use the data to inform decisions being made in our community.



Dear _____

The _____ has been asked to participate in the Hearing Children's Voices project.

Local children aged 3-8 will be asked:

- What they like about where they live, learn and play
- What they don't like about where they live, learn and play
- What they imagine for their future

The project is a chance for children to share their views which will be used to inform community development including:

- The Mildura Rural City Council Municipal Early Years Plan

The project aims to show children that they can have a say in decisions that affect them and that their opinions are important in our community. The project activities will take place during their normal class/session times and be led by their usual educators.

For your child's voice to be used to have an impact on community development we are asking for consent to:

- Include your child's views and artistic works in the development of the Mildura Rural City Council Municipal Early Years Plan. Also to display at the conclusion of the project;

and/or

- The possible use of your child's photographic image, audio or visual footage being provided in Hands Up Mallee for the purposes of use in: educational and promotional activities; newsletters and publications.

If you do not wish to provide consent, then your child will still join the fun and activities, but no personal information will be recorded or shared, and their views will not be recorded or shared.

If you have any concerns or require additional information I encourage you to contact me to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely
(Insert name and contact details).

I give permission for (child's name): _____

to participate in the hearing children's voices project

their views to be used to inform the Municipal Early Years Plan

their artwork and other project materials to be displayed and published

their photographic image, audio or visual footage to be used for educational and promotional purposes

Parent / Carer name: _____

Parent / Carer signature: _____

EDUCATOR REFLECTIONS FORM - VOICES OF CHILDREN

Early Years Service / School name: _____

Age range of children: _____ Number of children: _____

Was the guide useful? Yes No

Why / why not? _____

Describe the activities you used to listen to the voices of children?

Did this work well? Yes No

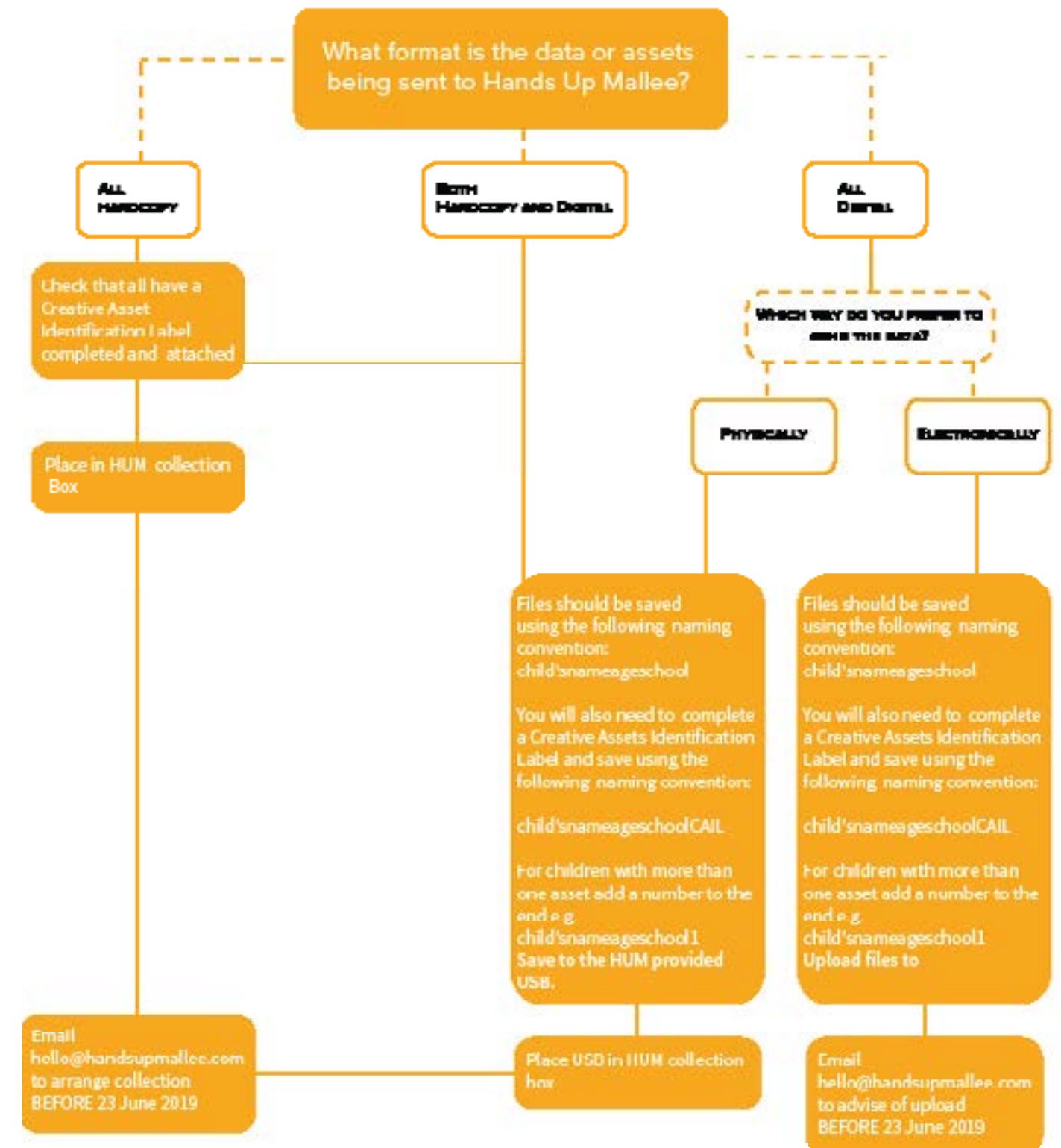
Is there anything you would change about or add to the activity?

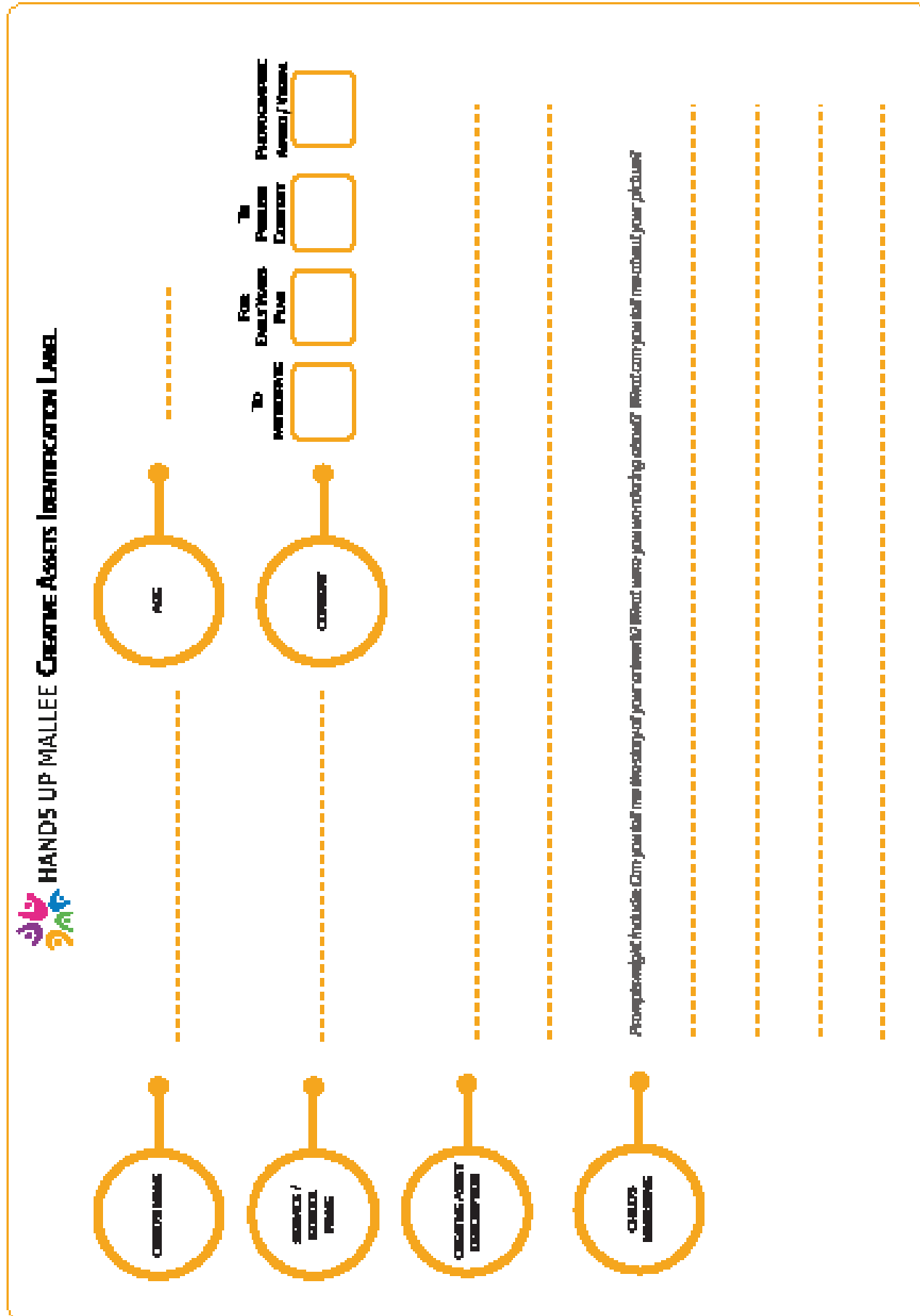
What could have been done to better prepare or support you through this process?

What are the learnings from the activity for educators?



The voices of children project Data / Asset preparation for collection





Children’s Voices - A principled framework for children and young people’s participation as valued citizens and learners
<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/childrens-voices-framework.pdf>

Consulting with children with disabilities as service users
<https://www.tcd.ie/tricc/assets/pdfs/crc-archive/2006-Whyte-Consulting-Disability-Exec-summ.pdf>

How to involve children and young people with communication impairments in decision-making
<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/involving-children-communication-impairments-decision-making>

Learning to listen - Consulting children and young people with disabilities
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/learning-listen-consulting-children-and-young-people-disabilities>

Mildura Rural City Council Early Years Municipal Plan
<https://www.mildura.vic.gov.au/.../council-plans.../municipal-early-years-plan-2015-2018.pdf>

Bray, R., & Clacherty, G. (2009), An analytical review of literature, thinking and practice towards child and youth participation in East and Southern Africa. Johannesburg: RIATT

Children's Voices - A principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/childrens-voices-framework.pdf>

Ecological Model adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf>

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (Eds) (2012) The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation (3rd Edn), Westport, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing

National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about>

Sparrman, A., & Lindgren, A. (2010), Visual documentation as a normalizing practice: A new discourse of visibility in preschool, *Surveillance & Society*, 7(3/4): 248-261

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/convention-rights-child>

UNICEF's Framework and Vision for Child Friendly Cities

<https://childfriendlycities.org/>

Victorian Curriculum Foundation - 10

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/f10index.aspx>

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/index.aspx>



HANDS UP MALLEE

VISIT: 154a Ninth Street
Mildura VIC 3500

MAIL: Po Box 10184
Mildura VIC 3502

PHONE: (03) 5021 7671

FAX: (03) 5021 7672

EMAIL: Jane McCracken
Executive Officer
jmccracken@schs.com.au