Chapter 7 Activities

Activity

Anna, working with children (and adults) in Darfur, is mainly concerned with keeping children alive in the very difficult circumstances in which they live and MSF is reliant on voluntary donations for the work it does so she is working with scarce resources. In contrast, Teresa is in a context where the basic requirements for life are taken for granted and her concern is to support a group of children's learning and development through a very sensitive understanding of each individual child.

Each context has challenges but they are very different. Think about the sort of challenges that face Anna and Teresa in relation to issues raised earlier in the book:

a. What kind of rights is Anna likely to be most concerned about? How might these differ from the rights that Teresa might be concerned with? (Chapter 2)
b. Which of the following factors identified in Chapter 6 might be influencing the ability of families to provide for children's rights in each of these contexts?
   ● The consumer society
   ● Over and under employment
   ● Relative poverty
   ● The commodification of children as social and emotional assets
   ● The perception of danger and blame
   ● Absolute poverty
   ● Children being economic assets
   ● War and political repression

c. Where does the funding for each of these contexts come from? Do these stem from legal or moral considerations? (Chapter 2)
d. What kind of factors might be 'silencing' the voices of the children in each context? (Chapter 4)
e. What might Anna and Teresa be able to do to support the children's voices being heard? (Chapter 4)

Activity

1. The services in this table will have norms concerning the space and time that is given to children being involved in decision making. Look back at the Key points Spaces and Norms in Decision making in Chapter 5 (page 115) and see how they fit in with the key focus for each service.
2. The key focus for each service and the implications for those working in the service are likely to reflect different ways of thinking about children and the kinds of relationships that exist between children and adults. Look back at Table 2.4, 'Rights, Children and Adults', in Chapter 2 and think about the kinds of relationship that are implicit in each of the services.

Activity

Identify the difficulties that workers in these different services might face. Look at the examples in earlier chapters to extend your thinking:

Youth Justice system – research by Kilkelly (page 119–22 in Chapter 5),
Education – the points made by Anderson (page 117) in Chapter 5,
Social Services – the Cleveland enquiry (page 154) in Chapter 6 and Gorin's research in Chapter 6 (page 156).

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Activity

Think about those such as teachers and day care workers who work with groups of children rather than individuals. Think about those such as teachers and probation officers who are trying to balance the requirements of society with the rights of children.

How easy do you think it is for them to engage in relationships of this kind?

Activity

These pointers echo points that are made in Chapter 4 Table 4.2 (page 89) on 'Silence and Voice', and 'Key Ideas: Voice and Participation Rights', (page 90), concerning children's voices and participation in decision making. Look back at these chapters and identify what the implications are for those working with children.

Activities

The following activities are designed to help reflect back over the book as a whole. Key themes are identified with activities that relate to the theme in a number of chapters.

Theme 1 – the children's rights agenda: silencing and voice

Chapter 4 identified three particular ways that can be helpful in considering the complex factors silencing children when working with children. These were as follows:

- The worth of children's voices,
- The ways that social exclusion silences children,
- The dominance of adult orientated ways of communicating and decision making.

The following activities ask you to review the research examples in relation to these three kinds of factor.

a. The first factor was described as

a child's voice is not given *worth,* in terms of adults not treating their ideas or opinions as having value or legitimacy. Here the idea of 'voice' is attached to areas such as judgement, maturity, capability and power.

Review the ways of working with children, as described in Chapter 5 (page 123), and drawn from Weijers (2004), and identify how the right to participate was engaged with positively in terms of ideas of worth, judgement, maturity, capability and power.

b. The second was described as

'broad factors that exclude sectors of the population have an impact upon the children's participation' including poverty, class, gender, disability and sexuality.

Review the ways of working with children described in Chapter 4, 'Example of Research: Ask Us!', and identify how the right to participate was engaged with in ways that relate to challenging factors relating to the exclusion experienced by children in relation to society's attitudes towards disability.

c. The third was described as

barriers to children's right to participate . . . adult-orientated ways of communication and involvement in participation.

Review the ways of working with children described in Chapter 7, 'Example of Successful Working 2', and identify how the right to participate was engaged with in ways that developed ways of communicating and participating that were child centred and addressed barriers set up by adult ways of communication and involvement.

Theme 2 – rights-informed approaches to relating to children: decision making

Chapter 5 discussed the Social Care Institute for Excellence's guide to enabling the participation of children and young people in work concerning social care. They proposed that even when an organization says that it is committed to a culture of participation, they do not always change their ways of working as a result. Their argument includes the idea that unless children and young people can influence decision-making processes their right to participate will not be effectively realized. They proposed four areas to assist in organizations review. Chapter 5 summarized the elements that combine to enable decision making:

Culture: the ethos of an organization, shared by all staff and service users, which demonstrates a commitment to participation;

Structure: the planning, development and resourcing of participation evident in an organization's infrastructures;

Practice: the ways of working, methods for involvement, skills and knowledge which enable children and young people to become involved;

Review: the monitoring and evaluation systems which enable an organization to evidence change affected by children and young people's participation.

Re-examine the two following examples of research into practice with children: 'Example of Research: Rights, Families and Religion', Chapter 6 (pages 147–8), and 'Example of Research: Consultation with Young Children', Chapter 4 (pages 104–5).

a. Does the example indicate whether the culture demonstrates a commitment to *participation*? If it does – how does it do that? If not, how do you think change could be effected to create such a culture? In reflecting on this think especially about the organizational *structures* that are in place, or that could be changed.

b. Does the example include effective *practice* – ways of working or methods – that enables children and young people to be involved? If it does – how does it do that? If not, how do you think change could be effected to create methods? In reflecting on this think especially about whether there is effective involvement of children in *reviewing* the organization.

Theme 3 – tensions, spaces and relationships: family, best interest and rights

Chapter 1 discussed the idea that an emerging theme within children's rights concerned tensions 'between the different spaces and relationships within which children live their lives. One of this book's key themes concerns the tensions between children's experiences of spaces where rights informed policies and laws operate and where they do not.' Chapter 6 discussed a key aspect of this tension, concerning the relationship between children's rights, children's position in their family and issues concerning those working with children. It talks about the relationship between the concept of 'best interests' and the role of carer in the following way:

the concept of 'the child's best interests' makes it clear that carers need to be aware of the power relationship that they have with the child and acknowledge that their personal interests may be in conflict with the child's. Knowing the child's thoughts on the matter can only be beneficial in trying to make the best decision.

The main implication of these ideas is that in order for carers to act in the best interests of the child, they need to be aware of and respect the views of the child. This doesn't mean that the child will always do exactly what he or she wants but he or she will participate in discussions about what actions might be best. Interestingly, Thomas's research into children's participation in decision making found that 'what they wanted was above all the opportunity to take part in dialogue with adults, not for either themselves or the adults to determine the outcome' (146).

Look back at the examples.

Decision Making and Participation Rights in Education, Chapter 5
Example of Research: Participation and Protection, Chapter 6,
Example of Research: Children's Response to Services, Chapter 7
What ideas about 'the best interests of the child' emerge from the adults and children in the examples?
How are children's views of what they think is in their 'best interests' taken into account?
How might the dialogue between adults and children concerning what is 'in the child's best interests' be supported in each example?

Chapter 7

This example is from Anna Kent, a voluntary worker for Medecin Sans Frontiers in Darfur, a region in the Sudan, where war has affected people's lives for many years (Kent, 2007).

> I want to tell you about Nyachoul, a 1-and-a-half year old girl who was brought in two days ago. I was doing the night-shift on-call and got a radio call in my tukul at about 2am that a seriously unwell child had been brought in. As I arrived, it was clear the baby was very ill; she had the remains of a measles rash and she was showing signs of malnourishment and dehydration, which is often a fatal combination. She was dreadfully thin, flopped against her mum like a rag doll, had sunken eye sockets and did not even have the strength to take breast milk. She was silent, as she didn't even have the energy to cry.

> I will be honest – I was filled with a variety of emotions. Most were for the well being of the child, but a small amount was directed towards the parents. I thought, 'How could you let your child get this bad before getting help?' There was no time for musing over these thoughts though – we gave the child an NG (a tube from the nose that goes straight into the stomach) and some rehydration liquid, and within a few minutes the baby was alert, looking around and had the strength to start feeding. Over the night we gave her NG nutrients and encouraged her to feed from the mum.

> The next day we were able to take out the NG tube and today the baby even started to take some solid therapeutic food, which is great. Her saggy skin has filled out and she has energy to laugh and play (and inevitably cry when the 'kawaii' me – approaches. . . . I am the first white person she has ever seen and I did put an NG tube in her, so I can't really blame her for being afraid of me!)

> I have spent some time trying to understand the answer to my initial internal question of the parents . . . how does this happen?? From looking at the parents, they obviously care for the child; they were distraught and they too are very thin. They have explained to me the different pressures their day-to-day lives hold. They live a hard, six-hour walk from the hospital, across swamps and rivers that no doubt hold crocodiles and snakes. Neither of them own shoes and there are no other health services nearer to them. They also had no food from last year's harvest left. They knew they had to cultivate their land to provide food for the rest of the family before the rains started in earnest or they would all go hungry. They realised Nyachuol was sick from the measles, but they felt they couldn't risk the lives of the rest of the family by not digging the sorghum lines.

Teresa works in the United Kingdom with children who have special needs. One of the children she works with, Kevin, is 9 years old and cortically blind, is doubly incontinent and epileptic. Here, Teresa is reflecting on a video of her work with Kevin:

> Work with Kevin starts abruptly with me announcing, 'We'll go and find your ball.' . . . When he moves from crouching to a high kneeling position I say, 'good kneeling' but on reflection Kevin's action looked like a communicative gesture of joining in than a mere motor action. Later when the toy organ stops working and I say so Kevin says 'oh dear' . . . again I missed it perhaps because Kevin often says this as a catchphrase. However on this occasion the words were meaningful and deserved a response to underline the fact.
>
> I omit to let Kevin feel the ball at the start of the activity, one of the few ways of working out what is going on. Kevin successfully locates the ball. I reward him with an enthusiastic 'good boy, well done' but did not reinforce the meaning of the situation by saying what he had done.
>
> There is a beautiful snatch of film where Kevin and James interact with each other, a notoriously rare event for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. To my shame, although I am working with Tim I clearly see this happening and take no affirming action and simply intervene when the contact becomes rough. This effectively terminates the interaction.
>
> The contact begins with Kevin trying to further inflate a silver balloon (the inside of a wine box). Kevin rustles it. James snatches at and rustles it and then Kevin rustles it again and pulls it away. James shrieks and then Kevin pats him on the back, pulling the smaller child towards him. I could intervene sensitively at a number of points . . . Instead I pull the two boys slightly apart with the words 'stop fighting'. On continued replaying of the video it can be seen that after initially pulling James, Kevin says 'be careful' as if telling himself and then becomes gentler an instant before I intervene.
>
> <div align="right">(Lehane 1992 cited in Ghaye and Ghaye, 38–9)</div>

Chapter 7 Example of research

Example of research: gender inequalities

In reviewing research on children's gendered experiences Morrow (2006) gives and example of how playworkers can ignore children's perceptions of gender differences and create inequalities in their settings:

> Playworkers utilised adult discourses of equality of opportunity when they wanted to prevent what they saw as boys' subversive attempts to take over space, being used by girls, for football. The boys interpreted these adult attempts to limit football in terms of unequal gendered relations in clubs, primarily because most play workers were women. As one 10-year old boy explained: 'They treat girls differently, and they treat boys like they are things that don't belong here'.
>
> (Smith and Barker, 2000, cited in Morrow, 2006, p. 97)

Reflection on research

The workers in this setting were acting in what they believed to be in the best interests of the girls, but this was without getting the perceptions of any of the children. As a result, they were unable to deal with a further tension

- between the rights of individuals or groups of children with particular interests.

Although different professionals will be subject to different kinds of pressures the implications for all workers are that they need to be aware of

- the tensions between the rights of different individuals and groups and develop personal and collective strategies for resolving these,
- the perceptions of all those involved,
- their powerful position in relation to children and to parents/carers.

Activity
How do you think the playworkers might have dealt with the boys' domination of space in a way that left both the boys and the girls feeling that a fair outcome had been reached?

Example of research: what children want from those who work with them – 1

The Children Act Now (Aldgate and Statham, 2001) identified qualities in professionals that are important to children:

- reliability – keeping promises;
- practical help;
- the ability to give support;
- time to listen and respond;
- seeing children's lives in the round, not just the problems.

Reflection on research

Activity

Look back at the points that parents made about their relationship with services provided by the state in Chapter 6 (page 155). Identify the similarities in what parents and children are looking for. Why do you think there are some similarities?

Example of research: what children want from those who work with them – 2

Thomas (2000), researching the experience of children in care, identified that what was most important for these children was that their point of view was taken into account and they were taken seriously. At the heart of this was the need for their workers to be good communicators, and they identified a number of factors that were important in ensuring this:

- *Time:* Children want adults to have time to spend with the child and to work at their pace so the child stays in control.
- *Relationships, trust and honesty:* Children want adults who are 'straight' with them.
- *Active listening:* Responding to cues, restating and drawing out the meaning of what the child is saying alongside the expression of warmth, empathy and acceptance.
- *Choice, information and preparation:* Children are more likely to have their say if they have been prepared for the discussion and given time to think.
- *Support and encouragement:* Children don't like 'being put on the spot' and need support to say things that might be difficult. They don't want to be judged or criticized.
- *Activities:* Children identified games, drawing and other activities that can be less boring than sitting and talking.
- *The child's agenda:* Children wanted to be given space to talk about what concerns them.
- *Serious fun:* If decision-making processes are made enjoyable (even around serious topics) children are more likely to get involved.

Reflection on research

Activity

Look back at Chapters 4 and 5 and their concerns with hearing children's voices and participation in decision making. How do you think the features of communication identified by children will support children's voices being heard and their participation in decision making?

Example of research: children's response to services

Research by Southon and Dhakal into the lives of Street children in Nepal identified how children used the services provided by voluntary organizations. The intention of most services was to get children off the streets and into mainstream society but the research found that

> Organisations are very much seen as a part of street life and not as a way out. Different organisations are used for different services – food, shelter, medical treatment, emergency support, clothes, shelter, and recreational facilities. It is these open-access services, supporting their independent living, which were positively assessed by children. . . . Street children will continue to use services offered but unless organisations learn to work in the street environment they will have no impact on the important development stage of a significant number of children living on the street.

The following are some of the observations that children made about the different organizations indicating they were very clear about the type of support they needed and their resistance to being controlled by the organizations.

> There is a local group which gives us rice but they always scold us even when eating rice!
>
> (Baneswor, 12 years old)

> Organization D is very good because it sometimes gives food, and gives clothes each year. It gives us medicine and helps us when we are in trouble.
>
> (Baneswor, 13 years old)

> I like organization D very much. They always set a time and come here and wake us up if we are asleep. Other organizations take you to their centre for no reason or scold and bully us. I like organization D because they always keep their promises. They recognize that games and enjoyment are important for us. They stay and eat together with us as brothers. But, there is a long process for training. I don't know when it will be available. I don't have confidence.
>
> (New Bus Park, 15)

> In organization D all the staff love and care for us. This organization is the closest thing to me. Organization A only lets good children stay. They only let small and ill children stay. Organization F have invited me but I haven't been yet.
>
> (Maiti Devi, 14 years old)

Reflection on research

Activity

Organization D appears to be popular with these children. Can you identify some of Thomas' criteria for effective communication in the way that staff from organization D engage with children?

How might Organization D have a different interpretation of 'in the child's best interests' to Organization A?

Chapter 7 Example of successful working

Example of successful working – 1

Case and Haines (2004) report on a project in Swansea that aimed to prevent youth offending in Swansea through a range of initiatives that targeted risk factors. The risk factors were identifies with the aid of the young people and the initiatives were all based on the participation of the young people. The initiatives were as follows:

- *Promoting positive behaviour in schools*. This initiative wasn't just focused on changing the behaviour of the young people in school but was also concerned with tackling the school organization and ethos and developing family–school partnerships.
- *Family Group Conferencing (FGC)*. The restorative justice measure of FGC consists of all appropriate parties involved in school non-attendance or offending behaviour (e.g. young person, family, teachers, friends, victims) meeting to search for a way to find a positive resolution to the situation.
- *Mentoring*. A range of mentoring opportunities was provided, all based on the type of relationship advocated by Thomas (2000).
- *Cognitive-behavioural anger management*. These include individual as well as group sessions and give individuals the opportunity to talk about their perception of their difficulties
- *Youth access*. This acknowledged the difficulties that were experienced by some young people in a school setting and offered alternative settings for education and training to those who were at risk of exclusion.
- *Youth Action Groups (YAG)*. These involve young people in trying to find solutions to some of the risk factors associated with problem behaviours.

The evaluation found that the consultative approach empowered the young people in engaging in positive behaviour and avoiding behaviours that are seen to be anti-social.

Reflections on the research

This kind of work with young people involves both education and justice systems and overcomes some of the tensions around individual rights and the needs of society by involving all interested parties. While it was primarily involved with groups of young people, there were also opportunities through mentoring for young people to engage in individual positive relationships with adults. By involving the young people in identifying risk factors, rather than targeting particular groups on the grounds of socio-economic status or race, the interventions attempted to challenge stereotypes and avoid stigmatizing young people.

Activity

The authors of the research identify that

> the key objective is to produce a dynamic cultural shift within the City and County of Swansea such that Promoting Prevention exists as a strategy and a structure, which binds local agencies into a coordinated and comprehensive approach focused on enfranchising the local youth population and targeting disaffection. This requires commitment from all parties if Promoting Prevention is to supersede a more traditional 'signposting' role in order to empower young people's knowledge of and access to services. The ethos and methods of Promoting Prevention seek to create a local climate of change that values the ideals of 'community' and 'citizenship' within an integrated working model.

How do these intentions relate to the four elements: culture, structure, practice and review?

Example of successful working – 2

Research by Alison Clark (2001) with children aged 6 months to 5 years of age used a range of techniques (a 'mosaic' approach) to gain children's views about their setting. The techniques included

- Observations
- Interviewing and child conferencing
- Cameras
- Tours with the children guiding the adult
- Map making
- Parent and practitioner views.

Information from all these sources was brought together in order to understand what children were concerned about. They found that

- friends and changing friendships, including relationships with important adults and siblings;
- favourite spaces including 'hidden' spaces outside;
- conflict and how it is dealt with by adults;
- memories of important people who have left and aspirations about the future

were all important to the children and this helped those working with them to adapt the environment and the way they worked to take account of these concerns.

   Again, this example involves children as well as parents and professionals in decision making and gives opportunities for children to engage with adults individually in ways that are appropriate to their means of communication. It also ensures inclusion through the variety of communication techniques used.

Activity

Look back at the Ask Us! Example in Chapter 4 (pages 99–100). Identify the common factors in the mosaic approach and Ask us! example.

Chapter 7 Examples of concerns

Too many children are being criminalised and brought into the youth justice system at an increasingly young age. Between 2002 and 2006, crime committed by children fell, yet during the same period, it is estimated that there was a 26% increase in the number of children criminalised and prosecuted.

(2008, 34)

We are also concerned about the over-representation of black children in the criminal justice system and evidence of direct or indirect discrimination in policing and the youth justice system.

(2008, 32)

Children are, however, still not viewed as key participants in education: discussions around improving education are often adult-based and fail to include children and their views. We are also concerned that educational inequalities persist, despite considerable investment in education across the UK. Access to sufficient, quality education remains a problem for particular groups (such as Gypsy and Traveller children, children within the juvenile justice system and children in care).

(2008, 27)

Although social services might prefer to be involved in preventative work, family support and early intervention, in reality, financial pressures, demands on staff and an emphasis on the right of the child to be looked after by their parents mean that they often focus on children whose situations have reached crisis point.

(2008, 17)