

Service Evaluation with Pre-school Children

Children are not born knowing how to evaluate a service, but they are born able to express themselves about the things they like and don't like. "[Young Children's Citizenship](#)" (Neale et al 2004) discusses this in some detail.

The [Reggio Emilia](#) Approach suggests there are a hundred languages of children; each requiring a different way of listening.

The [Mosaic Approach](#) to listening to children is about offering lots of different ways for children to express themselves.



Children may not have a lot of experience or knowledge but they are active and capable learners. Consider what they have learned in their short lives so far. Adults need to learn from children about the children's learning; this is where they are the experts.

Children are very good at expressing how they think and feel now. It takes a lot of practice for them to think or remember how they felt at another time doing something different. The use of questionnaires with young children, even with symbols and emotion stickers, is not likely to provide clear information; they maybe choose an emotion sticker next to an activity because that is how they felt about the activity then, it is how they feel right now or because they prefer smiley faces.



Involving young children effectively in evaluating your service includes:

- 'Listening' to all the languages children use
- Learning alongside children
- Gathering evaluation information as you go not at a particular time
- Providing children with lots of practice at plan do review

Listening to different expressions:



Drawing with scribing ("Can you draw yourself feeling good at nursery? Tell me why you feel good").

Book making - "my book about .."- using photos/drawings/scribed comments.

Big art –drawing round child, write what that child likes/dislikes.

Treasure boxes – junk box with sculpted clay 'treasure' – representing things the child likes most in the setting

Show and tell – "Bring something from your favourite activity today and tell us about it"

Music making – make 'happy' and 'sad' music. Then take the children on an imaginary journey through their day and let them express happy or sad.

Drama – get children to express happy, sad, worried, angry, tired and then go through a day/activity and let the children act out their feelings.

Learning alongside children:

Sometimes children learn by standing back and taking in the whole picture, sometimes they home right in on a tiny detail of something to work it out. To evaluate a service it is good sometimes to stand back and look at the whole. Sometimes it is about getting right up close and being completely absorbed in the children's play.



Standing back



One member of staff can stand back and observe the whole room. The children need to know why, so they don't interrupt, but by doing this it will be possible to see how the whole space is used.

Doing this once a month/term will show which areas of the room could do with refreshing, where adult interaction might be most useful, where additional resources are needed etc. Tell the children what you have noted and involve them in deciding how it could be improved.

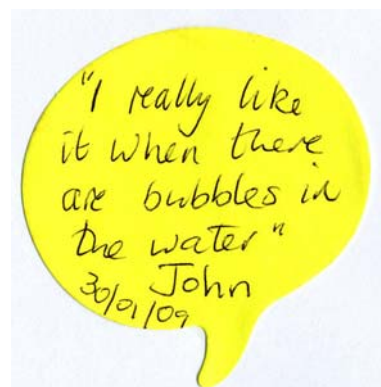
Getting up close

To learn by close observation, join in the play, finding how the children are playing and learning in that area. What is their conversation about? Can you help them follow this interest through and learn more? (e.g. change the role play area in to a shoe shop/garage whatever the interest is)

Gathering information as you go:

Show value to children's day to day expressions about their experience by capturing what they have said on [Post-its](#)/stickers and putting it up on an evaluation board.

Use a camera to catch children's facial expression and body language – display the photographs and encourage children to remember and talk about what they did- comments can be written beside the photos.



Put up a visual map of the room layout, different activities or different parts of routine (you could use symbols or photographs) and have emotion stickers available for children to place on the map whenever they want to – a range of emotions not just smiley faces.



[Makaton](#) emotion stickers

Practicing Plan-do-review

The [High Scope Approach](#) uses the Plan-Do-Review cycle with very young children. This encourages children to consider what they would like to do, then plan how to do it, carry out their plans and then review afterwards what they had learned.

So for example, a child wanting to paint a picture would make a plan working out that they needed to put on an apron, choose their paper, brushes and paints. They would then get these things and carry out their plan. Afterwards they would be responsible for putting away the painting and paint, washing the brushes and their hands, hanging up their apron. The review part would happen when an adult uses open questions to ask the child to tell them about what they did.



Children who become familiar with plan-do-review in small choices in their life can then be quite skilled in looking at the bigger things. This is a powerful way of enabling children to become involved in evaluation at every level for personal development to evaluating the service as a whole.

By offering a range of ways for children to become involved in evaluation you will improve your service and empower children to become active and engaged citizens knowing they can help shape their world.