



CREATIVE SKILLS

INFORMATION RESOURCE

The role of arts and creative experiences within an early years rights context

What are children's rights?

"Rights are a list of promises to children and young people to keep them safe. They are used to make sure you are treated fairly and looked after properly. When something is called a right, it means that nobody can take it away from you".

(Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland)

Children's rights are listed in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Scotland, as part of the UK, has signed up to protect these rights. The Scottish Government has committed to make these rights part of our law.

What do Children's Rights Look Like for 0-5s?

"...from an early age children are finding out about their rights, often through the way others treat them"

(Dr. Rosemary Roberts, Pre-Birth to Three Guidance, Scottish Government)

Babies and young children first learn about their rights through their experiences.

Long before young children can understand the concept of children's rights, they can develop a sense of their own agency, through their relationships with parents and carers, and through their surroundings, or environment.

Developing a sense of agency is key to fulfilling children's rights for 0-5s.

Agency

Feeling like you're the one in the driving seat when it comes to your own actions, the ability to act independently and make your own free choices.

The expressive arts and free choices for babies

Free choices for babies? Yup! Adults make so many decisions for babies and young children, it becomes crucial to find areas of their lives where they CAN make their own decisions and develop that all important sense of agency in a safe, supported way.

The expressive arts (things like movement, music, puppetry, visual art, storytelling etc) are a great vehicle for supporting babies and young children to begin to realise their rights!

Exploring arts experiences with babies and young children give them the chance to:

- **Make decisions**
- **Express themselves**
- **Develop that all important sense of agency**
- **Show their individual personality**

What should these arts experiences be like?

- Lots of opportunities for exploring and playing
- Engaging and inspiring – babies and children WANT to take part
- A space free from stress – no pressure to do things ‘correctly’
- Babies and young children are able to participate freely – no need to work towards a specific goal or product
- Time and space – to get stuck in, and to return to an experience another day
- Genuine, meaningful choices babies and young children can make themselves
- Babies and young children can see the results of the decisions they make.



What do we need adults to do?

- Understand how babies and young children can express their interests – through gaze, movement, facial expressions, noises and sounds
- Tune into those cues and respond to those interests
- Respect the choices children make (even if that means every painting ends up brown)
- Value the choices and self-expression of babies and young children
- Create environments where exploring is possible and encouraged (e.g. explore messy stuff where you don't need to worry about the carpet)
- Be enthusiastic, have a go (everyone can sing, dance, draw etc – you don't need to be Beyonce, just having a bash is more important)
- Play alongside children
- Introduce new ideas, textures, characters etc – you can and should bring your own ideas and creativity too!

What do babies and young children gain?

- Vital tools to enable them to realise their rights
- A vehicle to support expressing their views
- A sense of achievement
- A positive sense of self
- A voice
- What they do makes a difference
- Their choices have impact in their lives
- Confidence
- Valuing their own competence
- Their rights are met



Here Comes the 'Policy Bit'...

What does the UNCRC say about the expressive arts?

The UNCRC says that children have a right to relax, play, and take part in artistic and cultural activities (Article 31). The rights in the UNCRC are linked together and support each other – so supporting the right to participate in artistic activities promotes other rights including the right to be heard, to free expression, to development, to education and to recovery.

The Committee that oversees the UNCRC says:

“Play and recreation are essential to the health and well-being of children and promote the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills... Research evidence highlights that playing is also central to children’s spontaneous drive for development, and that it performs a significant role in the development of the brain, particularly in the early years”

(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 17)

Where does GIRFEC fit in?

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is Scotland’s approach to improving outcomes and wellbeing for children: its principles reflect the UNCRC. The GIRFEC approach uses wellbeing indicators: safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (SHANARRI).

Whenever the expressive arts give babies and young children opportunities for self-expression, decision-making and agency building, children are engaging with their rights. SHANARRI indicators can be used to link these experiences to wellbeing.

Why are we talking about this now?

Scotland is currently in the process of incorporating the UNCRC into law, which means means that people working at all levels of government will be under a statutory obligation to support children to realise their rights.



Lots of early years professionals, parents and carers explore the expressive arts with young children already, without thinking about them in terms of children's rights. However, if you know WHY these opportunities are important, you're more likely to keep them going and help babies and young children develop their sense of agency and express themselves.

Here are some examples of how arts experiences can be used to fulfil babies' and young children's rights.

These case studies come from early years professionals who took part in Starcatchers' Creative Skills Programme and introduced more creative approaches within their practice.

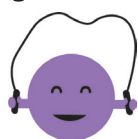
The Midlothian Case Study is an excellent example of how expressive arts can be used beyond 'activities'. In this setting, young children make decisions about the way they make their own transition. The music and movement makes these decisions meaningful, fun and introduces opportunity for self-expression.



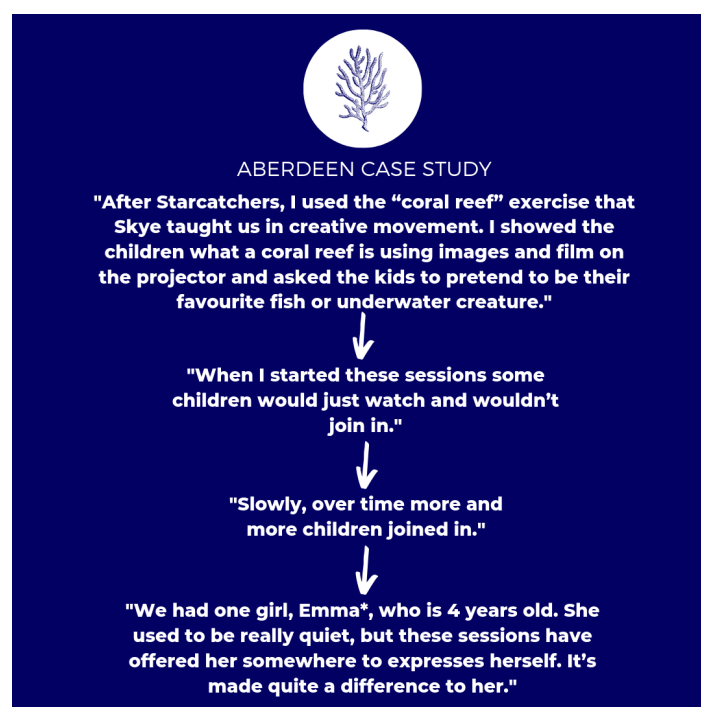
Respected

The Aberdeen Case Study shows how it can take time and regular opportunities to engage in the same experience to build the confidence and agency to take part. Wee ones respond brilliantly to repetition, so you don't need to dream up a whole new experience each time.

Pay attention to those non-verbal cues, and add in variations if and when you see their engagement begin to dip.



Active




The expressive arts supports verbal and non-verbal ways for children to express themselves. In this example, the children are given a voice in two ways: the opportunity to take part, and the adults listening to and valuing both ways of communicating. It's also a good example of how the arts can help us express views and feelings that we might otherwise not have been able to recognise or articulate.

Arts experiences like these can help us feel better, understand each other better, and bring us closer together.



**Healthy/
Nurtured**



NORTH AYRSHIRE CASE STUDY

"I felt some children in my group were showing signs of challenging behaviour. By knowing all the children well, I understood that a way for them to express their feelings could be through drawings or paintings."

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"They began to express their feelings through the materials. Their movements were sharp, sudden and harsh. This was a clear indication of how they were feeling."

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"I then introduced an acoustic guitar playing a low volume level. As a result of this the children's emotions changed and they became more engaged and happier."

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"each child [...] would describe what their art was. For example: 'that's me being shouted at by my gran that made me scared' and 'I'm sad in the picture because everyone wasn't being kind'. By discussing this the children were able to share how they felt."

Old MacDonald Masterclass: turning babyhood classics into agency and children's rights

Songs like Old MacDonald are great for giving young children opportunities to make fun decisions and develop their own agency as someone who can communicate and influence the world around them.

"When my daughter was only a few months old we had a glove with different animals on each finger, and I would sing the verses changing the animal depending on which finger she grabbed. If she grabbed the duck twenty times in a row, I sang Quack Quack twenty times.





“You can use the same technique letting a child choose a toy, or even turning the pages of a picture book . If you have farm animals, that might be a good place to start, but a lot of fun can be had trying to think up noises for a farm with a dragon or a shoe or an umbrella. Older children may only need a pause after ‘and on that farm she had a.....’ to give them the opportunity to choose the animal, or other random character/object they want.

(Arts from the Start Starcatchers blog, 2016)

Making My Mark

Making My Mark is a Starcatchers’ campaign celebrating the role that arts and creative experiences can play in helping our youngest citizens learn about their rights.

Through this campaign we want to inspire grown-ups to put arts and creative experiences at the heart of interactions with babies and young children 0-5.

“Through art, babies, toddlers and young children make their mark on this world – they have a voice”

Rhona Matheson, Chief Executive, Starcatchers

Watch our [short film](#)

Join us @StarcatchersUK on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with **#MakingMyMark**.

We’ll be sharing:

Everyday ideas for artistic and creative activities with babies and young children

Moments when babies and young children are exploring, experimenting, getting stuck in and expressing themselves. We’ll do this through our performances, community projects and work with early years settings.

Contribute your own observations and ideas!

@StarcatchersUK

www.starcatchers.org.uk/making-my-mark

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