The Children's Perspectives Protocol

A participatory approach

to studying

child work issues

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Introduction and outline

Summary

The Children's Perspectives Protocol comprises semi-structured activities and games focusing on key themes in children's lives. They are used as resources for group work.   Many are based around locally-produced picture-cards which participants are asked to compare, sort and rank, yielding a combination of individual and group responses. In brief, the activities are:

Activity 1:   'My Day' invites young people to describe their daily lives, orally and using drawings and mapping techniques;

Activity 2   'My Work' explores the circumstances of children's work and the detail of the activities they undertake;

Activity 3   'Who matters?' asks about young people's social networks, the quality of key relationships, as well as their own self-evaluation;

Activity 4:   'Work and school' asks what participants consider are the bad as well as the good things about their work, and then repeats the activity for school, before establishing which is their preference;

Activity 5   'Which work is best?' asks participants to rank children's occupations (including their own) in terms of relative desirability/undesirability, and explores the criteria on which young people base these judgements;

Activity 6   What is a Child?' examines young people's own views on child development. They are asked to chart a wide range of work activities in terms of age- appropriateness;

Activity 7:   'What if?' presents young people with common dilemmas facing working children and invites them to comment in terms of what is likely to happen next and what could done to help;

Activity 8 'Life-stories' provides investigators with an opportunity to explore the issues in Activity 1-7 with a particular child, in order to enrich the level of detail provide from group work.

The origins of the protocol

This protocol was constructed as part of the Radda Barnen project *Children's perspectives on their working lives* . It provided the framework for local investigators carrying-out the initial study with 50 groups of working children in diverse occupations in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines and Central America.

- The protocol was designed to inform popular assumptions about the impact of work in children's lives with evidence on children's own perception of their situation;

- The protocol is applied in ways sensitive to the local circumstances of working children, and their preferred ways of communicating their experiences;

- The protocol can be adapted to provide systematic, detailed accounts of specific occupational situations in ways that can inform context-appropriate interventions;

Why study children's perspectives?

Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a child-centred way must include the perspectives of working children and young people (7-14), whose 'best interests' are to be promoted . Context-appropriate interventions must take account of the way they understand the impact of work in their lives, and provide practical opportunities for their participation. For example:

- In what ways do they feel their work affects their health, their social, emotional, intellectual and moral development - in harmful and beneficial ways? How do they feel their situation can be improved?

- To whom do they feel most accountable in their working lives? How far are their working lives shaped by their parents' expectations? Do they feel any personal autonomy in making choices about their present work, or their future prospects?

- What do they believe is in their best interests? How do they feel their situation can best be improved? What kinds of intervention/support would they welcome? How are their views shaped by their economic and family circumstances, and their understanding of the realistic opportunities for education and personal development?

A group approach

The protocol was designed for use with groups of children who share common work experiences. They are normally the same gender, approximate age band, occupation and family circumstances. Through a group approach, children's perspectives are explored through games and discussion which is less threatening than one-to one interviews.

The success of the protocol depends on the preparation and skill of local fieldworkers who convene the groups of children and young people. As part of their preparation it is essential that fieldworkers recognise their own beliefs and prejudices on child work issues. Only when they have 'set these aside' will they be able to listen to the children with 'an open mind'. Spending time establishing rapport with groups is essential if they are to feel confident to talk about their lives. Informal conversations, playing games, sharing a snack, etc. can all help this process, which may take hours or days depending on the group and their circumstances.

The activities were designed as a sequence, but some flexibility is possible over the inclusion and ordering of activities according to the purposes of a local study. It is essential that activities are adapted to local circumstances, literacy levels, children's preferences for talking, drawing, role-playing etc. Local fieldworkers must also pace the activities to take account of children's interest, concentration, fatigue etc., with a balance kept between talk and activity-based aspects of the protocol and regular breaks for exercise, snacks etc. Finally they must keep an accurate record of what the children say and do. Making an audio or video recording can seem a distraction at first, but experience suggests that many groups can feel empowered by the opportunity to record their views, especially if they are invited to participate in the process. These recordings are an important source of detailed evidence about children's perspectives, along with rankings and ratings required for several of the activities. Drawings, mapping, charts and role-play can also be a rich source of information, along with case studies of individual children's history, experiences and aspirations.

As a rule, the more time spent getting to know the children and carrying out the activities the better. How much time is spent with a group will determine the depth of information obtained. As a **minimum**, allow at least 2 days for carrying-out and writing-up each group convened.

Planning for group work

A minimum team of two people carry-out the group work.

• A *Group Facilitator* takes responsibility for running the groups and introducing the activities. Many are built around picture cards depicting children in various occupations and circumstances. These must be prepared in advance or drawn with the children. The Facilitator must also prepare materials for drawing, role play etc. It is essential that the Facilitator gets to know the young people well, can talk in their language, is non-threatening and has gained their confidence. There are important issues about how status and identity of the group facilitator will affect the success of the project. Gender especially is an issue - in most settings, girls will not respond to a male facilitator.

• A *Group Recorder* is responsible for observing the groups, noting children's responses to the structured activities, and making and audio (or video) record of the discussion for transcription later. The group recorder must have research skills, and be able to complete data summaries. Standard data sheets are available to guide recording information. The Recorder most also present to the children in a friendly and non-threatening way. While groups are being run it may be helpful to have a third person available to deal with practical issues, payment of the children, providing refreshments etc.

Look for a 'neutral' location to convene the groups, some distance from children's work, their school and their families. The location for group work should be quiet, undisturbed and feel familiar, informal and comfortable to the children. The tape recorder microphone should be well-placed to record what is being said. A warm, informal, friendly relationship must be established with the children. The Group Facilitator must not present as an authority-figure. The status differential can be reduced through informal dress, manner, where you sit, how you speak etc. Refreshments should be arranged, and time organised to give variety and fun. If children are getting bored with an activity, abandon it and come back to it later. Pay children for giving up their time - pay a little more than they could expect to earn for the time they give.

Children's Consent

The purposes of the group work must be made clear to children and the outcome, including any impact it may have on their work in the case of planned intervention. Children must have given their own informed consent, along with other stakeholders as appropriate. It is essential that research teams also make their own judgement about any risks to children that might follow from group work. They also need to be clear in advance about issues of confidentiality, and where to refer a child if they disclose abuse or require other support.

Further information

This guide offers a brief summary of the activities used in the study of children's perspectives. For further details about the activities, about the collection of systematic information and about the analysis and interpretation of activities, contact the research coordinator: Dr Martin Woodhead, Centre for Human Development and Learning, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, U.K.

Activity 1: 'My Day'

AIMS

*Find out how children divide-up/describe their day.
*Estimate the time they spend on each part of their day

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Create a profile of children's daily life:. Base this activity around 'yesterday'. This is more likely to give accurate information, than asking in general terms about a 'typical' day. Ask:
What did you do yesterday?

Take each part of the day in turn:
What did you do in the morning?
What did you do in the afternoon?
What did you do in the evening?

We are especially interested in:
*The range of activities and pattern of the daily timetable.
*The amount of time given to work, domestic chores, school, play, washing, eating, and sleeping.

Mapping techniques may help children explore their day in space and time. Try to pin-down times of activities so we can estimate hours spent on domestic chores, at work and at school. If children aren't used to 'clock-time', find other markers for their day (sunrise, sunset, school time, meals etc.). In some contexts children may be able to do this as an individual task, which can then be shared. For others it is best done as a group activity, agreed by the group. It can be drawn as a mobility map or children can make a chart chart/timetable of daily life. This activity could be followed up by more detailed photo-records, diaries or audio-diaries made by children of their daily lives (as part of 'Lifestories' - see below)

2. Talk about the profile:

Discuss how far there is a shared timetable amongst the group.
Take note of individual differences.
Ask about other days in the week e.g. market days, Sundays
Ask about other seasons if appropriate e.g. harvest time, planting times, festivals.
Notice the comments that children are making as they do this task. These will be followed-up later.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:

Individual and/or group daily timetable chart (especially showing work, school domestic chores and play) including estimates of times.
Additional information/ charts to show individual, weekly, seasonal variations.
Notes and transcriptions of issues and incidents mentioned by children.
Photos, pictures, tapes, diaries (as appropriate).

Activity 2: 'My work'

AIMS

*Explore more detail about the work that children do;
*Explore how they got started, the reasons for working;
*Explore their problems, possible solutions and their view of the future;

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

This is an open-ended exploration of details of children's working lives - their experiences and feelings. We want to find out about all kinds of work.   Where children are involved in more than one category of work, then explore each of these separately. Where children are expected to do domestic chores, explore these too. Use the themes below as a starting point. Use mapping, drawings, flow-charts, role play to support the discussion, as appropriate. Don't dominate the group with your questioning - guide a discussion in which children share experiences and ideas. Start from children's descriptions of their work in Activity 1. Ask children to tell you more - follow the line of their talk. Encourage children to talk about specific events, incidents. Major themes will be:

1. Details about work:

What is their main job? What other jobs do they do?
Where do they work? Who for?
What skills are involved, how did they learn them?
How much money did they make yesterday? What happens to the money they make?

2. How you got started:

How did they get into this kind of work? Did they have a different kind of job before? Did they have to leave school to be able to work?
Whose idea was it that they should work? Did they have any choice? What were the reasons?

3. Problems, solutions and futures

What are the problems they face in their work? What should be done to make their working lives easier? Can they do anything themselves to make things easier?
How long do they think they will carry-on with this work? What will they do next? Who (or what) will decide?

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:

Detailed notes on working lives, stories and incidents shared within group.

Verbatim quotes from recordings of key points made by children. Notes of emotions expressed by children, use of 'body-language'. Make a note of issues and incidents to follow-up in life-story work with particular individuals.

Activity 3: Who matters?

AIMS

*Identify children's social networks
*Explore children's sense of responsibility, especially towards their family
*Explore children's own self-concept/self-esteem in relation to work.

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Children's social networks
We are interested in who children see as the important people in their lives - What is their social network? What place do they have within it? Are they dependent - or do others depend on them?

Ask children to make a drawing, or a chart . Suggest they put 'myself' at centre and other important people in a circle around them. They might include a parent, a teacher, a neighbour, a friend, a project worker etc. Use this as a starting-point for discussion:

> Why are these people important?
> How do they help you?
> What responsibilities do you feel to them?
> How far do they expect obedience?
> How much autonomy do you have?

2. Family responsibilities and expectations
Ask in more detail about children's relationship to the most important person, usually a parent or parents. We are interested in parental expectations about family, work, school - from the children's point of view. You will need to start with individual children's views and then ask more widely around the group. (This activity can also be followed-up in Activity 8 'Lifestories'). Identify the 'most important person'.
Ask: **What things make them pleased with you ?**
Ask: **What things make them cross or unhappy with you ?**

Specifically, explore expectations in relation to work as well as school and domestic chores. Explore differences in expectations between fathers, mothers and others?

3. Children's view of themselves.

Ask: **What makes you feel good about yourself ? What are you proud of?**
 Ask: **What makes you feel bad about yourself ? What are you ashamed of ?**

Explore children's self-esteem, pride and self-confidence
INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

Chart or charts showing social networks.
Lists of parent's positive and negative feelings.
Lists of positive and negative aspects of self-concept.

Activity 4: Work and School

AIMS
*Identify the perceived benefits and problems for working children.
*Identify the perceived benefits and problems for schoolchildren.
*Assess preferences for work versus school or for combining the two.

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR
Find out whether children are attending school as well as work.
Prepare cards of schoolchildren and children's own occupation. Prepare card of a 'happy' face to represent 'good things' and a 'sad' face to represent 'bad things'.

1. On being a working child
Place picture of children's own occupation in centre with 'good-happy' card at one side and 'bad-sad' card at the other side.
Ask: **What are the good things about being a working child.**?
(things that make you happy, pleased, proud, confident)
Then ask: **What are the bad things about work?**
(things that make you sad, frightened, angry, bored)
This procedure can be used to create spidergrams with lists of 'good' things and 'bad' things for the legs. If children have listed many 'good' things and 'bad' things, encourage children to rank these in order of importance.

2. On being a school child
Use picture for schoolchild. Repeat procedure exactly as for work i.e.
Ask: **What are the good things about being a school child.**?
(things that make you happy, pleased, proud, confident)
Then ask: **What are the bad things about being a school child.?**
(things that make you sad, frightened, angry, bored)

3. Schoolchild or working child.
Put 'school' and 'work' cards side by side.
Ask about present circumstances:
'In your present family circumstances, which is best for you:
(i) 'only going to work'
(ii) 'only going to school'
(iii) 'going to work and attending school'
Ask: '**Why?'**

Discuss the problems of combining school and work. How could school and work be more compatible? If circumstances got better would they want to carry-on with work or spend more time at school?

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:
List of 'good' and 'bad' aspects of work with quotes from children
List of 'good' and 'bad' aspects of school with quotes from children
Preferences for 'work', 'school' or 'work and school', and reasons
Audio-recordings and notes of discussion.

Activity 5: Which work is best?

AIMS
*To identify perceived merit of a range of children's occupations
*To explore reasons/criteria children use when evaluating work
*To make a matrix-ranking of occupations for each of these reasons

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR
1. Create an overall ranking - **-** Based on pilot work make a set of objects/ photos/pictures to represent 5 major types of working situation that are relevant to children in the age group 7-14, and that children will know about. In most settings, a separate list of boys' and girls' occupations will be needed.

Example Boys list (Addis Ababa) Shoeshine, Newspaper seller, Car watcher, Taxi-boy, Farmer, Lottery-seller
Example Girls' list (Addis Ababa) Kollo seller, Maid, Waitress, Prostitute, Lottery seller
Use a preference ranking technique. Put down the picture of children's own occupation. Then put a picture of one of the other occupations alongside. Ask children:

If you had the choice, would you rather be doing .... or 'own occupation'?
Which is the best kind of job?.
Why do you prefer ....rather than.............?
Explore good things and bad things about the two occupations. Look for a range of reasons favouring one job over another.

Then repeat procedure, comparing 'own occupation' with each of other types of work. At this point the children should have sorted two piles of cards -
'better than own occupation' and 'worse than own occupation'.
Ask children to sort within each of these piles according to which is best. By the end you should be able to lay out the cards in rank order from the best to the worst. Invite further discussion. If there isn't consensus, note the majority view and the points of disagreement.

2. Create a ranking matrix

Children will very likely identify different reasons for favouring occupations. One might be more secure, another less hard work and another better paid. Ask children to create a separate ranking for each of these reasons.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:

Overall ranking of occupations
Notes and transcriptions of reasons for ranking.
Detailed ranking matrix of preferences and reasons.

Activity 6: What is a child?

AIMS
*Explore children's beliefs about when 'childhood' begins and ends
*Identify what children see as age-appropriate work for girls and boys.
*Assess children's knowledge and attitudes to rules/laws on children and work.

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Explore words children use for a child, an adult - and the years in between.
Are you a child or an adult? When did you stop being a child? When did you become an adult? What makes an adult different from a child?

Introduce a timeline - a long sheet of paper marked into 5 broad age bands.
I   **up to 8 years,**
II   **9-11 years,**
III   **12-14 years,**
IV   **15 -17 years**
V   **18 years plus**
Relate the discussion to these age bands. Make sure children understand the age bands, by relating to their experience, e.g. of school grades or the ages of members of the group.

2. Make an age-sort of children's tasks at different ages
Prepare a set of 16 cards to show children in a wide range of domestic chores and occupations across the full age range. Make pictures as gender-neutral as possible. Include: 1 of children's own occupation; 5 other occupations normally done by girls and/or boys (based on Activity 5); 4 other work occupations normally done by older age -groups (e.g. porter, electrician, driver, secretary); 6 domestic chores done by boys and/or girls at various ages (e.g. washing-up, sweeping, collecting fuel, running errands, looking after young siblings, cultivation).

Ask them to sort the cards into the age bands on the timeline. Ask them to sort twice - first for their own gender and then for the opposite gender.
Ask **'What is the youngest age you think a girl can do this job?'**
Ask **'What is the youngest age you think a boy can do this job?'**
Discuss the basis for deciding what is appropriate. Note any differences in belief amongst the group. Note reasons given, especially for gender differences.

3. Knowledge about rules and laws.
Ask: **What are laws/ rules about ages for children who work?**
Ask: **What kinds of work is it wrong for children to be doing?**

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:
Children's definitions of childhood
Developmental chart(s) of age-appropriate work (for girls and boys)
Knowledge about rules and laws.

Activity 7:   What if?

AIMS
*explore universal themes affecting working children

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR -
Use a prepared story-completion game (in words and pictures). The themes would be universal but specially adapted to each local context and each occupation group. Ask children to comment on the dilemma in role play, words or pictures. Ask:
Does this happen to you? What should X do? What will happen next? Why? Who might help?
This is also a powerful way of exploring perceptions of difference, e.g. by varying if X or Y is girl/boy, rich/poor etc.?

Theme 1 = "What if there is no business all day"

e.g. *X has been working in the streets all day but has not had a single customer. X must return home empty-handed.*

Theme 2 = breaking rules/trouble with authorities

e.g. "*Xhas been working in a place that is not allowed. A policeman chases him.*"

Theme 3 = New regulations

e.g. *"The government wants to make a new rule which says they must be at least 15 years old before they can work"*

Theme 4 Family pressures

eg. *"X is good at school and his teacher says he could pass the exams. But the family want X to leave school so that he can earn money working"*

Theme 5 Coping with exploitation

eg*"X normally expects Y amount for each job. But a customer only gives half the normal amount"*

Theme 6 Coping with abuse

eg*"X is working in the evening. A customer tries to sexually abuse them,"*

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:
Summary of beliefs about how working children cope with common dilemmas, what rules apply, what support networks are available to them etc.
Transcriptions of audio of key points made by children.

Activity 8. Life-stories

AIMS

***Make detailed histories of the working experiences of individual children, their perspectives on their present circumstances and future prospects.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

At least one child per occupational group should be selected for detailed case study. Where possible these will be tape recorded in full, and will be a major source of verbatim quotes. Photographs of children's working lives would also be good. These life histories may include interviews with other key people in children's lives, about their views on children's work.

Encourage individual children to tell their story - where they have lived, what are their family circumstances, what school experiences have they had - when did they drop-out of school and why - when did they start to work etc.? What were their responsibilities at different ages? Identify the key stages in children's lives, and the transition points, as they see it. Try to find reference points that pin-down events to particular ages.

Use flow-chart as a starting point for exploring beliefs and feelings about transitions. Why did things happen? Who decided? Does the child feel they were responsible? Did the child have any choice? Is it what they wanted? Could it have been different? (Explore compulsion, family, peer, financial difficulties, employer pressures).

 Ask children how they would like their working lives to be in 3 years from now - what do they see as their strengths, weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats to achieving their 'dream'.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:

This will require a complete audio-recording, summarised in detail under the main themes of the study and with verbatim quotes from children.