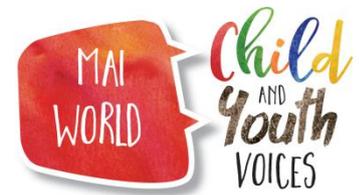


## The *Education matters to me* series

AN EXAMPLE OF CHILD AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT THROUGH  
COMBINED METHODS: FACE TO FACE, POSTCARD AND SURVEY  
MAY 2018



The Children's Commissioner promotes the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. When done well, involving children in decisions upholds their right to have a say and be heard. It advances the best interests of children and young people and produces better decision-making overall. As adults who make decisions that affect children and young people, it is imperative you seek their views.

Find more case studies on our website [www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz)

Earlier this year the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC), alongside the New Zealand School Trustees Association, released a series of reports - *Education matters to me*<sup>1</sup>. These reports share the views of tamariki and rangatahi, children and young people<sup>2</sup>, about their experiences in the education system. The project was initiated to help ensure that children and young people's views were being heard by national decision-makers in the education sector, and the general public. This engagement was a collaboration between children and young people, the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the New Zealand School Trustees Association.

The OCC's decision to engage with children and young people directly was an important way of demonstrating our commitment to putting children and young people at the heart of what we do and the advice we give.

This case study explores how the Office of the Children's Commissioner designed and carried out best practice child and youth participation for the *Education matters to me* series. We recommend

### About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

1.1 million children and young people under 18 make up 23% of New Zealand's population.

The Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft and his office advocate for their interests, ensure their rights are upheld, and help them have a say on matters that affect them.

### About Mai World

We endeavour to model best practice for engaging children and young people within the context of their whānau, schools, and community groups, as well as encouraging other organisations to do the same.

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<sup>1</sup> The reports are available online at <http://www.occ.org.nz/listening2kids/what-children-tell-us/#edu>.

For further information, contact [voices@occ.org.nz](mailto:voices@occ.org.nz)

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report we have used the terms 'tamariki / children' and 'rangatahi / young people' interchangeably to refer to all children and young people that we spoke with.



all child and youth engagements are tailor-made to benefit the tamariki and rangatahi you are supporting. This case study is intended to share our best practice approach to child and youth participation.

## Supporting participation and engagement opportunities

One of the things that Mai World<sup>3</sup>, our child and youth voices project, does is identify opportunities for children and young people to have a say. Through the *Education matters to me* engagement we identified an opportunity to share the voices of children and young people on their experiences of education.

We wanted to hear about the education system now, from those using it. We especially wanted to hear from children and young people who may not currently be well served by the education system about their experiences. In order to optimise opportunities for children and young people to share their views we used many methods of engagement.

### This engagement is a good example of child and youth participation because:

- We maintained a strong and uncompromising commitment to upholding the rights of children and young people to share their views and be heard
- We built on existing knowledge and past engagements
- We had a strong team with youth engagement expertise, trusting relationships with communities, and proficient communication and writing skills
- We had clear central project management that
  - ensured the views of the children and young people were heard
  - carried out upfront planning
  - provided on-going support to the team
  - kept the engagement approach consistent
  - upheld best practice approaches.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on Mai World visit <http://www.occ.org.nz/4youth/maeworld/>



## We designed an engagement to enable children and young people to share their views

### **Scoping**

Before carrying out any engagement it is important to be clear on the purpose. This is a vital part of child and youth participation because it ensures their right to participate is being fully upheld, the engagement is meaningful, and mitigates the risk of tokenistic consultation.

In this project, our purpose was to hear and share the views of a diverse group of children and young people on their experiences of New Zealand's education system. We wanted to support children and young people's views being heard in the setting of the National Education and Learning Priorities, applicable to all children 0-18 years over the next five years.

Once we had an agreed purpose, we then considered whether the views of children and young people have been heard on the topic before. We then gave attention to how best to support tamariki and rangatahi to share their views.

### **Ethics and informed consent**

This engagement followed OCC's thorough ethics process, including an ethics committee and ethical approval processes. We require the completion of the ethics process for every new engagement. This supports our practitioners in constantly improving their engagement practices by learning from previous engagements and problem solving any challenges with a group of knowledgeable youth participation experts.

Some of the OCC ethics considerations include:

- Relationships and opportunities to co-design with community
- On-going informed consent processes that are appropriate for the children and young people taking part, and the scope of the engagement

#### **Key scoping questions:**

- 1) *What are we trying to achieve?*
- 2) *Who should we be hearing from?*
- 3) *Have tamariki and rangatahi been asked before?*
- 4) *Who can best support them to share their views?*
- 5) *What method of engagement will best support these children and young people to share their views?*
- 6) *How can we ensure their voices are heard and have an influence?*

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- Tailored purpose built engagements
  - Testing of engagement approaches
  - A gift, koha and kai
  - Data storage
  - Confidentiality.

We have clear guidelines around ascertaining informed consent and ensuring that any children and young people we engage with understand what's happening and know their rights. Overall, we have learnt it is important to have consent guidelines around engagement, but the approach must be tailored to the developmental needs of the child and the context you are working in. Further guidance on informed consent can be found in Appendix one and on our website.

## **Intentional planning and design is critical**

Three things were integral to the success of this engagement. These were: The people involved, how we engaged with rangatahi and tamariki, and clear project design and coordination. As with any engagement, we had limitations and challenges. These included resources, time, and the involvement of many decision makers and stakeholders. Our ethics committee was integral to identifying and mitigating these limitations in both the planning and implementation stages of the engagement.

### ***Design of engagement team***

Our project team included the project lead and report writer, four facilitators, and a team of advisors from the strategy, rights and advice team at the OCC and from NZSTA.

Through our Mai World journey we have identified a good engagement team draws its strength from diversity of skill. A great writer isn't always a great facilitator, and great facilitators may not have strong skills in capturing and communicating the views of young people in a way that portrays the young person's intended meaning. When resources allow, we recommend partnering facilitators with 'pen holders' for maximum impact.

Due to resourcing limitations, three out of our four facilitators were largely expected to be their own record keepers and note takers. We recruited our particular facilitators with this in mind. We knew what skills and strengths we wanted them to have before reaching out to them to join the team.



The relationship between facilitators and focus group participants in this engagement was a key factor in its success.

We had worked with all our facilitators on different youth engagement projects in the past and knew we could have confidence in them and that they were experts in child and youth participation.

All our facilitators engaged successfully with tamariki and rangatahi Māori. They recognised the strengths of the tamariki and rangatahi and supported them to share their voice through a range of different engagement methods.

In recruiting our facilitators we knew that if we wanted to engage with a diverse range of children and young people we needed facilitators who had existing relationships within the communities of those young people. Although all the facilitators engaged with a range of children and young people, they also had strengths and connections with specific groups.

One facilitator had extensive experience working with under 8 year olds and a range of community contacts in Christchurch. Another was Māori and a fluent te reo speaker. Another had designed engagements for OCC before and strong relationships with the disability community and with children with disabilities. Another was an experienced youth worker who is Samoan and has strong relationships with youth groups that particularly engage young pacific people.

### ***Design of engagement approach***

We ensured the team designing and implementing the engagement had extensive expertise in child and youth participation. And always paramount was that the children and young people taking part have a positive participation experience. We recognise the vital importance of whanaungatanga and always take a child centred approach when engaging with all children and young people.

In total, we heard from 1688 children and young people.

We engaged with 82 tamariki and rangatahi Māori through our face to face conversations. The experiences of people who whakapapa Māori are informed by their own lives, their connections to culture and their whānau, hapū, iwi, rohe and the communities they have grown up in.

The three most important elements of our engagement with tamariki and rangatahi Māori were: recognising the importance of whanaungatanga, recruiting a facilitator who is Māori and a fluent te reo speaker, and using a range of engagement methods



that emphasise story telling. This enabled us to engage in te reo Māori with focus groups of rangatahi Māori from kura kaupapa.

Given our short time frames, we found by having two Māori facilitators (one primarily as the pen holder) engage at one teen parent unit where all young people were Māori, automatic barriers were broken down. The young mothers immediately felt comfortable communicating things to our facilitators that they assumed they understood (which they did). For example, the rangatahi shared that their teachers were great but that they were Pākehā so didn't get some things. The facilitators could explore that further.

Our three non-Māori facilitators, due to their relationships with their communities and expertise, also engaged effectively with young Māori.

#### Facilitator's handbook

- 1) Background documents and information
- 2) Consent processes
- 3) Advice on engagement approaches
- 4) Forms for recording and drawing insights

All face to face engagements were tightly controlled in that they were guided by the six areas of enquiry and had the same purpose and scope. All facilitators were provided with a handbook, and expected to report using a template to ensure consistency and to carry out consent processes to the OCC standard.

Key elements of the engagement design included:

- 1) Strong understanding of best practice child and youth participation
- 2) A clear and agreed purpose for the project
- 3) Great facilitators with existing relationships with young people and their communities
- 4) Child centered approach to gathering voices, designed specifically for the participants
- 5) A uniform approach to recording voices
- 6) A plan for understanding and communicating the voices once they had been gathered

### **Methods of engagement**

1. On-line in-school surveys
2. Postcards
3. Face to face techniques including group discussion, pair and trio interviews, slam poetry, and activity based engagements.



Both the online surveys and the face to face engagements were built around the project's six key areas of enquiry.

These areas of enquiry were identified from analysis of prior OCC engagements with children and young people on the topic of education.

The areas of enquiry were:

- He tirohanga Māori (Experiences of tamariki and rangatahi Māori)
- Emotional wellbeing
- Engagement
- 'If I were the boss' - improving our education
- Progress and achievement
- Transitions.

Each facilitator took a positive youth development approach during face to face engagements with the children and young people. They focussed on the child or young person's strengths and supported them to share their views in the way that suited them best. All engagements were informed by Lundy's model of children's participation (2007). The facilitators used a range of methods in their face to face interactions including interviews, drawing, art, and activity based engagements.

### ***On-line in-school surveys***

We developed two surveys – one for primary and intermediate students and one for secondary school students. The surveys were delivered to children and young people through our Mai World network. Our voices team is experienced in constructing surveys that provide a platform for young people to share their views. All questions were pre-tested with a small group of children to ensure they were developmentally appropriate for the age group we were aiming to reach.

### ***Postcards***

A5-size postcards were printed for students to share their views in any way they chose. They could be posted back to the Children's Commissioner or handed to the facilitator. (All 36 children involved chose the latter). One child submitted a drawing, some young people wrote in te reo Māori, some included identifying names and some were anonymous. We agreed to only publish non-identifying information. The postcard technique did not garner many responses. This may be due to not putting free return postage on the postcards and relying on the children themselves, or their teachers or parents, to send it back.



It may also be due to children and young people generally not using letters or postal services, instead using online methods such as private chat and online polls. Another critique of the postcard method is that they are not private – anyone can read what is written on them and this may deter children and young people from sharing their views.

### ***Face to face engagement***

We had a team of four very skilled engagement specialists as our facilitators for the face to face engagement with children and young people. One facilitator was an OCC staff member. The other three have existing relationships with the OCC as well as extensive networks with the children and young people we had identified we needed to involve during our scoping activity.

The engagements reflected the diversity of the children and young people they were carried out with. The facilitators were encouraged to use a range of methods of engagement and to incorporate their own personal style. For our facilitator who speaks fluent te reo, one aspect of this meant incorporating te reo Māori when he was engaging with tamariki and rangatahi who know te reo. Another of our facilitators used more visual aids for conversation when she engaged with under 5s.

Facilitators were supported to be adaptable and facilitate engagements that enabled genuine and meaningful interaction and discussion between them and the children and young people. This approach enabled many more children to have their views heard.

Some of the methods employed were:

- Activity based engagements
- Poetry workshops
- Use of emotion faces (with children aged under five)
- Pair and trio interviews
- Play based conversations<sup>4</sup>

Our facilitators engaged with an amazingly diverse group of tamariki and rangatahi. Facilitator relationships with the partner organisations or host organisations (such as teen parent units, early childhood centres, schools) were integral to ensuring that all engagement built on the strengths and abilities of the children and young people. Host organisations supported the facilitators to engage well with children from all walks of life, at all ages, stages and abilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Additional guidance on methods of engagement is available at [www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz)



## **We made sure the voices of these children and young people were heard**

### ***Recording what we heard***

A consistent process throughout the engagement was essential to record the views and opinions we were hearing. To do this, we designed a recording template to ensure the voices were captured accurately.

Four facilitators engaged with children and young people in Christchurch, Tauranga, Auckland and Wellington. Having four facilitators as well as one main project leader who would report on what was heard meant it was critical that all the voices were captured in a way that accurately conveyed the messages shared by the children and young people. The facilitators were required to fill out the recording template either during or directly after each engagement. The recording template required them to input data including:

- details of the child or young person,
- verbatim quotes from the young person under each area of enquiry,
- insights from the facilitator and how they drew those insights.

Details were recorded, stored securely and not shared more widely than the facilitator and the project lead. All quotes were referenced in a way that ensured anonymity for the children and young people.

This was a time consuming process for our facilitators, but absolutely necessary to ensure the original meaning of what the children and young people said was preserved.

### ***Understanding what we heard***

We analysed the views collected through the three methods of engagement in a number of different ways. Facilitators recorded analysis of what they had heard immediately after each face to face interaction. For the survey results, we had a lead analyst, supported by rigorous peer review processes.

Once the engagements were complete we brought all four facilitators together with project team members for a full day insights analysis and consensus workshop to ensure the views we had collected were accurately represented and to draw key insights. We recommend this approach to others. This workshop was time critical and we suggest a date be set and committed to for this from the very beginning in any engagement.



## ***Communicating what we heard***

Key insights across all areas of enquiry emerged from the workshop. It was agreed these would form the basis of our first report – *Education matters to me: Key insights*. The key insights report was then supported by detailed reports under each of the areas of enquiry.

These reports are:

1. He manu kai mātauranga: He tirohanga Māori  
Education matters to me: Experiences of tamariki and rangatahi Māori
2. Education matters to me: Emotional wellbeing
3. Education matters to me: Engagement
4. Education matters to me: 'If I were the boss' - improving our education
5. Education matters to me: Progress and achievement
6. Education matters to me: Transitions

This series of reports ensured the children and young people's views were accurately represented in the most compelling way. The reports themselves underwent a number of iterations and peer reviews before they were finalised. All reports are built on and evidenced by verbatim quotes from children and young people. Views gathered through survey, post cards, and our face to face engagements form the content of these reports and all insights drawn.

Facilitators who had collected the voices were expected to ensure their original meaning was retained. Quotes taken out of context can be misunderstood. Our facilitators ensured this did not happen through the post engagement report collating process.

Some tamariki and rangatahi shared their views in te reo Māori. It was crucial we had a facilitator who was fluent in te reo. We also contracted a te reo Māori expert to support us in our use of te reo when reporting back. We heard from tamariki and rangatahi te reo speakers that their language is important to them. Therefore, it was important that we retained their words, and used te reo in our reporting. Ideally we would have preferred to have full te reo Māori versions of our reports. However we did not have the in-house capacity to do this.

Throughout the whole engagement process the children and young people involved understood how their views would be represented, and for what purpose. Our facilitators checked back with the young people about what they had heard at the

end of every engagement. They also communicated with the children and young people once the reports were released. The children and young people knew they would hear about the reports once they were public and agreed to this aspect before taking part in any engagement.

A communications plan, using general and social media, was developed to ensure the reports containing the views of the children and young people reached their target audience and made an impact. A great engagement process could be a waste of resources if the information is simply turned into a report that sits on a shelf, not utilised to its full potential to affect decision makers.

We considered how to best communicate the insights with Ministers and key decision makers, teachers and schools, parents, other children and young people, and the general public. Elements that increased the appeal of the project to general media include:

- Giving prominence to the authentic voices of children
- Partnerships between two well-known organisations – Office of the Children’s Commissioner and the New Zealand School Trustees Association
- Existing contacts and networks that both organisations have in the children’s sector and the education sector
- Targeted messaging for different audiences
- Clear and simple insights that were easy to understand and resonated with the audience

This engagement and its reports had extensive media coverage. More than 40 items were printed or broadcast across the main print, TV and radio channels (TVNZ, TV3, Radio New Zealand, Newstalk ZB, Radio Live/Newshub, NZ Herald, Dominion Post and Stuff) and the report received high engagement on social media. This was rewarding for the children and young people who contributed and also increased the attention key decision makers gave to the reports.

Our messages were picked up by other experts and decision makers, who spoke to media through interviews and social media posts about the work.

We issued a media release highlighting the education issues faced by students. We shared the links of all reports with key stakeholders and networks, encouraging them to share the links among their networks too.

#### Our social media communications

facebook

@childrenscommnz  
Or search for Children’s  
Commissioner NZ

twitter

@OCCNZ  
Children’s CommNZ



[www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz)



## The voices of these children and young people will have a lasting impact on the education system

The *Education matters to me* series demonstrated the value of hearing the lived experiences of those impacted by a system when making decisions about it.

Immediate evidence of impact includes:

- Shift in the Ministry of Education's approach to enabling children and young people to participate in decisions that impact on them. Commitment from the Minister of Education to ensure student voice is considered, including in the National conversation on education.
- More than 40 items across main print, TV and radio channels have shared the *Education matters to me* series.
- Children's voices have been heard by schools, teachers, parents, policy makers and decision makers, who have shared how their approach has changed as a result of what they heard.
- Demonstrated best practice resulting in many agencies seeking our advice on engagement projects.
- Children and young people have seen their voices are being heard
- A number of engagements with children and young people have been modeled on the *Education matters to me* series, and will continue the conversation on education.
- The Ministry of Education is using the *Education matters to me* series as evidence to inform policy decisions.

Hearing and incorporating the views of children and young people delivers better and more robust decisions. It also confirms and develops children and young people's capacity to act independently, to make their own choices and actively participate as New Zealand citizens.

The *Education matters to me* engagement was a significant piece of child and youth engagement. A project of this magnitude within tight timeframes and within a limited budget was only possible because of the team of child and youth engagement experts who applied their best practice knowledge through meticulous project planning, genuine engagements and a very high standard of analysis and reporting.

While the views are not statistically representative of the young people of New Zealand, and should not be treated as such, we have heard anecdotal feedback from



organisations involved with children and young people that our reports reflect what they too have been hearing from the children and young people they work with.

Thank you to the tamariki and rangatahi who shared their experiences of education with us here at the OCC so that we could share your voices with Aotearoa New Zealand. **Your views matter and have been heard.**



## Appendix one:

### On-going and informed consent

At the OCC, we have clear guidelines around ascertaining informed consent and ensuring that any children and young people that we engage with understand what's happening and know their rights. These guidelines are:

- Discuss with the child/young person who you are and what you do
- Discuss with the child/young person what you want to talk to them about
- Discuss with the child/young person how long the interview/engagement will take and how you will capture/record their views
- Discuss with the child/young person confidentiality and limits of confidentiality
- Discuss with the child/young person what will happen with their views
- Let the child/young person know they can withdraw from interview/engagement at any time.

What's important in order to truly gain 'informed consent' from children is the way in which we communicate these guidelines.

We adapt the mode of communication according to the children and young people we are engaging with and establish how we can best support them to give their full and informed consent. We encourage other organisations to have tailored forms for each engagement specific to the cohort they are engaging with at the time. For some children and young people, the concept of informed consent may be incredibly foreign and the approach you would take in practice with them would be different to a member on a youth panel who has experienced participatory processes before.

For example, through the *Education matters to me* engagement, when working with under 5s, having any written consent forms would have been tokenistic and not appropriate. In that case the best approach was to support the teacher to have a chat with the child before the engagement. Then the facilitator can do the same in a creative way. This might mean drawing a picture or using an example that helped the child to understand what was happening, while giving regular opportunities for the child to opt out of participating. At the same time it was important to seek parental consent via a consent form.

We support our staff to take different approaches to ascertaining informed consent. For our Mai World project, as part of our ethics, we discuss how we will ascertain informed consent at the beginning of every new engagement. We think about how we can approach this conversation creatively with children and young people and then how we will know we have informed consent.



In order to stay as up to date as possible with best practice child and youth participation we need to remember that the way we ensure we are gaining informed consent is changing all the time.

We have clear guidance for our staff and facilitators about what informed consent is and how to establish whether we have ascertained it or not. We recently trialed an approach to consent with a small group of young people with appropriate reading and writing levels where we supported them to write their own consent forms. We had the conversation about what informed consent is in a child friendly way using the example of permission slips for school trips and building from there. Then we worked individually with each child to compose their consent form which they then signed. (One of the young people drew a flower as her chosen signature).

What was important here was the process. Taking this approach allowed our facilitator to have conversations with each young person and be confident they were happy to participate, understood what was going to happen and how their voices were going to be shared. One of the young people wrote one sentence – “I agree to our terms” and signed it. In this case, we had noted the contents of our conversation as we had it, and knew what the “terms” were. So these did not need to be stated on the young person’s version.

Overall, we have learnt it is important to have guidelines around engagement; however the approach must be tailored to the developmental needs of the child and the context you are working in.



The Children's Commissioner seeks the voices of children and young people through **Mai World: Child and Youth Voices**.

More information contact Project Lead: Kelsey Brown  
or visit our website [www.occ.org.nz/4youth/maiworld/](http://www.occ.org.nz/4youth/maiworld/)