Questions for reflection

- What are the key purposes for seeking the views of pupils?
- How is the pupil voice already being effectively heard?
- How will pupil voice be incorporated into school life?
- Are further knowledge and skills needed to focus on pupil voice more effectively? How might these be achieved?
- Are changes in attitudes needed to focus pupil voice more effectively? How might this be achieved?
- Do school structures, policies and processes effectively enable pupil voice?
- Do staff have the time, resources and support needed to elicit pupil voice?
- Are there ways of determining what change occurs as a result of listening to and acting upon pupil voice?
- How is any change that does take place embedded within school systems, policy and processes?
- Are children aware of the parallels between school democratic processes and issues of democracy, community and justice in the wider world?
- Is the pupil voice framed and underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Next steps

- Involve pupils in all stages:
  - Identify the purpose of seeking the views of pupils
  - Identify all the ways in which the pupil voice is currently heard (ask pupils)
  - Identify further ways in which pupil voice can be heard more thoroughly and effectively (seek views of pupils)
- Draw up a pupils voice policy or adapt current school policies to incorporate the pupil voice
- Identify training needs for staff, pupils and others in the school community to ensure pupil voice is effectively heard
- Ensure adequate time, resources and support are made available to staff, pupils and others in the school community to develop pupil voice
- Set systems in place for recording, reflecting and involving others, ‘involving a wide range of pupils and staff’

Thematic links

School Councils UK www.schoolcouncils.org


Learner voice – a very useful publication from Futurelab on how to involve children’s voice in decisions and discussions as learners: archive.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/handbooks/learner_voice.pdf

www.involver.org.uk – helping young people to learn democracy by doing democracy – through school councils and pupil voice.

Monitoring & Evaluation: how do you know it’s working?

In ensuring that the pupil voice is not just heard but also acted upon and celebrated, a school might use the following tools to monitor and evaluate how effective it has been:

- Assessments on the understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Pupil questionnaires to monitor progress on how satisfied they are on their ability to freely express their opinions, have them taken into account and whether they feel involved in decision making in the school
- Evidence (observation or other monitoring tools) of any improvements in behaviour, self confidence, relationships or willingness to be involved in varied aspects of school life
- Monitoring of staff responses to incorporating the pupil voice, through peer reviews, self evaluation questionnaires, feedback in meetings or other means.

Global Learning Centre

Tower Hamlets PDC
229 Bethnal Green Road, London E2 6AB
T. 020 7364 6405 E. hec@gn.apc.org
@hecglobal

Details of current teacher training, information on global learning and examples of HEC’s work

www.globallearninglondon.org.uk

Learning in a Global Context was developed through LocalGlobal, funded by UK Aid.

www.lgtn.org.uk

Learning in a Global Context is a framework for supporting schools in preparing young people for life in an increasingly globalised world.

Participation, Democracy and Pupil Voice

Introduction

Providing opportunities for children to have a voice is a fundamental human right, identified by Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This states that all children have the right to express their own opinions and to have them taken into account in any matter affecting them.

Aside from being a fundamental right, pupil voice also provides opportunities to develop skills of oracy, presentation, discussion, negotiation and debate. Listening and responding to children is also likely to lead to a more harmonious school community. When children help make decisions in the classroom and the school, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership, to be positively engaged and to feel responsibility towards others in the school community.

There are many schemes that enable children to express themselves and participate, such as peer mentoring, playground buddies, anti-bullying teams, school gardens, social enterprise and school councils.

Pupil Voice and Global Learning

Enabling pupils to express their views is a vital part of global citizenship. By taking part in their own democratic structures such as a school council, or a co-operative enterprise, children learn about issues of justice, democracy, community, sustainable development and interdependence. For example, school councils provide a framework of meetings, elections, reporting back, discussions, agenda setting and project management that allow all the school to take part.

At a global level, children face the consequences of decisions made by adults on major global issues such as, climate change, conflict and poverty, so it is important that the means are in place – both in school and in the wider world – for children’s views to be heard and to be considered by decision-makers. It is important that at a national and global level, the voices of children and young people are heard through mechanisms such as Youth Parliaments and Councils, Model United Nation Assemblies, and Special Sessions involving children and young people at the United Nations (see box overleaf). Children are one of the powerless groups in society. By learning about how powerless groups have become empowered children can understand the importance of how having a voice can bring about positive change. Examples might include great figures in history such as Nelson Mandela, or exploring the Fairtrade movement and its role in improving lives, particularly those of women and children.

Outcomes for pupils

In a school that embraces pupil voice, pupils will:

- Be able to express their opinions and have them taken into account in any matter that affects them
- Feel that the school listens and responds to their views and needs
- Feel a sense of ownership of the school
- Feel a sense of responsibility towards the whole school community
- Show improved levels of self-esteem and well-being
- Develop a positive sense of self
- Show improved behaviour and have better relationships with all members of the school community
- Develop life skills and social competences
- Work cooperatively with all ages and types of people involved in the school community.
- Be involved in many different aspects of school life
- Become more engaged in discussing, planning and reviewing their own learning
- Be involved in decision making that affects them and the whole school community
- Make a positive contribution to the school
Without the voice of students, schools serve no purpose. They are nothing but institutions where adults run and tell you what you should have the chance to live in one today. Alfie Kohn

There’s a radical – and wonderful – new idea here… that all children could and should be inventors of their own theories, critics of other people’s ideas, analysts of evidence, and makers of their own personal marks on the world. It’s an idea with revolutionary implications. If we take it seriously, Deborah Meier

Case studies
Pupil voice goes global
In 2002 UNICEF and partner organisations held a Children’s Forum in New York so that children aged between 7 and 18 could meet to voice their concerns on important issues and come up with ways for governments, civil society organizations and children to work together to make the world a better place for everyone.

According to Ofsted, in effective schools,
• Pupils were carefully involved in discussing issues of practical importance to them
• Pupils contributed through class and school forums to developing and monitoring school policies
• Pupils’ views on the quality of school life, including lessons, were actively sought and valued
• Pupils were given direct experience of involvement and responsibility, for example through running clubs, managing activities and events
• Pupils worked as mentors to younger children, as buddies to troubled peers, as mediators to resolve conflicts, as tutors of practical skills, or as ambassadors for the school.
• Pupils brought belief and commitment to these roles and the capacity shown… to carry off these roles with grace and self-discipline was often remarkable.

From Ofsted Annual Report 2007

How to make the voices of pupils heard
The following table lists just some types of events, roles and activities that could help improve the effectiveness of the voice of young people in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballots</td>
<td>Useful way of seeking consensus on decisions but not so useful when seeking to gauge the breadth of opinions that may exist. Ballots are more empowering when the ‘issues’ to be balloted on are decided by learners in the first instance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections/selections</td>
<td>Pupils vote for representatives to promote issues important to them or may be involved in the selection of those who will work with them, e.g., some schools have involved pupils in interview and selection panels for recruiting teachers and other staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Councils</td>
<td>Tends to be the most popular formal pupil body in schools. The School Council has a say in the day-to-day running of the school. Important issues to consider for School Councils is the degree of real power to effect outcomes and change the council has and how well they represent all learners; feedback mechanisms are also critical in ensuring that issues raised by councils are heard and responded to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management committees</td>
<td>The involvement of pupils on a range of committees to ensure that learners have a formal representation alongside staff. An alternative is where pupils have their own committees in order to manage aspects of their own educational experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil governors</td>
<td>Pupil representation on the Board of Governors to help ensure pupil opinion and issues are conveyed to those who are responsible for strategic decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums and consultation workshops</td>
<td>These are good ways of gauging the views of learners and exploring issues in more depth. They seek to explore the views and key issues of learners. Ensuring space, time and opportunities for these to happen and that outcomes are acted upon is essential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message boards</td>
<td>These can take a variety of forms. They can be used to convey information to pupils but can also provide a way in which pupils can express their own opinions or convey information to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil researchers</td>
<td>Much data is kept about learners but little is collected by them. Pupil research can promote a range of skills, especially if the research agendas, planning and data collection are set and managed by pupils themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle time</td>
<td>This process represents a good way for pupils and educators to discuss issues that are relevant to them. Can be very flexible and open in the way they are conducted and the range of issues covered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and Buddying schemes</td>
<td>Peer mentoring and buddy schemes have grown in popularity over recent years. Pupils often respond better to people their own age – they speak the same language and know the problems that peers encounter – so talking through issues in pairs (or small groups) may provide a less intimidating way of discussing and raising issues. Pupils can be matched in a range of different ways such as in peer mediation where young people provide a neutral conflict resolution service for others or befriending where pupils offer support and friendship to others. Such schemes can help pupils themselves to formulate issues for debate or produce action plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and action groups</td>
<td>Useful in conveying more in-depth knowledge on specific issues and interests or around particular problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running clubs</td>
<td>Development of a range of skills: Managing activities, monitoring, introduction to budget keeping, reflection, recruitment, reporting back.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Ofsted, in effective schools,

School Council in Hertfordshire
A researcher visiting a school council describes his experiences thus: I was met by members of the school council and treated to a… presentation similar to the one they had delivered to more august bodies. In the presentation, views on their role in school and how they operated were put forward with confidence and knowledge. Even the youngest members answered questions to the group skillfully. Members of the council were given the opportunity to report to the governing body and to welcome their members to council meetings.

From Ofsted Annual Report 2007

Deborah Meier being interviewed, with his translator, Dr Sidi M. Omar.

Tamek being interviewed, with his translator, Dr Sidi M. Omar.