

Children's Voice

There are different ways that schools can promote the student voice. For children to be active global citizens they need to be able to express their opinions and have different ways in which to act on them. The global aspects come from the framework of local to global and the values of rights, identity, equality and community.

General Guide

A general pdf guide from the DCSF, created as statutory advice but never printed and only available as an electronic version, can be downloaded from:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00410-2008.pdf>

Within the Timetable

Within the timetable and lessons you can help teach the skills and confidence needed for the children to present their views to an audience. Their opinions can be input into the lessons whenever there is a choice of activity or topic or place to visit, and the children could discuss it and vote on it.

Project Work

With school or class projects children's voice can be encouraged through giving them more power and responsibility, letting them vote on decisions.

Various schemes such as Healthy Schools, Out of Hours Learning, SEAL and Sustainable Schools had aspects of children's voice. Indeed Sustainable Schools created a great support website, with the eight doorways that are based partly on a children's working group helping the school.

<http://www.carbondetectives.org.uk/Country.aspx>

Peer Child Schemes

Schools that have mentoring schemes for addressing bullying, or issues of friendship and isolation in the playground, or new children being helped by older children, are promoting and developing children's voice. Indeed any peer teaching or support involves the children acting on their own decisions and using their experiences as well as training to help solve problems.

School Council

A common public way of supporting your children expressing their views is through a structured system of representation commonly called a 'school council'. These allow for all the schools students to learn about elections, voting, representation, and the role of constitutions in ensuring accountable, open democratic governance around the world.

Problems with Inclusion

The problem with all elections is the role of popularity and other factors preventing some children from taking roles, and the same children possibly being re-elected. This can be overcome through having an appointment system rather than elections, and comparing the system to an administration,

like a civil service rather than democratic representation. Otherwise the constitution could allow for only one term of office, and the facility to co-opt members who represent minority groups, like disabled children.

Children's Rights

Children's voice is empowered and defended in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is explicitly referenced in Article 12, the right to express opinions and take part in decisions that affect a child's life. Other articles are about identity, right to information, to meeting, to education, and cultural rights. To link student voice to rights is to link it to a globally accepted set of values, every country has signed the convention except USA and Somalia.

UNICEF have developed a scheme called Rights Respecting Schools, which is about a whole school approach to Children's Rights. There is a whole school evaluation framework called 'Hear By Right' created by National Youth Agency.

<http://www.nya.org.uk/our-services/hear-right/>

Children's Participation

Participation is not necessarily rights based, it is often defined through customer/consumer terminology and engagement. It can therefore be led by the agenda of those doing the consulting, and be defined and framed by those in authority who also control the actions resulting from the participation or consultation. Engagement is also linked strongly to voluntary work which is not a rights issue.

"What is participation?"

Asking children and young people what works, what doesn't work and what could work better; and involving them in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, on an ongoing basis. The Every Child Matters (ECM): Change for children programme ensures that policies and services are designed around the needs of children and young people; and that they are involved in decisions at a local and national level. Engaging children and young people gives them opportunities to make positive contributions to their communities."

FAQ from Every Child Matters website - now archived

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/participation/faq/participationfaq/>

Ensuring Children's Voice in a Global Context

All projects, events, fund-raising, peer schemes can be seen as enterprises. If given responsibility for planning, finance and running the projects, then the children could run them as businesses, called social enterprises. These are businesses that instead of the single bottom line of profit, have the triple bottom line of profit, environment and community. Their aim is to improve the community and environment, and to use the profit to do so.

Throughout the world social enterprises, many of them co-operatives, along with microfinance, are empowering communities, supporting the environment, combating poverty, and promoting human rights.

Your children will learn about business, trade, co-ops, democracy, rights and development!

Children's Voice in a Wider Context

Locally

There are several ways your children can express their views within local government. These include: voting for a young mayor, taking part in local conferences, visiting the town hall, meeting local politicians, running a campaign to change the community through lobbying your local politicians, have politicians visit your school and be interviewed by a class or doing an assembly. For primary schools meeting the Mayor is very positive, as they have symbols of office (robes and chain), that tell a bit about local history, and they are non-party political in their role, unless directly elected.

Nationally

To allow your children to express their voice about the life of children in the UK and their rights, including changes in law or government policy, the best national source of information is the umbrella group, Children's Rights Alliance for England. Their members include Save the Children, NSPCC, Children's Society... and your school can join. They produce a regular children's newsletter, training, an annual report about the state of children's rights in England, and they run a very useful website.

Globally

National and international charities will run children's voice events linked to global issues like the G8, or Make Poverty History, or the Rio Summit. These normally include support teaching resources, competitions, and possibly online discussion events or live conferences.

Links checked and updated August 2014