

Obtaining the views and opinions of children and young people

Guidance for Schools and Professionals

This booklet provides guidance about tools and techniques which may be useful for a range of education professionals when hoping to elicit the views and voices of children and young people with a range of needs. It has been put together by a multi-disciplinary team based at the Hackney Learning Trust.

Why gather pupil views?

The following legal obligations require that pupil views are gathered:

- Increasing opportunities for pupil views to be both heard and listened to in the context of Special Educational Needs (SEN) has been brought to the foreground by current legislation (Children and Families Act, 2014) and statutory guidance (DfE, 2014).
- The SEN Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014) states that “Local authorities must ensure that children, young people and parents are provided with the information, advice and support necessary to enable them to participate in discussions and decisions about their support” (1.9). This includes consulting children and young people throughout the assessment process for an Education, Health and Care Plan (9.21).
- The views of the pupil should be included in these discussions. This could be through involving the pupil in all or part of the discussion itself, or gathering their views as part of the preparation.
- Eliciting pupil voice is a central part of the Person Centred Planning process and is vital for informing the ‘One Page Profile’ section of an Education, Health and Care Plan, whether it be statutory or non-statutory.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990) outlines key rights for children and young people, including their right to information and advice and the right to express an opinion on all matters affecting them.

The value of obtaining pupil views

- Improved pupil engagement, wellbeing, and learning;
- Better relationships with staff and peers;
- Improved outcomes and progress for the child/young person;
- The child/young person who is engaged in planning for their future can actively take part in target setting, which can lead to increased motivation during activities due to understanding of the long term goals;
- Better policies and procedures, based on the real needs of pupils, where pupil views are accessed at a whole-school level;
- More inclusive communities, where all pupils are encouraged and supported to participate;
- Increased opportunities for pupils to develop social skills and an increased understanding of their strengths and needs

(School Councils Wales, 2011).

Guidance on eliciting pupil voice

- Every effort should be made for professionals working with children and young people to both listen to and hear the voices of these pupils.
- Opportunities for this need to be carefully planned and pupil views should be accessed prior to initial meetings for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments wherever possible.
- Techniques for doing so should be tailored to suit the needs of the individual and be driven by best practice guidelines.
- Strategies for eliciting pupil views should always take account of and make use of the communication style that is familiar to the child or young person, i.e. if they use a choice board regularly you can use this to support you to gain their views.
- The education professional/ practitioner should consider their competence for using the strategies presented and discuss this with a line manager or supervisor where necessary.
- External professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists, Specialist Teachers and Educational Psychologists can support schools to use the techniques described in the following pages.
- Independent Support is available on request from trained workers who have experience of local SEN systems and can offer support and advice about the EHC Planning process. Part of this support can include ensuring that the ideas, opinions and hopes of children and young people are included in the plan. There are two teams of Independent Supporters in Hackney: Hackney SEND Information, Advice and Guidance Service (formerly Parent Partnership) and KIDS. Independent Support is funded and overseen by The Council for Disabled Children and funding for this has been agreed in Hackney until March 2016.

Representing pupil voice in writing

- Always be clear about the source of any information. If information about pupil views has been gathered from others, state who, when and how they know this. For example, 'Ms Smith noted in the review meeting that Dylan seems to like music because he smiles and claps his hands when it comes on.'
- When capturing pupil views state which techniques have been used. For example, 'Talking Mats was used to gain Destiny's views. She was shown a range of picture symbols and asked to sort them into like, dislike and not sure'.

References

Department for Education. (2014). Listening to and involving children and young people, Ref: DfE-00011-2014 London: DfE. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/listening-to-and-involving-children-and-young-people>

Department for Education & Department of Health. (2015). Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years, Ref: DFE-00205-2013. London: DfE. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

School Councils Wales (2011). Pupil Participation: Good Practice Guidelines. Available at:

<http://www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk/uploads/publications/540.pdf>

Secretary of State for Education. (2014). Children and Families Act 2014. The Stationery Office: Norwich.

Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

United Nations (1990). Convention on the rights of the child. New York: UN.

Useful Links & Contacts

The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Participation Works: www.participationworks.org.uk

National Youth Agency; Hear by Right: <http://www.nya.org.uk/our-services/hear-right/>

British Youth Council: www.byc.org.uk

Pupil Voice Wales: <http://www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk/>

UNICEF: www.unicef.org.uk

UNCRC: www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publications/crcsummary.pdf

Hackney SEND Information, Advice and Guidance Service,(formerly Parent Partnership):

<https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/SEND/Pages/SENDIAGS.aspx>

KIDS: <http://www.kids.org.uk/independent-support>

Active Listening

Active listening goes beyond just hearing what has been said; it means being attentive to what the other person is saying. Active listening derives from person-centred counselling techniques but is useful in many settings and is an essential component of effective communication. When working with children and young people and their families it is important to actively listen and show them that you have heard and understood what they have to say. This can help to develop a sense of rapport and help communication to be open and honest. In order to actively listen we need to first pay attention, make eye contact with the speaker and focus on hearing what they have to say, rather than on our response. Note that eye contact may be difficult for some children and young people or their parents/ carers, so this should be adapted as appropriate. Use a friendly and open body posture and demonstrate that we are listening with our non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and nodding. Provide feedback to the speaker by reflecting what has been said by paraphrasing, e.g. “What I’m hearing is...” and “It sounds like you are saying...” and check that this is accurate with them. Ask clarifying questions where necessary, e.g. “What do you mean by...?” Always allow the other person to finish speaking before responding and try to summarise the discussion at key points to show an overall understanding of what has been said, including commenting on the feelings of the child or young person where appropriate.

Case Study

Kellie was having difficulties in Year 8 at secondary school and would often become engaged with arguments with other students in class during independent learning tasks. She had started to frequently ask to go to the toilet or deliberately leave the room during a number of lessons. Through discussion involving active listening Kellie’s mentor was able to summarise what she heard and check back that this was correct. “What I’m hearing is that you don’t like classes where a lot of reading is involved because you find it difficult and this can be embarrassing at times. So you try to get out of the work by getting into arguments so that you can leave the classroom. Have I understood you correctly?” As a result of these discussions the school worked to put a programme in place to support Kellie’s reading and her confidence with reading tasks.

Web Links

<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/jps/active-listening.html>

<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

Drawing

Drawing has been described as a non-threatening way of eliciting the views of children and young people. It is seen as a means of empowering children and young people because it is one of the ways that they can organise and express feelings, ideas and develop an understanding of the world. Researchers often elicit views through drawings and paintings. Listening to children and young people as they draw and attending to what they say can provide insights into what they are thinking and feeling. It gives children or young people with limited verbal skills a familiar vehicle for expression. Children and young people have expressed their views on difficult subjects through drawing this can be especially powerful when accompanied by their own narratives. Researchers have commented on the care and attention to details that children can bring to this mode of expression in order to communicate their point of view. Paintings and drawings have been used for therapeutic and diagnostic purposes. It encourages children and young people to deal with issues that are important to them. It is also open ended and unlike the usual interview process there is no eye contact made, which may be more comfortable for children and young people with social communication difficulties. Drawing is seen as a universal means of expression and can be a valuable approach for children or young people with English as an additional language.

Case Study

A year 6 boy with English as additional language was working with a teaching assistant who had asked him about what he had done at the weekend. He had only been in the country a few weeks and whilst trying to explain what he did said 'Mind the gap'. He became frustrated that none of the adults working with him could understand what he was trying to say. He was encouraged to draw what he had done. He drew members of his family on a tube train with people getting on and off and pointed to the gap on the platform. The drawing was a useful starting point for further work with him.

Web Links

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03004430802666999>

http://drawingtheidealsself.co.uk/drawingtheidealsself/A_PCP_technique.html

Observation

Pupil observation can be used to gather data about how children and young people interact with their environment. Observations can have various degrees of structure and can include event sampling, time/interval sampling and anecdotal records. Within observation the pupil's voice is inferred rather than given directly. Ware (2004) comments on this difficulty and differentiates between a 'view' and a 'preference' or reaction to a situation. She notes that having a negative reaction to an event is not the same as expressing the view that one does not wish to partake in that event, using the example of going to the dentist to have a filling. Observations should ideally occur over time, in a range of contexts and across different activities to allow for facilitators to build up a cohesive picture of children and young people's views. Wherever possible these observations should be triangulated, so that different people who are important to children and young people can present their perspectives on the situation. The use of video can support with this – to allow for multiple perspectives of the same situation. Observation of choices can be used to demonstrate pupil views about future events.

Case Study

Tom was struggling in Year 1 at school and would often become frustrated and angry in class with no clear triggers. School staff decided to observe him at times when he was calm to determine what was working well. They also video recorded these observations so that his parents and other professionals working with Tom could give their perspectives on the observation. They found that Tom was calmest when he had an adult in close proximity to reassure him with slight pressure. Tom's mother reported that she had also noticed that he liked to sit very close to her on the sofa at home when they were relaxing. Facilitators supporting Tom felt that perhaps the pressure of close proximity was comforting and tried using a heavy blanket to keep him calm at times when no one was able to be close by. Later observations revealed that this pressure was a calming influence – therefore multiple perspectives on Tom's responses to his environment revealed that pressure was something that was important to him.

Web Links

http://www.g-w.com/pdf/sampchap/9781590708132_ch03.pdf

References

Reference: Ware, J. (2004). Ascertaining the views of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 175-179.

Photographs

Photographs (using a regular camera, tablet or mobile phone) can be a very powerful way for a child or young person to express their opinions and views. At a simple level, handing the camera over and later looking together at the photographs that have been captured by the child or young person can give staff a glimpse into activities, people and objects that attracted the person's interest and provide a starting point for conversation. The child or young person could take photographs of things, places, people and objects and be supported to sort the photographs into piles e.g. things that they like and don't like. An 'All about me' picture book could be created with topic pages e.g. things I'm good at, places I like, things I need help with, my favourite people, I can... etc. The picture book might act as a prompt for the child or young person to communicate their opinions during review meetings. Alternatively a poster or a mind map could be created using the photographs, which could be displayed and referred to during EHCP meetings or annual reviews. For a child or young person interested in computers or technology, they could be supported to use the photographs to make a PowerPoint presentation similar to the 'All about me' books incorporating music, sounds or visual features.

Case Study

Molly is a 15 year old young person with a language and learning disability. Her secondary school wanted to help her to plan and prepare for transition to college and adult life. Molly needed support to understand time concepts and to make decisions about her future. One of the teaching assistants worked with Molly to put together a photographic timetable of her life starting as a baby through pre-school, primary and secondary schools. This helped Molly see her life in phases and understand that the next phase would be college followed by employment (which were initially left blank). The teaching assistant then used pictures, drawings and photographs of places, activities, leisure activities and subject areas to help Molly think through her favourite subjects and areas of interest. They also visited two sixth form colleges and Molly was able to refer to the photographs of those visits to remember which college she liked best. The photograph of her preferred college and favourite subject areas and leisure activities were stuck onto her timeline in the college section. Using the photographs enabled Molly to understand the transition process and prepare for it. She referred back to it often and talked about her future in a more concrete manner.

Web Links

<http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/strategies/all-about-me>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Create-an-%22About-Me%22-Book>

Talking Mats

Talking Mats© is a useful tool for children or young people with symbolic understanding. It enables people with communication or learning difficulties greater ability to communicate effectively about things that matter to them. Talking Mats© uses three sets of picture communication symbols – topics, options and a visual scale – and a space on which to display them – the mat. Once the topic is chosen (e.g. ‘things I do at school’) the participant is given the picture options one at a time (e.g. circle time, PE, playground) and asked to think about what they feel about each one (e.g. like, don’t mind, don’t like). They can then place the symbol under the appropriate visual scale symbol to indicate what they feel about the topic. A photograph or photocopy is taken of the mat once complete, which can be used as a record of the person’s views and compared over time. Talking Mats© helps families and professionals involve children and young people meaningfully in their IEP meetings, annual reviews, EHCP and transition meetings. It can be used to include the child or young person in target setting and to prepare people for, and express their thoughts and feelings around transitions.

Case Study

John is a young adult with a learning disability in the second year of sixth form college. His tutor was committed to involving him in target setting. His tutor gave him pictures, drawings and photographs to represent college activities and subject areas. The top scale of ‘managing’, ‘need some help’ and ‘not managing’ was chosen. The Talking Mats approach enabled John to structure and organise his thoughts and he could indicate his views about the options. His tutor took the options John had placed under ‘need some help’ and ‘not managing’ (e.g. socialising with girls, paying for lunch in canteen, maths) and created another mat with the top scale of ‘want to get better at’, ‘not too bothered for now’, ‘do not want to get better at’. John therefore was able to express the areas he wanted to prioritise for target setting and staff felt better progress was made as a result.

Web Links

www.talkingmats.com

www.aacscotland.org.uk

Making and using video

Videos made by and with the child or young person can be a powerful way of capturing their views and interests. Children and young people are able to demonstrate their skills, abilities and interests through sharing videos of themselves engaged in lessons and activities, as well as at play and leisure, and in discussion with friends and family. The very nature of the video is highly personal to the individual child or young person, and engages others to take an interest. Video is an excellent medium for children and young people with limited expressive language skills, as they can show others the recording of what they enjoy and are able to do. They can choose the location and activity to be videoed, and can add their favourite music. Video can also act as a training resource, with clips showing supporters which methods and strategies are effective, and also demonstrating techniques for lifting and handling or care. Video is used very effectively at planning meetings and reviews to involve the child/young person and give them choice and control over what they share and show. Video can be combined with other media, and embedded into a presentation, extending its use.

Case Study

Kitty, age 10, spent the two weeks before her Annual Review working with her LSA David to take video clips of lessons and leisure activities. David helped Kitty to make a PowerPoint presentation which included several short video clips of her at work and play. At the Annual Review, accompanied by a couple of friends for moral support, she proudly offered round snacks and drinks, before presenting her PowerPoint to her parents and the teachers, professionals and support staff.

Web Links

Solution Focused Techniques

Solution focused techniques originate from psychological roots, in particular family therapy work from the 1980s. The main premise of solution focused work is fairly simple – to focus on solutions rather than problems. Although this sounds easy, in practice it can be quite difficult, as much of our work with children and young people can be about problem-solving and trouble-shooting. Solution-focused strategies aim to work on what is going well and do more of it. It is an affirmative, goal-directed, collaborative and strength-based way of working. A variety of techniques are used that focus on exception finding and strengths. Beginning with problem-free talk may help to build rapport – this may be a conversation of the child/ young person's choice or driven by something that they are interested in. Asking children and young people about their preferred future can be a useful way of identifying aspirations and motivations; these questions could be short or long-term projections into the future. One example might be the 'miracle question', which asks how life would be different if you wake up tomorrow and a 'miracle' has happened overnight. This is a good way to identify the most important goals for children and young people. Drawing can also be incorporated into solution-focused work, for example by asking young people to draw their ideal selves and describe how they are similar/ different to themselves now. Exception finding is another simple strategy that helps children and young people to reflect on when things go better; by identifying patterns in times that things go better facilitators can identify strategies that work to support children and young people effectively.

Case Study

Tamara is a 17 year old young person who is struggling to make friends at her new college. Her mentor decided to have a discussion using some solution-focused strategies. She asked her what would be different if all of her problems were solved. Tamara said that she would have someone to eat lunch with and maybe to get the bus home with too. Tamara's mentor then asked her if there were any times when things had gone better. Tamara said it had been better in lessons when tutors had set up structured times for paired talking and acknowledged that she found it difficult to initiate conversations with others herself. By making tutors aware of this Tamara's mentor was able to increase the times that Tamara engaged in conversations and set up other structured interactions at lunchtimes by creating a voluntary club to organise fundraising events for the college, something that Tamara had an interest in. At review 6 weeks later Tamara was much happier and had made one close friend and a range of acquaintances as a result of the solution-focused discussion that took place.

Web Links

<http://www.progressfocused.com/2011/07/21-solution-focused-techniques.html>

Wiki Websites

Wiki is an accessible style of simple, secure, pictorial easy to build website. They can be used to create multimedia person-centred plans that use pictures, words, video and sound to capture the voice, skills, aspirations and needs of the individual. Wikis enable families or young people to have more influence over the Education Health and Care Planning process. The Wiki web site can offer genuine collaboration between parents, teachers and professionals. The website has an 'owner' who can invite professionals to see some/all of the information on the Wiki website. This enables young people and their families to choose what to share on the Wiki and who to share it with. (Wiki websites can also be used as public websites to provide information about the Local Offer in a simple, accessible online format.)

Case Study

In some of the Education, Health and Care Plan 'Pathfinders' parents have been supported to develop individual Wiki websites specifically for their daughter/son. These are able to store and present key information on behalf of the young person, explaining their practical support and communication needs, as well as enabling the young person and their family to detail their interests and hopes for the future. Despite the simple format of the Wiki framework, it is possible for detailed information to be displayed. Use of photography and video clips greatly enhance the clarity of communication and the young person's self-expression. The advantage of the Wiki website is that it can contain and convey a wide range of information between the family and professionals while maintaining confidentiality. This enables close monitoring of healthcare and educational progress. Above all the young person can become highly motivated and very pleased to have their life chronicled in this way. The learning from Pathfinders such as Greenwich is that brilliant improvements can be achieved for the individual young person, families and professionals across the domains of Education, Health and Care.

Web Links

<http://rixresearch.org/>

<https://vimeo.com/113480394>

<http://youtu.be/wOK84qsB4BA>

Writing

Writing is a familiar process to many children and young people, however research suggests that when they are asked to write there is a tendency to focus on technical aspects. Some research suggests that primary pupils in key stage 1 are more enthusiastic about writing than older pupils; they hold positive views of themselves as writers because of the variety of writing that they engage in such as writing cards, notes and letters to friends. Older pupils, around year 3 or 4 tend to be more negative because writing can appear prescriptive. As they get older they want more autonomy in writing and would rather write what they choose. Children and young people often utilise writing to annotate their drawings and researchers have used a 'draw and write' approach to elicit the views of children and young people around health, education and social issues. When writing is used to annotate drawing it frees up the child or young person to express their views without having to focus on the technical aspects. The process has been extended further to draw write and tell (Angell et al 2014). In the process of 'draw write and tell' the child or young person is given the opportunity to talk about their drawings and interpretation is not left to the supporter. This approach involves giving the child or young person a verbal explanation of what is required and providing drawing materials. There is a 'tell' session in which open ended questions are asked.

Case Study

A year 5 girl with additional language and learning needs was asked her views about school during an individual session with the EP. Her responses to questions asked about school appeared stilted. It was felt at the time that her responses may not have been a true reflection of how she felt. She did not elaborate on her responses. The EP gave her the opportunity to draw how she felt about school this resulted in a more detailed responses. She drew what she liked and did not like about school and in the narrative that accompanied her drawing she expressed her likes and dislikes. She talked about feeling 'spiky' inside and nervous and used some emotion words to annotate the picture. She was anxious about changing class at the end of year 5 and leaving her teacher. This alerted the EP to the significant difficulties that she is likely to experience at transition and this was discussed with the SENCO.

Web Links

<http://ecr.sagepub.com/content/13/1/17.full.pdf+html>Writing

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Further Information

A ‘Pupil Voice and Views Working Party’ meet at Hackney Learning Trust once a term. For more information or to get involved please contact Emma Sheffield on emma.sheffield@learningtrust.co.uk