Voice of the Child / Young Person

Contents:

1. Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) changed the way that children are viewed and treated, that is as human beings with a distinct set of rights. Article 12 of the Convention states that when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

On the 25th Anniversary year of the UNCRC, The *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years* was published. This document places an important emphasis upon involving children and young people in decision-making at individual and strategic levels.

*Local authorities **must** consult the child and the child's parent or the young person throughout the process of assessment and production of an EHC plan. They should also involve the child as far as possible in this process. The needs of the individual child and young person should sit at the heart of the assessment and planning process. Planning should start with the individual and local authorities **must** have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child's parent or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them.*

The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews (Ofsted 2011) provides an analysis of 67 serious case reviews that Ofsted evaluated between 1st April and 30th September 2010. The focus of the report is on the absolute importance of listening to the voice of the child in safeguarding children and young people.

The Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines refer to a legal case in 1985 which looked specifically at whether doctors should be able to give contraceptive advice or treatment to under 16-year-olds without parental consent. They have since been more widely used to help assess whether a child has the maturity to make their own decisions and to understand the implications of those decisions. These guidelines are key in the context of young people's participation in decision-making and can be relevant to all professionals working with young people.
(http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/gillick_wda101615.html)

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Harry Shier (2001) developed a pathway that is useful in assessing organisational readiness and commitment to youth participation beyond individual projects. In this model of participation, Shier outlined five different levels of engagement when taking views into account.

These are:-

- • 1. Children are listened to.
- • 2. Children are supported in expressing their views.
- • 3. Children's views are taken into account.
- • 4. Children are involved in the decision-making processes.
- • 5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

Shier stated that level 3 of his model is the minimum practice needed to meet the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Three stages of 'commitment' are identified at each level:-

Stage one: openings

The first stage is when an opening occurs and a teacher (or group of teachers) expresses an interest and or readiness to work in a certain way.

Stage two: opportunities

The second stage is when a teacher / teachers are given the opportunity to work at this level due to additional resources, time or skills, or new methods and approaches.

Stage three: obligations

The third stage is when a consensus is reached and the new way of working becomes policy and a 'culture' change happens.

The publication of the SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 years (2014) has provided an exciting **opportunity** to further develop good practice across Wigan in involving children in decision-making processes and effect wider cultural change in this area. Between 2012 and 2014 several 'Voice of the Child / Young Person' pilots have been commissioned as part of the Wigan Pathfinder Project. The aim of the pilots has been to develop systems around eliciting the Voice of the Child so that participation becomes a process rather than a specific event or project. This process will focus upon supporting young people in expressing their views in order to subsequently influence actions and plans. The projects have also further developed our understanding of key factors to consider when eliciting the Voice of the Child / Young Person.

2. Guidelines for eliciting the Voice of the Child / Young Person

The guidelines have been developed in consultation with the Voice of the Child Strategy Group which was commissioned by the SEND Pathfinder Team. The group was attended by professionals from Education, Health and Care.

This section aims to provide guidance in engaging with, listening to and involving children and young people in decision-making. It comprises some key tools, from those that have been used extensively in research and clinical practice, to those which professionals have found valuable within their individual casework.

The tools are designed to elicit views on a wide range of topics e.g. school, teaching, learning, keeping healthy, feeling positive, keeping safe, being part of my community, being independent.

Getting started

Key factors to consider when eliciting the Voice of the Child / Young Person:-

1. Prepare children for change and consider what skills / understanding they may need in order to participate effectively in decision-making.

2. Use everyday interactions and natural encounters - eliciting views does not have to be a 'special event'

3. Plan ahead – Why are you asking? What information do you need? How are you going to find out? What actions are you going to take as a result of finding out the information? How are you going to feedback to the child regarding the impact of their communications?

4. Match tools / methods to the purpose and to the needs of the child

5. As far as possible, present the true voice and avoid adapting the language or communication for adult purposes.

6. Carefully consider the best conditions for participation e.g. a familiar physical and social environment.

7. Give children opportunities to share their views without their parents/carers present.

8. Sensitively balance children's and young people's views with safeguarding their welfare.

Matching tools to the needs of the child / young person

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives was initially published in 1956 under the leadership of American academic and educational expert Dr Benjamin S Bloom. Benjamin Bloom chaired a committee of Educational Psychologists whose aim was to develop a system of categories of learning behaviour to assist in the design and assessment of educational learning.

Bloom's Taxonomy model is in three parts, or 'overlapping domains'.

- Cognitive domain (thinking)

- Affective domain (feeling)

- Psychomotor domain (doing)

In each of the three domains the categories are ordered in degree of difficulty. An important premise of Bloom's Taxonomy is that each category (or 'level') must be mastered before progressing to the next. As such the categories within each domain are levels of learning development, and these levels increase in difficulty.

The cognitive or thinking domain has been presented below as it can be extremely useful in the context of eliciting young people's voices, as a template, framework or simple checklist to ensure that we are using the most appropriate type of questioning or approach for the child's developmental level.

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CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

1 Knowledge — Identification and recall of information			
define fill in the blank list identify	label locate match memorize	name recall spell	state tell underline
Who _____ ? What _____ ? Where_____ ? When _____ ?		How _____ ? Describe _____ ; What is _____ ?	

2 Comprehension — Organization and selection of facts and ideas			
convert describe explain	interpret paraphrase put in order	restate retell in your own words rewrite	summarize trace translate
Re-tell _____ in your own words. What is the main idea of _____?		What differences exist between _____? Can you write a brief outline?	

3 Application — Use of facts, rules, and principles			
apply compute conclude construct	demonstrate determine draw find out	give an example illustrate make operate	show solve state a rule or principle use
How is _____ an example of _____? How is _____ related to _____? Why is _____ significant?		Do you know of another instance where _____? Could this have happened in _____?	

4 Analysis — Separating a whole into component parts			
analyze categorize classify compare	contrast debate deduct determine the factors	diagram differentiate dissect distinguish	examine infer specify
What are the parts or features of _____? Classify _____ according to _____. Outline/diagram/web/map _____.		How does _____ compare/contrast with ___? What evidence can you present for _____?	

5 Synthesis — Combining ideas to form a new whole			
change combine compose construct create design	find an unusual way formulate generate invent originate plan	predict pretend produce rearrange reconstruct reorganize	revise suggest suppose visualize write
What would you predict/infer from _____? What ideas can you add to _____? How would you create/design a new _____?		What solutions would you suggest for ____? What might happen if you combined _____ with _____?	

6 Evaluation — Developing opinions, judgements, or decisions			
appraise choose compare conclude	decide defend evaluate give your opinion	judge justify prioritize rank	rate select support value
Do you agree that _____? Explain. What do you think about _____? What is most important?		Prioritize _____ according to _____? How would you decide about _____? What criteria would you use to assess ____?	

http://www.edudemic.com/blooms-taxonomy-critical-thinking/

Recommended tools to use

It is the intention of this chapter to promote the use of natural encounters and conversations in order to elicit children's and young people's voices, whilst being mindful of their developmental level and choosing appropriate questioning or approaches, as detailed in Bloom's taxonomy. For children / young people who are verbal, there will already be a wide range of effective tools and approaches being used in schools.

For further ideas and inspiration follow the links below:-

http://www.sheffkids.co.uk/adultssite/pages/communicrateworksheets.html

http://www.ica-uk.org.uk/participation-resources/

http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/reading-room/how/person-centred-planning.aspx

Children / young people working at a sensory level

For very young children and children/ young people working at a sensory level, an additional observation tool is being developed by the Educational Psychology Service and the Speech and Language Therapy Service (for further information please contact the Educational Psychology Service EP_Admin@wigan.gov.uk).

Children / young people with communication difficulties

Talking Mats is an established visual communication framework that uses a mat and picture symbols as the basis for communication (http://www.talkingmats.com/). It is designed to help people with communication difficulties think about issues or topics in a different way and it provides people with a way to effectively express their views visually. Research evidence demonstrates that Talking Mats is a very useful tool for assessing and helping children and young people to make decisions about their future targets (Mackay & Murphy 2012).Talking Mats has been successfully piloted within the Local Authority as part of the SEND Pathfinder project. The case studies carried out demonstrated that information gathered through Talking Mats could be used, as part of the Education Health and Care planning and review cycle, to inform both decision-making and goal setting for children and young people through:-

Identifying strengths
Identifying areas to develop
Identifying the child / young person's response to a range of experiences
Informing day-to-day decision-making
Informing targets and interventions
Supporting transition planning

In order to express their views effectively using Talking Mats, children / young people need to have:-

1. Some visual acuity (symbols can be enlarged / mats colour-coded)
2. The understanding that symbols / pictures can represent real objects
3. Pointing (eye / finger pointing)
4. A level of comprehension of two information carrying words or above (Murphy et al., 2004)

Training in the use of Talking Mats by the Educational Psychology Service will be available within Wigan by January 2015.

We aim to develop these guidelines over time. If you have suggestions for other tools to be included, please contact The Educational Psychology Service (EP_Admin@wigan.gov.uk).

3. Guidelines for sharing the Voice of the Child / Young Person with others

The child / young person may be in a position to communicate directly with those making decisions about their lives. Some children / young people will need an adult to support them in this role. The Voice of the Child Strategy Group recommends that these children are assigned a 'Voice of the Child Champion' by the SENCO.

Their role is as follows:-

To ensure that the child's views are elicited, listened to and taken into account during decision making.

To strive to communicate from the child's perspective

There are many innovative ways in which children / young people's voices can be communicated. For further ideas / inspiration follow the links below:-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76q1U31ihw0&feature=youtu.be
Wiki - New ways of working for Person Centred Planning

www.communicationpassports.org.uk/

www.assistiveware.com/product/pictello

4. Eliciting and sharing the Voice of the Child / Young Person as an integral part of the graduated approach to SEND

When?	Why?	Key questions relating to home, school and community	Who elicits?	Who shares?
As an integral part of the graduated approach to SEND	In order that the young person's views have been listened to, understood and taken into account when planning interventions (Shier model level 3)	*e.g. What do you like / not like doing?* *What are you good at?* *What's easy?* *What's hard?* *What do you think you need help with?* *What kind of help works or doesn't work?* *Who do you like to be with?*	SENCO is responsible for managing this and delegates to the most appropriate person within school. SENCO appoints 'voice of the child champion' for the child. Outside agencies also contribute to developing understanding of the child / young person's views.	Child SENCO Voice of the Child Champion Outside agencies

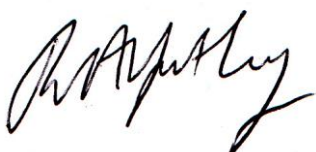| When?	Why?	Key questions relating to home, school and community	Who elicits?	Who shares?
Week 1 – Request for a statutory assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan	EHC referral group to consider the evidence in relation to the above i.e. have the young person's views have been listened to, understood and taken into account when planning interventions (Shier model level 3)	*e.g. What else could be done to help you?* *If you could change one thing, what would it be?*	As above	Cumulative written information to be provided as part of the request.
Week 6- 10 Additional Voice of the Child / Young Person advice may be requested by the EHC referral group to inform EHC Plan	As above	Revisit questions, check out preliminary decisions or plans *e.g. What do you think you need help with?* *What kind of help works or doesn't work?* Questions re provision / placement raised where appropriate	SENCO Voice of the Child Champion Educational Psychologist (EP)	Summative written information to be provided by school or EP

When?	Why?	Key questions relating to home, school and community	Who elicits?	Who shares?
Week 11 – 16 Summative information gathered for presentation at the EHC Plan meeting	In order that the young person's views have been listened to, understood and taken into account when identifying needs and provision.	As above	SENCO Voice of the Child Champion Educational Psychologist (EP)	Child Voice of the Child Champion
Reviews	In order that the young person's views have been listened to, understood and taken into account in the implementation of the Education Health and Care Plan	e.g. *What's changed?* *What's not changed?* *Can we do anything differently?*	SENCO is responsible for this and delegates to the most appropriate person within school. Outside agencies also contribute to building up understanding of the child / young person's views.	Child Voice of the Child Champion

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