



# creative approaches to pupil voice

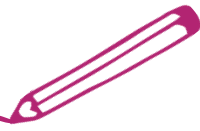
A resource for schools on alternative ways to listen to children and young people

Prepared by Sarah Bailey working in partnership with St Luke's Church of England Primary School, Glossop.

Commissioned by The Mighty Creatives

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education

# overview



In 2021, TMC commissioned a report to explore the perspectives of teachers on current practice in pupil voice in schools in the East Midlands. In 2022, we worked in partnership with St Luke's CE Primary School to develop a creative methodology to share with headteachers across Derbyshire. Headteachers were enthusiastic about our work and were keen to know more. Their reflections included:

Do it! This is too important not to prioritise!

This resource pulls together the approaches we've heard about or tried over the last couple of years. We'd like to thank all the schools from across the East Midlands who contributed to this work and who shared their approaches and thoughts on pupil voice.

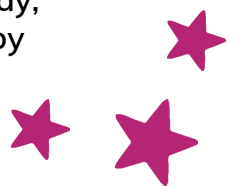
We hope you find it helpful!

## about sarah bailey



TMC has been working with Sarah Bailey to create this resource. Sarah is interested in childhood.

As an artist educator, her practice has formed over a number of years working with children and young people and the adults who work with them, across schools, play, youth and social care spaces. Her practice comes from theatre, and is influenced by processes from a variety of art forms and a range of pedagogies.



# what is pupil voice?



At its core, pupil voice is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, Article 12, which states that we:

“assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”



In England, the Department of Education issued a poster entitled “How the government is protecting your rights”. This makes specific reference to “Listening to children” and states:

“As a child, you have the right to give your opinion on things that affect your life”

The Character Education Framework Guidance (2019) includes questions such as:

- How do we ensure that all members of the school community (e.g. staff, pupils, parents/carers, governing body) understand and share our aims?
- How well do we promote consideration and respect towards others (pupils and adults), good manners and courtesy?
- Do we understand and reduce barriers to participation (e.g. cost, timing, location, logistics, confidence, parental support etc.)?
- Do volunteering and service opportunities contribute to breaking down social barriers? Are they effective in making pupils civic-minded and ready to contribute to society?
- Do we enable young people from all backgrounds to feel as if they belong and are valued?

Schools also have a duty to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Within these headings, we might explore how work in pupil voice could support this development of children and young people's:

- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them
- interest in investigating and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues and ability to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others on these issues
- willingness to participate in a variety of communities and social settings, including by volunteering, cooperating well with others and being able to resolve conflicts effectively
- knowledge of Britain's democratic Parliamentary system and its central role in shaping our history and values, and in continuing to develop Britain



# school councils... and beyond



While traditional structures such as School Councils are an important element of how schools reflect democratic values within their communities, many of the teachers we talked to broadened the discussion to considerations of school culture and ethos. How do we make sure everyone in the school community is heard?

In its simplest sense, the idea of voice is about speaking and listening. Issues of responsibilities, rights, understanding and power intersect. Pupil voice can also present practical challenges for the educator in terms of time, how to hear children with different communications needs, and how to create the conditions that make room for multiple perspectives.

## Why creative approaches?



Art is concerned with expression, meaning, imagination and creation. Beyond developing skills as an artist, art education has a long history of generating new knowledge and ways of knowing, trying to improve teaching and learning through artistic methodologies, and supporting us to find connection with each other and the world in new ways.

In drama, practices such as Mantle of the Expert developed by the late Dorothy Heathcote created a pedagogy that supported enquiry based learning in the classroom. The practice of Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia encourages us to think about 'The Hundred Languages of Children' and asks us to reflect in particular on the visual worlds that children experience and create. Good listening, observation and reflection are fundamental to approaches like these.

Though the suggestions here are not concerned with the making of art, some of the practices here are inspired by approaches from the artistic world. We think that they help us to hear differently. Communicating in multiple modalities helps us to develop deeper understanding of how other people experience the world. At their best, these approaches help us to imagine new ways of being together.

This resource pulls together processes that we've heard about from teachers or trialled during the last couple of years in our work on pupil voice with schools. Listening to children and enabling communication is a clear value in all the schools we collaborate with in the East Midlands, and we hope this resource adds value to that work. We think strong practice in pupil voice is fundamental to the fulfilment of children as learners and members of our school communities. If you would like to share your practice in this area, we would love to hear about your approach too.





# a sample workshop



Outside of school council structures, pupil voice is often integrated into multiple aspects of school life; from classroom pedagogy through to children and young people centred activity at lunchtimes or in assemblies. For those schools who wish to develop a more specific space for reflecting on the views and experiences of children, we have created this toolkit.

After trying out a few ideas, the workshop below was constructed alongside headteacher, class teacher and year 5s from St Luke's CE Primary School. We encourage you to modify it for your school community. For example, consider if the ground rules you usually share at school are right for the session, if they need to be restated or if you want to make any variations.

The strength of this workshop was in the quality of listening modelled by the headteacher and class teacher, and reflected by the children. There was a sense of openness and shared learning. This takes time. If you have limited capacity, just choose the activity that seems most important and give yourself and the children the time you need to do it well. It's always a good idea to warm up to these kinds of activities, and to close the session with actions and reflections.

In the sections to follow, we have also provided additional or amended activities and suggestions for early years settings, secondary schools and special schools.

## activity 1: warm up the sun shines on



This is a classic drama game that can be modified for a variety of topics.

It's a fun way to warm up our brains and voices. It helps to shift our focus from 'what's the right answer' or 'what does my friend think' to 'what do I think.'

Ask the group to sit in a circle, and stand in the middle. Tell them you are going to make a statement that is true for you e.g. "The sun shines on everybody who enjoys dinner time." If they agree, they change seats.

The last person standing is on! You can modify this approach to warm-up to exploring specific topics.



## activity 2: reflecting on learning

### a gallery of learning



What do you remember learning from your time at school?

This activity helps us to understand what is memorable for children in our classrooms. Take a long roll of paper, and divided it up into school years. Ask the children to draw on the things that they remember learning during this time.

Obviously, what initially comes out is anything that was out of the ordinary, but given enough time to reflect, more subtle reflections come.

After the drawing is complete, reflect on highlights together. Year 5 were very astute in recognising the types of learning that seemed to work well for them as a group.

Try this one with staff too. What engaged you at school? Is it the same for you now?

## activity 3: reflecting on the environment

### a picture of my school



Ask children to take photos of 1-3 places they like or dislike in school, then share back in a group and discuss what we have in common, and any changes that might be helpful. The strength of this exercise is in the conversation that you have afterwards. At St Luke's we unearthed some very useful information about a corridor that was associated with challenging behaviour.

This activity is not necessarily about changing everything or saying yes to suggestions, although you might decide that's appropriate. The focus here is on listening, understanding and two-way feedback. This process helps us to have better conversations about our experiences of the school environment.

You can use other categories if you wish e.g. 'the places I find it easiest to concentrate.' You can also alter group sizes or work with individuals.



## activity 4: reflecting on values

### gingerbread teacher



This exercise helps us to understand perceptions and expectations between staff and children.

In small groups, ask children to draw an A3 sized gingerbread. The shape represents a new teacher who is joining the school. On the inside of the shape, ask them to write all the characteristics they would like in a new teacher. Once this is completed, ask them to write all the things they think that teacher should know about their school on the outside.

A class-teacher suggested that she might use a similar approach as part of a getting to know you exercise with a new class, and as a way of her showing the children that she has heard them and is responding to what they need from her.

A headteacher was interested that some of the more obvious values of the school were not represented in the children's reflections. She wanted to spend longer with them to understand if this was because it had become embedded or if further work was required to make the values visible.

This shape can be modified according to what young people find engaging. Group sizes are flexible.

## activity 5: close

### "I liked it when you"



End the activity by recapping on what we have learnt about our perspectives during our time together.

Finally, to reinforce the children's experiences of being heard, encourage them to give feedback to each other. Ask children to stand in a circle, and to choose a peer to give feedback to. This might include statements such as "I liked it when you drew the picture of that school trip", "I liked it when you talked about the sign that welcomes people into school," or "I liked it when you helped me to take the photo." Include teachers and other adults.

## Final thought: what's the appropriate feedback loop?

Activities like these can be useful consultation exercises, but in a school context they are more useful as part of an ongoing conversation. Think about what came up in the session, and what follow up is appropriate. If you can, let them know how you will follow-up. It's ok to say "I'm not sure about what we can do yet, but I'll talk to some of the other teachers about it and we'll let you know."



# making our approaches age and stage appropriate



It's obviously essential to think about how approaches such as these are adapted for different learners. What's appropriate for your school community?

Below are some further suggestions for different settings based on our work to date:

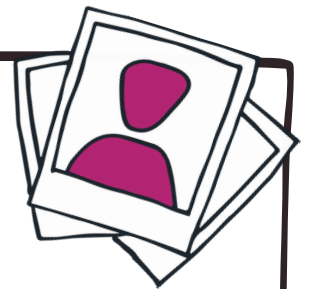
## early years



Early Years education includes observation as a central part of its approach. It's important that we don't undervalue how teachers are 'listening' to very young children using this method.

### a self portrait

How do the adults help to build a portrait of this child and begin to understand the choices they make? One method is to literally create a portrait of the child - using visuals and text as you need.



What does this child like to do at playtime? Are there spaces in the classroom that they visit regularly? This can be done physically or digitally. If you take the digital option, consider how might we make this appropriately visible in the classroom.

### this morning I am...

How can we make a space to understand where children are at during the day? Some schools set-up a simple visual for children to place themselves on at key times during the day. This could be a simple chart that gives them a range of options and enables them to make a mark about what they want to do, or it could be about how they are feeling.

If you think this approach is useful for your school, perhaps discuss with colleagues about what scale would work best, and modify it as required.



# early years continued...

## getting distracted...

Distractions can be gold! One primary school referred to “planning in the moment” in relation to their work with the very young. The headteacher from a Nursery School described a situation where children had become fascinated by aeroplanes in the playground. They built this into the learning, building planes and developing small world play.

It's all based on their interest, even though we are considering age, stage and skill development

## parents too...

How might you include parents in your approach? And how do we help them to feel comfortable being part of a team that reflects on what their child is communicating? It can be useful to make a social space where parents are welcomed to reflect on their child and the school community as a whole.



# alternative provision



Leicester City Primary Pupil Referral Unit take a trauma informed approach to all of their work with children and families. This includes pupil voice too. Due to the nature of some of their early experiences, the children often don't have a clear self-concept so peer-to-peer work can be unhelpful for them. Some of the children find too much attention stressful, even if it comes in the form of praise. Instead they work on creating relationships between key adults and children - 'class families' - to ensure that children feel safe.

The staff build on this carefully through tools like photos and positive comments around school. They are aiming for gentle reinforcement that the child is being seen and heard.



If they don't think they are  
listened to then we will know



## ways of connecting...

This takes time. Sometimes a young person will meet us several times before they are sufficiently comfortable to offer us insight into their interests. When this happens, it's a cue for us to respond with appreciation for them. This can be challenging if we don't approve! This is a nuanced process that many educators would recognise. We need to spend enough time paying attention before we start to extend. For example, if a particular style of animation is of interest, we might invest the time in appreciating it with them before we start offering extended possibilities for learning.

## ways of seeing...

How might we use photographs gently to help a child communicate preferences if verbal communication is too demanding? Consent needs to be thought about even more carefully in an environment that might contain additional stress. If it's helpful to you and the young person, great. If it's not, then it's not. Drawing or collage can be used similarly.

## find a soundtrack...

If explaining what we think and choosing are difficult for us to do well, it can be helpful to find a way of scaffolding choice through activities which are lower stakes. When we have space to be social in our approach, group playlists can be a useful way of building something together and retaining an individual contribution.



# special schools



Understanding the views and experiences of each young person is something which is given particular focus in special schools. We often see constant reflection, evaluation and adaptation embedded within the culture of the school.

## make a scrapbook...

Scrapbooks are a tool that Greenfields Specialist School for Communication find helpful in supporting pupil voice. As part of the process of documenting learning, children's views are included throughout. This approach can then be shared with families and other professionals to help us all stay up to date with our perspectives.

## create a visual language together...

Some schools use specific symbols and languages to communicate. Ashmount School worked with an artist to create their own set of symbols to use with an E-Tran frame to enable young people to communicate using their gaze. Think about how you might use these to discuss specific issues of school life.

Colours were mentioned frequently. If children are used to a red/amber/green system for indicating preference, this can then be used across different areas. For example, in the recruitment of new staff.

## hear the big idea...

The deputy headteacher of Ashmount School wanted us to think about all ideas that a young person might bring. Sometimes we do need to frame pupil voice activity in a way which holds a group in a shared understanding of what is possible. However, sometimes highly individual thinking can be useful for the child and the school community.

☞ We wouldn't shut down the 'swimming pool' or 'zero gravity chamber' ideas. We work with their inventiveness to find the best thing for all of us. We have a student who has invented his own full language based on teacher names. And he would like us to fully adopt that. That isn't practical, but he showcased it to the whole school. Everyone loved it. It's about coming back to the underpinning principle underneath the ideas through exploring it with them. For him, it was about defining part of his identity, his experience of school life and inviting others to share that with him. We do a lot of wondering aloud.



# primary Schools



## fingers on noses/thumbs on chests...

St Luke's CE Primary School use this as an alternative system to raising hands in the classroom. It works well for encouraging less confident children to speak up. It also changes the way that teachers are looking for input from individual children.

## tell us a story...

Some children might be more articulate about their perspective through creative writing. This can be flexed for topics and contexts. For example, if we want to plan a Leavers assembly, could we imagine a child at a different school who has the best leavers assembly ever. Sometimes the distance of a character and change of space makes it easier for us to imagine a different set of possibilities.

## the moment when...

In drama education, we sometimes start from finding a particular focus or 'the moment when.' This can be a helpful tool for understanding perspectives on events in school. For example, we might focus on the 'moment when the the bell goes' and re-enact thoughts and/or feelings in small groups.



# secondary schools



## where do you stand...

This can be a useful warm-up to talking about our views.

One person stands in the centre and makes a statement e.g. "I enjoy science lessons." The rest of the group then moves closer or further away according to how much they agree.

## role on the wall...

This is a commonly used drama technique that works through the creation of character. Using a large piece of paper (lining paper works well), draw around a young person. Encourage them to choose someone to draw around them who they are comfortable with. If the group are not confident with this approach they can draw the shape freehand.

Tell them that they are going to create a character of a young person who is going to join the school or is transitioning into a different year group. Ask them to think about what they need and what they need to know. As an extension ask them to think about what that character wants to tell the teachers in the school.

## a day in the life...

Ask young people to capture video of different parts of the school day, according to whatever needs to be in focus. For example, you might concentrate on arrival in the morning, and how the schools appears first thing.

Consent around images and the parameters around the use of them should be agreed at the outset.

## a learning map...

Maps can be a useful way to visualise our experiences and goals. Ask each young person to draw out their journey through education so far - and where they want to go next. This can be done in groups. You can use a key to highlight particular events. You could revisit this to see how we might have made changes that have helped us to move forward.





# frameworks for pupil voice



There are a few frameworks to help us think about how we are ensuring that we are listening to learners. In our approach, we have found the Lundy model to be particularly useful.

Lundy, again linking back to Article 12 of the UNCRC asks us to reflect on four areas to ensure that we are involving children appropriately. This was included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making as follows:

“Space: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view

Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their view

Audience: The view must be listened to

Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate”

As you can see from our images below, the children at St Luke's were able to translate these ideas well during our work together. It could be useful to spend some time thinking whether these principles are right for your school community, and how they might be expressed.



have you changed it  
so every one can be  
included

have you tried  
to give children  
a voice

SPACE

Make sure  
they feel safe to  
express their emotions

have they <sup>been</sup> give different ways to talk

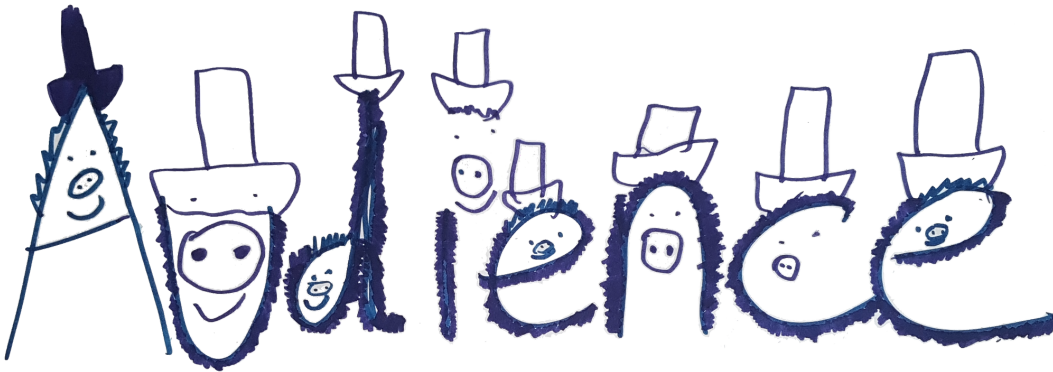
# VOICE

Do children actually know what they're taking to.

are you sure they want to take part

provide the right information

help people understand children



is there a place where children can communicate with their teachers without speaking

Make sure people listen and that they have the power to do something.

tell the children why you have or haven't done something.

Make sure the children know every thing they say. Can't happen.



make sure the teachers are listening when the children are speaking

Are they systems in place to make sure the children are getting listened to!

# Other useful models:



## treseder's degrees of participation

This helps us to think about appropriate participation and, for example, what is adult or child initiated.

## the national youth agency's 'hear by right' framework

This is a set of standards for young people's participation more focused on the youth sector.

## the rights respecting school award from UNICEF

This award encourages schools to learn and implement children's rights as a whole school community.

## artsmark

Young People's voice is at the heart of the Artsmark framework which supports schools to develop and use arts, culture and creativity to support school improvement priorities.





## doing more:



If you'd like more examples to help you to develop pupil voice, the following resources may be useful:

- [www.amplify-voice.uk](http://www.amplify-voice.uk)
- [www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do-0/impact-engagement/involving-young-people/youth-voice](http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do-0/impact-engagement/involving-young-people/youth-voice)
- [www.pupilvoiceweek.co.uk](http://www.pupilvoiceweek.co.uk)
- [www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/pupil-voice/](http://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/pupil-voice/)

## reading more:



- [www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/the-power-of-pupil-voice/](http://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/the-power-of-pupil-voice/)
- [www.bera.ac.uk/blog/pupil-voice-in-quality-assurance-of-schools](http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/pupil-voice-in-quality-assurance-of-schools)
- [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)
- [www.nfer.ac.uk/school-councils-their-role-in-citizenship-and-personal-and-social-education/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/school-councils-their-role-in-citizenship-and-personal-and-social-education/)
- [www.nfer.ac.uk/media/2230/vim01.pdf](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/2230/vim01.pdf)
- [schoolriverside.com](http://schoolriverside.com)
- [ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lundy\\_model\\_of\\_participation.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lundy_model_of_participation.pdf)
- [www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy/](http://www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy/)
- Developing the Emotionally Literate School, Weare
- Radical Education and the Common School, Fielding and Moss
- Research with Children: Perspective and Practices, Eds. Christensen and James
- The Hundred Languages of Children, Edwards, Gandini and Forman
- Making a Leap: Theatre of Empowerment, Clifford and Herrmann



# want to know more?

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