



GTvision

Eastern Region Gifted & Talented Partnership

Listening to Learners

Over recent years, a wealth of evidence has supported the benefits of consulting young people in school. We hope that the articles in this newsletter will stimulate further discussion and debate in schools around this issue. The inserts in the middle of this newsletter provide some practical examples of the ways in which primary and secondary schools might consult with and involve their gifted and talented students in 'pupil voice'.



“The fact is that pupils themselves have a huge contribution to make, not as passive objects but as active players in the education system.”

Hodgkin R: Partnership with pupils, Children UK 1998

“Decades of calls for educational reform have not succeeded in making schools where all young people want to and are able to learn. It is time to invite pupils to join the conversations about how we might accomplish that.”

Cook-Sather A: Authorising students' perspectives: towards trust, dialogue and change in education. Educational Researcher 2002

Mary Myatt, County Adviser for RE and G&T in Suffolk is a keen advocate of 'student voice'. Here she explains why.

Good reasons for developing student voice

The chance to have our say meets one of our most basic needs. Yet until recently there was some resistance to using student voice as a tool to develop learning. In the discussions about creating a curriculum fit for the 21st century, it was Professor David Hargreaves who articulated the potential of student voice in personalising learning. Hargreaves defined student voice as 'how students come to play a more active role in their education and schooling as a direct result of teachers becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students say about their experience of learning and of school life'. Together with assessment for learning and learning to learn, student voice creates the framework for 'deep learning'.

There are two ways to consider student voice in education. One is limited, tokenistic and viewed with scepticism by learners. The other is centred on profound conversations about the conditions and processes of learning. It is this deep version that has the possibility of transforming learning for all.

There should no longer be any reluctance on the part of educators to involve learners, who are essentially clients, in the processes and discussions about learning. Politics and business recognise the power of stakeholder opinions in improving services. The Children Act affirms the importance of listening to young people when assessing and planning service provision, as well as in face-to-face delivery. Similarly, Article 12 of the UN Rights of the Child confirms the right for young people to express their opinions and to have those opinions taken into account. Furthermore OFSTED expects students' views and evidence from questionnaires and surveys to be a key source from which schools can make evidence based judgements.

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So what does good 'student voice' look like and does it have benefits for able, gifted and talented learners? It is most powerful when it involves teachers working closely with students to design and evaluate learning. For example, the initial stimulus material at the start of an episode of learning allows for questions such as:

- What is this learning about?
- What would you like to know?
- How could we go about the learning?
- Is there more than one way of going about this?
- How can our learning get better?

An authentic dilemma or problem requires learners to consider different responses.

This richer experience can best be achieved through using strategies such as TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context), DBL (Dilemma Based Learning), Philosophy for Children or Mantle of the Expert. All these create conditions for cognitive and social skills' development. As such they are inclusive and inherently differentiated models for working. They allow for significant learner autonomy, for personal expression and for creative responses from all, including the most able.

At the heart of successful student voice is open heartedness and mutual respect. According to Hargreaves 'when student voice works, there are gains all round'. He suggests that in schools where students are true partners in learning,

teachers invite students to observe their lessons and provide feedback and suggestions on how they might be improved. Research carried out by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has shown that when learners are given the title of a topic and asked what they would like to know, their suggestions mirror the schemes of work planned by teachers.



In offering open ended questions about their learning, rather than being told what to do, opportunities are created for students to reflect on the subject matter and the most appropriate ways of making it meaningful.

When there is genuine co-construction of learning there are significant improvements in engagement and motivation. Learners develop higher order questions as they become better at interrogating evidence and making critical evaluations. Alongside this they also become better at talking about learning. And when given opportunities to work as researchers they develop a positive sense of self, inquiring minds and become both active and reflective about their learning:

- 'I have changed my attitude to work and I am concentrating more'.
- 'It has given me more confidence with expressing my ideas and opinions'.
- 'We started to understand things more'.
- 'I've learnt that teachers care about what we think'.

The overriding message from student perceptions is that they would like more opportunities to make decisions about learning. **'We want learning and teaching to be done with us, not to us.'**

How hard can it be?

References:

Deep Learning, Professor David Hargreaves www.ssat-inet.net

TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context), Belle Wallace www.nace.co.uk

Dilemma Based Learning in the Humanities, Phil Wood, Barry Hymer, Deborah Michel www.teachingexpertise.com

P4C www.sapere.net

Mantle of the Expert www.mantleoftheexpert.com

How to Develop Children as Researchers, Mary Kellett www.paulchapmanpublishing.co.uk

Mary Myatt is County Adviser for Religious Education in Suffolk. She is also a member of Suffolk's Able, Gifted and Talented Team that provides support for colleagues in schools throughout the local authority. As an adviser for AG&T Mary is involved in: Leading Teacher Training; supporting network meetings which are currently focusing on CQS; the development of student voice; the promotion of active learning strategies, thinking skills and AfL to provide challenge; and in the management of Suffolk's Summer School Programme.



Mary may be contacted on
01473 583524.

The Able, Gifted and Talented Team is led by Liz Taylor and also includes Carol Evatt, Gay Whent and Doreen Bartlett.



Jean Ruddock in 'Pupil voice is here to stay!' (QCA Futures www.qca.org.uk/futures) writes:

What's in it for teachers?

- a practical agenda for change that pupils identify with
- enhanced engagement with school and learning
- a partnership between pupils and teachers
- seeing the familiar from a different angle
- a better understanding of young people's insight and capability
- a basis for developing democratic principles and practices
- a more inclusive approach to school self-review



What's in it for pupils?

- opportunities to discuss things that matter to you in school
- feeling respected, being listened to and taken seriously
- feeling that you belong and can make a difference to how things are done
- being involved, understanding more and having more control over your learning

"Pupil voice is the consultative wing of pupil participation. Consultation is about talking with pupils about things that matter in school. It may involve: conversations about teaching and learning; seeking advice from pupils about new initiatives; inviting comment on ways of problem solving that are affecting the teacher's right to teach and the pupil's right to learn; inviting evaluative comment on recent developments in school or classroom, policy and practice."

What learners say...

Identified gifted and talented learners from different primary schools in Essex were interviewed to find out about their experiences in school. The outcomes were overwhelmingly positive and their replies showed a high degree of insight. The following lists may help teachers when they are considering their work with this wonderful group of learners.

Gifted and Talented Learners like teachers who...

- are interested in the subject because it makes it interesting
- are able to make subjects interesting by making it hands on, introducing new things, going deeper and giving you activities
- understand the children in the class
- listen and don't take over and who allow children to explain their thinking
- push you to be the best you can be
- put their confidence in you and who trust you
- are enthusiastic
- use ICT well especially the whiteboard to make learning exciting
- make you work hard and learn new things
- allow you to pair /share –share ideas and listen to each other
- give you opportunities and experiences which expand your mind into new learning
- ask hard questions
- allow you to learn from your mistakes
- give you problem solving activities and investigations
- give you work at your stage – work is sometimes too easy
- tell you the rules so you know them and aren't told off
- make learning fun

Gifted and Talented Learners do not like...

- work which is too easy
- lessons which are boring because you have already done the work and have to do it again
- being under pressure to do well
- helping others if you can't get on with your own work
- children who make fun of you and call you names
- people who ask you different things and expect you to know

Creativity and Challenge in the Classroom

On the 21st October 2008, the Eastern Region G&T Partnership held their third annual conference at Newmarket Racecourse ('a breathtaking venue') attended by nearly 150 delegates from across the region.

Tim Rylands, 'an inspirational gifted individual' informed, challenged and motivated delegates in the first keynote of the day. As an expert in the use of technology to inspire and engage pupils in their learning, Tim demonstrated the potential of educational computer games for raising standards in writing.

- 'fantastic, made me want to rush back to school, hijack a class and start teaching!'
- 'genuinely creative and a gift to those teaching literacy'
- 'if we are to inspire our pupils it helps for us to be inspired too (like this)'
- 'too short, I could have spent a whole day'
- I only wish all my staff could have listened to him'

Geoff Dean, a leading specialist in the teaching of English to more able pupils, provided a 'thought provoking', 'motivational, questioning and reflective' keynote on 'Creativity in Literacy'.

- 'another dynamic session'.
- 'very thought provoking in terms of the curriculum of the future'.
- full of great ideas to move practice on back in school'.
- 'gave me new heart'.
- challenging thoughts about changes and adapting for our children's future'.

The programme included a range of workshops on aspects of creativity provided by practitioners from across the region.

Some overall comments included:

"An exhausting day (in a good way). Fab"

"Excellent day, the best I have been on so far"

"Excellent - would have liked all my staff to come"

"Very inspiring - I will come again. I look forward to next year"



And on that note...

ERGATP Fourth Regional Conference

Tuesday 13th October 2009 Newmarket Race Course Conference Centre 9.30am - 3.45pm

Keynote Speakers

John West-Burnham

John West-Burnham is a respected educational academic and consultant with a strong interest in personalised learning that is supported by his intensive research and first-hand experience of successful practice in schools. John is passionate about the value of 'deep learning'. This is learning which stays with the learner and which, he believes, we should be establishing for all pupils, including the most able.

Barry Hymer

Barry is an experienced primary and secondary teacher and chartered psychologist whose commitment to inclusive, holistic and child-centred approaches to education underpins his writing, teaching and his in-service presentations. He has particular interests in thinking skills and creativity, intrinsic learning motivation and independent learning, wise learning environments and in contextual, growth-oriented approaches to gift-creation.

Further details including programme, workshops and costs will be available in the Spring Term 2009.

Details will be emailed to all schools in the Eastern Region and posted on your local authority's Gifted and Talented websites.

If you would like to reserve a place in advance please email Nahid Ahmed at Nahid.Ahmed@luton.gov.uk

A flyer will then be emailed to you direct as soon as it becomes available.

ERGATP Key Contacts

Linda Prestidge - Chair - 01582 531107

Nahid Ahmed - Administrator - 01582 531100

Look out for the ERGATP link on the new Excellence East website!

Excellence East Contact Details

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