

PRIMARY PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

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7. Children's voice

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter you will:

- be familiar with the main principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and how these inform school policy;
- understand some of the theories on student voice and their implications for teaching and learning;
- recognise not just how the importance of children's voice operates in the classroom on a daily basis through routine activity, but also how it is expressed through wider school policy and initiatives;
- understand the benefits of student voice initiatives for both pupils and staff, but also recognise some of the pitfalls, limitations and inequalities of implementing student voice in schools.

TEACHERS' STANDARDS

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils

- establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect
- set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions
- demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils.

2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils

- be accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes
- be aware of pupils' capabilities and their prior knowledge, and plan teaching to build on these
- guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and their emerging needs
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching
- encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their own work and study.

4. Plan and teach well structured lessons

- impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
- promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity
- ... plan other out-of-class activities to consolidate and extend the knowledge and understanding pupils have acquired

- reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching
 - contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum.
- 5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils**
- have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these
 - demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils' education at different stages of development.
- 7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment**
- manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them
 - maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary.

A note on terminology

In this chapter the terms 'children's voice', 'student voice', 'pupil voice' and 'pupil participation' can be considered to be interchangeable, although the term chosen in any given context may vary. For example, discussion about School Council may invite the term student voice more readily, whereas examples of listening to children and children being heard in the classroom may better be described as children's voice.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The evolution of children's voice has moved on a long way since the Victorian adage that 'children should be seen and not heard', an expression that we know today but the origins of which actually date back to the fifteenth century. You can read in Chapter 1 about how the Education Reform Act (1944) did a great deal to shape the model of the education system we have in the UK today, but perhaps the most recent development of significance in terms of children being heard appears in the form of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989). As a teacher, this is an important piece of global legislation that you will need to become familiar with, if you are not already. A copy of the full charter can be found at http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf and there is a child-friendly version available at <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>.

In summary – and in plain English – the main articles in the UNCRC which relate to this chapter on children’s voice are:

- **Article 3:** The right for adults to act in the best interests of children when making decisions which affect them.
- **Article 12:** The right for children’s voices to be heard, listened to and taken seriously.
- **Article 13:** The right for children to voice their opinions and share what they think with others.

Activity: Reflecting on the UN Convention

Study and read carefully the articles in the UN Convention – in doing so you may wish to read both versions of the Convention above in tandem. Considering the school and class where you are teaching, carry out an initial audit of how the Convention impacts on your day-to-day teaching. Consider in particular:

- the age of the children you are working with – and how the Convention can be made relevant to them – and how they may need to engage with it;
- the curriculum and daily routines already established in your classroom;
- the implications of the Convention in relation to the wider policies and practices in your workplace;
- being able to provide concrete examples of how you see the Convention being observed and adhered to in your setting.

This information gathering process and analysis may involve discussions with other members of staff in school.

Research Focus: A pedagogical overview of student voice

Forty years ago, and well over a decade before the UN Convention was launched, Lawrence Stenhouse – a prominent British educationalist of the last century – claimed that pupils would do better at school if they were treated ‘with respect as learners ... and (their) ideas listened to and taken seriously’ (Stenhouse, 1975, p.32). Rudduck and Fielding (2006), in their account of the antecedents of the student voice movement, refer to the fact that in the 1970s, while researchers were interested in students’ perspectives, there was little commitment on the part of the schools they were working in to actually promote student voice. Henry Giroux – also an eminent critical pedagogue of our time – has considered student voice to play a particularly important role in schools. Not just in terms of the process of student voice being emancipatory for children, but more as a means for them to question, challenge and become involved with decision-making processes in schools.

An important final, if not obvious point to consider here, is that 'students make up around 95 per cent of a school's population ... [and] are often bright vibrant people who have much to offer' (Roberts and Nash, 2009, p.174), which supports Soo Hoo's (1993) pertinent notion that through our children and their voices, we need to value and recognise the treasure that they bring to our own back yard.

Defining voice

Student voice can appear in many different forms in schools, but broadly speaking it can be defined as any process of consulting with children and inviting them to enter a dialogue with each other, their teachers or other school staff. This dialogue may concern teaching or learning or wider school issues within the context of policy and practice. Such dialogues may result in situations where pupils are consulted about making changes or improvements in school, for example as being part of School Council. However, it is important to recognise that student voice is more than this, and among other things it should be about facilitating children to take ownership of their environment and become leaders themselves.

How student voice operates in schools

The ways in which student voice initiatives may manifest themselves in schools is almost entirely down to the ways in which the head teacher and senior management team or school leadership team give weight to their importance. This may be determined by the many factors that concern the school's population, the socio-economic demographics and any other idiosyncrasies which could include:

- the breadth, number and dominance of community languages spoken;
- the percentage of children in Key Stage 2 eligible for free school dinners;
- the percentage of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND);
- the ergonomics of the school site including access and resources;
- any wider social, environmental or demographic issues unique to the setting.

You may well find that in the schools where you work or undertake training there are existing systems, policies or practices in place. These may depend upon the age of the children and may vary between different key stages. For example, the ways in which children's voices are heard, valued or recognised in a nursery setting may well manifest themselves differently in a Year 6 classroom. Having said this, if your practice spans more than one key stage, you may well be able to establish some common patterns or trends. For example:

- inviting children to assess how well they felt they have learned something in a lesson;
- situations where children assess each other's work;

about how you form your own teacher identity. Personal professional development is a key component of your initial teacher training. It began the moment you prepared for an interview on your course, and will continue throughout your career. This aspect of developing as a teacher is discussed in this section also.

Section 4: Teaching skills

The ‘nuts and bolts’ of teaching are also important, and these are reflected in the Teachers’ Standards. This section will support your assessment of children, planning for teaching, management of behaviour for learning, and managing the classroom environment.

Features

This book contains a number of features to support your learning.

At the start of each chapter you will find a list of **Learning Outcomes**. These provide the intended focus of each chapter. You can skim these to see the structure and content of each chapter.

Each chapter will help you to demonstrate some of the **Teachers’ Standards**, and a list of the relevant standards appears at the beginning of each chapter. You may wish to search for individual standards that you have identified as areas for development, or make a note of your reading and associated activities in your teacher training notes.

Each chapter contains a number of **Activities** that help you to become actively engaged in the content of the chapter. Sometimes the activity will ask you to reflect on your reading or placement experiences, or there may be a task that you will need to undertake. You may find it helpful to undertake the activities with a friend, or discuss the outcomes with your tutors or school mentors.

Case Studies are provided to illustrate how the ideas presented in each chapter can be achieved in a real context.

Research underpins quality teaching. Each chapter contains **Research Focus** features that highlight key literature in the area being discussed. The features provide an overview of the research.

Each chapter concludes with **Further Reading** and a **Learning Outcomes Review**, which asks you to reflect upon the key components of the chapter.

Note

This introduction has explained that education is currently placed within a changing landscape and Chapter 1 particularly explores this further. We are clear about the direction of travel that many areas of primary education are taking, and those areas are addressed in this book – making it the most up-to-date and helpful book available to trainee teachers today. However, as this edition

went to print, the Department for Education was continuing to make fast and widespread changes to education, particularly in relation to assessment. Therefore, please be aware that while every effort was made to reflect the current state of education at the time of writing, there may have been subsequent changes that are not reflected in this edition. Remember that it is a key part of your professional development as a teacher to make sure that you keep up to date with legislation and change at government level, so monitoring the key education websites and specialist press should be a regular part of your practice.

References

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