

Beyond Tokenism –

promoting effective consultation and
a participatory ethos in schools

Hilton Dunblane Hydro



December 2003

ORGANISATION

Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership

FOCUS

'A practical guide to pupil participation in SEBD schools'

*Can you describe briefly any initiatives or projects in place that illustrate the focus of our conference i.e. **Collective Participation?***

The whole pupil participation project has been concerned with testing out different ways of enabling young people in special SEBD schools to participate in their school and education. The main methods used have been:

- Schools councils
- Project groups to focus on a particular issue.
- Creative consultations
- Assemblies
- 1 to 1 self advocacy i.e. preparation for reviews and PSG's
- Holiday activity programmes
- Groupwork as part of core curriculum time
- New opportunities outside of school

None of these methods are particularly innovative in themselves. What has been innovative is the process of negotiating entry into the school, building relationships, establishing trust from the staff, and how the schools have moved towards having pupil participation as an integral part of the school ethos.

How are these initiatives being monitored and evaluated?

The project was set up as to be an action research project with reflection and evaluation built into the process. This has been achieved through:

- MARS – Monitoring Action Research System – a database developed by Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership for hard data and reflection on key issues and learning.
- Questionnaires
- Paper based evaluations – groupwork, structured interviews etc
- Feedback from staff, parents and outside agencies
- MAP; a reflection on change proforma

CONTACT INFORMATION

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What are some of the biggest challenges faced by teachers and young people or members of your organisation, in implementing the initiatives or projects?

There are sometimes different expectations placed on project workers as a result of crisis management and workload within the schools. A key element of our integration into the schools has been our management of these differences. Other challenges have included: -

- Behaviour management
- Negotiating curriculum time/withdrawal from lessons
- Balancing different peoples' expectations of young people
- Negotiating roles that impact upon other established roles within two very different school cultures
- Managing personal well-being in the face of ongoing abusive situations
- Fundamental difficulties of working with young people with SEBD
- Pressures on teaching staff to deliver curriculum (tension between formal/informal 'work')
- Natural uncertainty caused by the development of new roles within existing cultures

What has worked well?

The introduction of additional specific and flexible resources into a school environment has worked well. This additional resource (two project workers / covering two schools) has allowed time to follow through projects and develop long-term processes. It's not school council meetings that take the time it's the 101 different actions that come out of the council and involving young people in the process that takes the time. Specific projects that have worked well would include: -

- Pupil participation in the transition between schools
- Preparation for Reviews and PSG's
- Holiday activity programme
- School web site
- Consultation on afternoon curriculum
- Development of a football team.

What did not work & lessons learned?

- Importance of induction period – don't rush it!
- Factor in time for relationship building and flexibility to meet and respond to needs that fall outwith your project, for reciprocal benefit
- Sessions need to be: well structured, stimulating, grab attention, flexible etc.
- If a session goes wrong, it is not necessarily your fault

Future plans?

- Project ends April 2004, currently developing exit strategy, sustainability and future funding options.
- Will be undertaking local seminars targeting, senior management, outside agencies etc.
- Writing final reports and toolkit for practitioners.
- Exploring dissemination routes

Any materials the school/organisation is willing to share or relevant publications that are for sale?

There will be a cost attached to the toolkit for workers outside Edinburgh but it will be free to practitioners inside Edinburgh. If you would like more detailed information or would like to discuss possible training, seminars, reports or toolkits etc. please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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