

Resource 4 Involving Seldom-Heard Children and Young People as Young Creativity Champions



Seldom-Heard Children and Young People

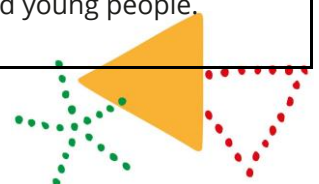
It can be difficult to define precisely which children and young people are 'seldom-heard' but put simply they are those who have fewer opportunities to participate and who may experience more obstacles when given opportunities to do so. Seldom-heard includes (but is not limited to) children and young people who are:

- Looked after or have been previously supported by the care system.
- Bullied.
- Not in school.
- Poor school attenders.
- Experiencing domestic violence.
- Homeless or do not have a secure/permanent home.
- Living with health conditions (including mental health issues).
- Living with physical disabilities.
- Living with a learning disability.
- LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and more).
- Young carers.
- Living in poverty
- From an ethnic minority.
- Refugees or asylum-seekers.
- Young offenders.
- Travellers.
- Living in rural isolation.
- Living with parental addiction.
- Living with challenging family relationships.

Existing approaches

Most schools have a range of existing approaches (school councils and committees, class representatives etc) to consulting with and/or involving children and young people in decision making. In this activity we promote the involvement of seldom-heard children and young people as Young Creativity Champions and advocate that schools may need to re-think their seemingly democratic selection processes and find alternative mechanisms to the stereotypical School Council whose members may be selected based on their popularity and include young people with high levels of confidence and social and cultural capital.

International research has highlighted the challenges, barriers and experiences of seldom-heard young people in relation to school/student councils as they tend to adopt a "*representative democratic model of participation whereby individuals are elected or self or adult-selected*" Kelleher et al. (2014) who go on to suggest the increased likelihood that these will lead to them being dominated by young people who are more confident and articulate. Young people themselves have highlighted that school councils do not adequately reflect the diversity of the student population in terms of background, age, gender, disability and ethnic background (Davey, 2010.) This view is supported by other UK studies which highlight the marginalisation of seldom-heard children "*those with significantly less social and cultural capital are less likely to reach student councils*" (Wyness, 2009) and O'Kane's 2009 Wales study into participation in decision-making in schools and their findings from consulting with marginalised/seldom heard young people.



Alternative approaches

Providing the same opportunity to be involved may require alternative approaches for seldom-heard young people. Your school may need to adopt a new or blended approach which provides additional support for seldom-heard young people allowing it to:

- Identify and target/encourage specific individuals.
- Target or ask for peer suggestions from existing school clubs/learning support groups (but not the school council) that are not generally represented on the school council or other committees.
- Still include a degree of self-selection and/or adult selection.

Being transparent about the process and clear about the different mechanisms in place to select Young Creativity Champions will be important and in doing so care must be taken with the explanation given to avoid stigmatisation and labelling of any individuals or groups of young people. This might be achieved by explaining that the Creativity Champions will include a number of young people who have put themselves forward for the role, some peer suggestions of young people involved in existing clubs and groups and some young people who teachers have approached to be involved. When peers suggest/nominate a young person from an existing club/learning support group it is important to highlight that their role is not to represent the views of their club/group but that they are there because the school values their own individual ideas, experiences and suggestions.

The benefits of involving seldom-heard children and young people

Much has been written about the benefits of involving seldom-heard children and young people in decision-making both for the young people themselves and the organisations who involve them. When given the opportunity to be involved these children and young people can bring new, different and innovative ideas and viewpoints to inform our work as creative thinking schools.

The Seldom Heard Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Including Seldom Heard Children and Young People in Decision Making highlights the following benefits to children and young people:

- The chance to be involved and have their voice heard.
- Opportunity to influence and generate change in the community they live in.
- Increased sense of belonging and connectedness.
- Improved ability to trust and build rapport.
- Increased status and standing in the community.
- Increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Increased competencies, skills and knowledge specifically related to the Five Creative Habits citing teamwork and team-building; working alongside children and young people and adults who have different views; self-discipline and time management; negotiating, planning and reporting; communication skills; problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Ensuring that more relevant and appropriate decisions can be made with regard to children and young people and their needs.
- Instilling a sense of achievement.
- Develop understanding of how adults make decisions and the challenges of the decision-making process.

The toolkit also highlights the following benefits to organisations:

- Brings new perspectives and ideas to activities and services.
- Ensures services and programmes are responsive and effective.
- Increases likelihood of commitment from children and young people to programmes/policies/services when they have been involved from the outset in design and implementation plan.
- Increased effectiveness reduces time and costs by reducing the risk of having to make changes.
- Increased credibility for the organisation as children and young people are actively involved in influencing decisions.

Young Creativity Champions - attracting and involving seldom-heard children and young people

As previously highlighted getting seldom-heard children and young people to participate as Young Creativity Champions may require you to explore new approaches to their engagement. An important early step will be to understand who they are and what groups of seldom-heard young people exist across your school.

Be clear about the reason why you want seldom-heard young people involved and be ready to explain this to them. Recognise that more time will be needed to support their engagement and more informal approaches needed to encourage their involvement for example one to one conversations, events outside of the formal school day, school social events where informal chats can take place, invitations to a small group discussion during the school day. Providing refreshments, or a small incentive and meeting in an informal/relaxed space will also be important to consideration. It is also important to understand that seldom-heard young people have the right to say no and may not want to be involved – they may have had poor experiences previously or they may not be interested in sharing their views on creative thinking in the school.

You will need to consider how you will develop the capacity of seldom-heard young people to be Young Creativity Champions so that they feel confident, supported and able to communicate their own view and ideas. Explain the support that you will provide and you may also begin their journey by providing an opportunity to explore what participation actually means. The methods you choose should allow them to express their ideas and experiences in accessible and creative ways. Asking them for ideas and offering choices and alternatives in selecting approaches should also support their sense of agency.

References:

Kelleher C, Seymour M, and Halpenny AM (2014). Promoting the participation of seldom heard young people: a review of the literature on best practice principles.

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