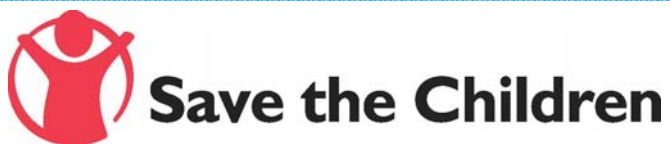


Youth Policy Exchange

Consultation with children and young people about their experience of participation in their education.

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Regional Participation Officer



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Contents.

▪ Acknowledgements	3
▪ Youth Policy Exchange: Introduction	4
▪ Youth Policy Exchange: The framework	6
▪ Participation in Education: Background	9
▪ Participation in Education: The process	11
▪ Participation in Education: The results	12
▪ Case Studies	
a) Thornhill School, Sunderland	16
b) Byker Primary School, Newcastle	18
c) Bishopgarth School, Stockton On Tees	20
d) Hendon Young People's Project, Sunderland	22
e) Porsgrunn, Norway	24
f) Rovenemi, Finland	27
▪ Participation In Education: Summary of key points	28
▪ Conclusion	29
▪ Bibliography	30
▪ Appendices	
1a. Save the Children information for children and young people	32
1b. Save the Children information for teachers	33
2. Session plan	34
3. Teacher's Questionnaire	37

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Youth Policy Exchange.

Introduction.

Youth Policy Exchange is a concept that has been developed by the Regional Youth Work Unit and a steering group of representatives from the Regional Assembly and Save the Children UK and is supported in principle by Government Office for the North East.

Although there is a distinction between consultation and participation, Youth Policy Exchange is a model of consultation which when applied properly, should lead to meaningful participation for children and young people.

Definitions.

In the report there are clear distinctions made between consultation and participation:

Consultation

Whilst consultation is often a starting point for participation, adults guide the decision making process. Adults tend to ask children and young people for their ideas/opinions and then feed gathered information into the decision making process.

Participation

Participation means taking involvement further by involving children and young people in shared decision making and making changes.

This report strongly recommends that changing values, attitudes and professional approaches for the meaningful participation of children and young people are more important than structures and methods. Effective participation is based upon respecting and valuing children and young people in our society.

The Porsgrunn Model, is an example of best practice from Europe, and has inspired the development of Youth Policy Exchange. Porsgrunn is a small town in Norway where child and youth participation has been built into the town's planning for over 12 years with successes, in both economic and political terms and regards a change in attitudes as the key driver to successful participation for children and young people not structures. *The Porsgrunn Model* is discussed later as a case studies.

There are a number of tools to help people engage and involve different groups of young people. It is important to clarify that Youth Policy Exchange is a framework to enable a meaningful process of consultation with children and young people and can be used in conjunction with a number of resources and

toolkits to engage children and young people with the subject matter. Youth Policy Exchange sets out the process but does not dictate the method and should be seen as a model of best practice where it is applied within organisations wishing to seek the views of children and young people.

Youth Policy Exchange lists a number of benefits to children young people:

- The process implements the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child particularly Article 12 that says that;

'State parties shall 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'.

- Children and Young People have direct access to areas of policy and service development;
- Children and young people take part in a process that is fun and they understand what it is they're contributing to;
- Young people have a commitment from adults from the beginning of the process;
- Children and young people's participation is meaningful and tokenistic processes are avoided.

As well as benefits to children and young people are those to adults:

- They will have a best practice framework for consulting with children and young people;
- The outcomes from children and young people feed into a bigger piece of work the process of which has been designed by someone else;
- It develops a culture of practice which could be embedded into organisational ways of thinking;
- Children and young people's participation is meaningful and tokenistic processes are avoided.

Youth Policy Exchange.

The framework.

Youth Policy Exchange sets out a framework which could be used in a number of settings. It is not restrictive but gives clear guidance of how children and young people can meaningfully participate.

The Youth Policy Exchange framework can be followed in seven stages:

Stage 1: Adult decision makers; organisations; service providers; policy officers to make a decision about an area of work in which they would like the participation of children and young people.

This clearly shows the commitment of the organisation from an early stage that children and young people should be involved equally in joint decision making. It's important that key decisions have not already been made; otherwise children and young people's participation would be less meaningful. If some decisions have already been made, be honest about what it is they are able to influence. At this stage the adults choose what area of their work they would like to involve children and young people in, eventually a culture of involvement should follow where they seek children and young people's participation in all relevant aspects of what they do.

Stage 2: The adults should explain the area of work in jargon free, children and young person-friendly language. This should be no longer than one side of paper describing the issue, what they would like to know their views about and no more than three questions they would like a response to. They should be clear about why their views are being sought. They should also be clear about what can be expected of them and how they will maintain a dialogue with the children and young people.

Adult language and ways of doing things are often the reason why children and young people don't engage in what we think are issues that are too complicated for them. The jargon we create to describe our work is often the complication and the systems we use to make things easier can actually alienate people who do not work within the same environment, not just children and young people. Basically we make it hard for them to understand what it is we're talking about. It requires a change in organisational culture to be able to make what you do transparent and accessible to others. It's not easy and does require a commitment, but if you value the participation of children and young people key changes like this are crucial and rewarding. You must also make a clear commitment to children and young people from the beginning about what it is you will do, as we often ask things of them and don't offer anything in return Please don't commit yourself to something you can't deliver on.

Stage 3: Once the adults are clear about what it is children and young people would be involved in, they then approach groups of children and young people or people who work with them to present their jargon free, friendly plan. From this point onwards children and young people can choose whether to engage with the issue, how they would like to talk about the issue, where they would like to talk about it, the timeframe and outcomes they would like to see happen if they do and how they would like feedback presented to them. It is up to the adults and children and young people to decide the process and after this has been jointly agreed it should be written up so that everyone knows what to expect and the dialogue can begin. It is also at this stage where the needs of the group or individuals can be identified in order that suitable venues, activities, food etc can be provided and to meaningfully take part in a dialogue.

It is important that children and young people have joint ownership over what it is they are getting involved in and the more they understand and are involved they are more likely to engage with the issue and share responsibility for maintaining a dialogue with you. It's important that you listen to them and share power with them whilst also being honest about what it is they are influencing.

Stage 4: From the agreed process an appropriate consultation session should be planned. As previously mentioned a number of toolkits, websites and people are available to help this planning. The process should provide you with a checklist to ensure you have taken into consideration all of the things that have been discussed. For example, if you have agreed to have a meeting on a weekend don't plan it to happen on a Thursday evening even if you can't book the room on the weekend, before you make this decision you should always go back to the children and young people to involve them in that decision or you might end up with one person at the meeting - yourself. If you respect their views, they will be more willing partners.

There are lots of resources already produced to help people talk to, engage with children and young people in a range of settings, from a variety of backgrounds with a diversity of needs and abilities. In each local authority area there will be at least one person whose job it is to make sure children and young people are involved in decision making and could help you. In the North East there is a network of workers called the Regional Active Participation Network (RAP) who meet with the aim to effectively support children and young people's active participation by offering support; working across the region networking and sharing practice with anyone regardless of job title who is involving children and young people in the work that they do and work strategically; acting as a conduit for children and young people's participation in partnership with statutory, voluntary, national and regional

agencies such as office of the Children's Commissioner and Government Office for the North East (GONE)

Stage 5: Consultation. If you done your planning, this should be very straightforward.

The consultation or engagement stage of Youth Policy Exchange is the fun part! Talking with and listening to young people when they are actively engaged in the issue, having fun and sharing their views is ultimately what you have worked toward achieving and the long process which build up to this stage will ensure good participation and the 'costs' will be justified.

Stage 6: How you record the views of children and young people and how you feed back to them should have been agreed at stage three. Again this part should be pretty straightforward, use the agreement as a checklist and refer back to stage two and ensure that you present you feedback in jargon free, children and young person friendly language.

Again this maintains a dialogue and shows the children and young people that their views have been valued and listened to before and during the consultation stage. Be clear to indicate any next steps and agree to keep them involved, it's important that children and young people know what has happened as a result of their involvement and again this requires a commitment to them as partners long after seeking their views. How you maintain this should again be agreed by you and the children and young people and may simply take the form of a newsletter, an email every month, a web blog, or meeting with them in person. It is important that you carry out your commitments to them.

Stage 7: The whole process requires you to produce something at each stage. This means that you will develop a record of children and young people's participation and methods that can be adapted and applied a number of times, and information to evaluate different stages of the process.

This builds resources within your organization which are appropriate to the area of work you do. You have used the framework as guidance but have adapted it to suit your needs. Each stage can be followed and recorded, mapping a very simple process to follow and track.

Youth Policy Exchange does not offer a quick fix to consulting with children and young people and doesn't dictate a timescale for it to happen. To invest properly in meaningful participation it takes time and resources but mainly a clear commitment and change of attitudes and values.

Participation in Education.

Background.

Save the Children UK has commissioned the Regional Youth Work Unit to invite groups of children and young people to talk about their experience of participation in their education using the Youth Policy Exchange model. Their views will inform a national website developed by Save the Children to be launched in 2006. The site will exist to aid teachers and other education professionals in building in participation into their everyday practice, sharing information and resources to help each other with the process.

Save the Children works with vulnerable children and young people in the UK and overseas to make real and lasting change to their lives. In England Save the Children works with children, young people, teachers and LEA staff to contribute to realising a quality education for all. In order to achieve this goal Save the Children believes it is crucial that children and young people are able to have a say in the kind of education they receive. Not just because it is their right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [articles 12, 28 and 29] but also because they believe it can lead to improved behaviour, engagement and achievement in education, as well as promote the values and behaviour necessary for people to fully take part in democracy.

The Project

Save the Children has recently carried out an informal survey of Local Education Authorities and Healthy Schools Coordinators to find interesting examples of the different ways in which pupils can be involved in developing and managing their education and schools. This can range from school councils that have made a big impact on school life, to pupils sitting on the governing body, interviewing staff for recruitment purposes, being involved in writing school rules and policies, carrying out their own and peer assessment of learning, deciding the PSHE curriculum or designing their own classroom layout and learning methods. Lots of schools are already carrying out these sorts of activities and will have learnt valuable lessons along the way about how to do it and what the benefits are. Save the Children would like to find out about these examples so that they can be publicised and shared more widely amongst those working in education.

The Website

The information collected through this survey is to be used to collect a number of educational case studies that will form the major part of the website mentioned previously.

Case Studies

Save the Children would like to collect some more detailed information in the North East about experiences of participation in school from pupil's and teacher's perspectives to inform this work and, hopefully the case studies can be used on the website.

Aims of the consultation:

- To find out the views of children and young people about their experience of participation in their education;
- To develop case studies for the Save the Children website;

With the purpose of:

- Stimulating debate and learning around participation in education amongst teachers and other education professionals;
- With the aim of building participation into their everyday practice;
- And to share information and resources to help each other with the process.
- Develop a relationship with Government Office for the North East so that they can support Save the Children in promoting better participation in schools.

Participation in Education.

Process.

Save the Children presented their ideas (appendix 1), which the Regional Youth Work Unit circulated to schools in the North East. Pupils from Thornhill School in Sunderland, Bishopgarth School in Stockton on Tees, Byker Primary School in Newcastle and Hendon Young People's Project (HYPP) in Sunderland opted to talk about their experiences.

The Regional Youth Work Unit met with teachers from each school and HYPP before meeting with the children and young people to talk about the process and any specific needs that the group may have. In this instance we were unable to talk directly with the children and young people to develop the process but worked with teachers and youth workers who work with them.

From this meeting a session plan (appendix 2) was developed based on the time allowed, needs and abilities of the children and young people and was agreed by both Save the Children and the teachers and youth workers.

A two hour session was facilitated with the children and young people in the secondary schools and HYPP and two one hour sessions were facilitated with pupils from Byker Primary School, over a three month period in their places of learning. Alongside this teaching staff in each of the schools were asked to complete a questionnaire (appendix 3) so that they could feed in their views. Teacher from two schools completed the questionnaire.

The results were recorded and written up into separate reports for each school and HYPP and sent to the school for the pupils to approve that the information that was recorded was correct and hadn't been edited to suit the report.

Once the information had been approved it was compiled into a report and sent to Save the Children with a view to using the case studies on their website.

Save the Children will inform the children and young people who took part via their school or project when the website has been launched.

Save the Children hopes that the schools will aspire to continue working with them to help them develop better ways of involving pupils in decisions about the school and how they learn.

Participation in Education.

The results.

In each setting we adapted the session plan to fit in with the needs of the children and young people and the time we had to talk to them. The session was based around three areas of discussion; school culture, school management and pupils' involvement in the wider community. Presented here are those findings that were common to all of the groups of children and young people we talked with, unless otherwise indicated.

School Culture

The students talked about making decisions that have an effect on their lives and what they thought were important decisions and how they would characterise an important decision.

What they said was the everyday decisions they make are about things like where to go, what to wear etc and their decisions are informed by things like safety and how much money they have. The young people aged over 13 talked about their education and studying and were aware that their decisions affected where they would go to study and their future work opportunities. They make decisions to help them plan, which causes them not to be so stressed. They felt that the easy decisions were the ones they could change and said they would go to friends or family for advice in making a decision. They said that although decision making makes them feel confused at times and can make them feel bad and is a responsibility, they do like to make decisions for themselves and feel it's important that they make decisions about their lives and have the opportunity to learn about their rights.

The students talked about student staff relationships, about how respected they feel and the impact this has on them. They were asked how much notice they take of teachers and if that's applicable to all teachers or just some.

They said that they felt that they aren't listened to by teachers and that there is too strong a sense of a hierarchy between teachers and pupils:

*"Some teachers are horrible and ignore you....adults think they are the boss!"
Female student year 5.*

The students didn't feel that all teachers are like this but that the majority are. They don't feel important to teachers and feel that teachers give a different amount of attention to different students, which isn't fair. They did recognise that teachers were under a lot of pressure and that they don't have a lot of control over what they can teach. They felt it would be better if teachers interacted more on a personal level with students. Some of the young people

felt that teachers judged them because of the area they live and talked about teachers taking their stress out on them, making them feel threatened.

"We always get the blame for things. We never get to tell our side of the story." Male student year 9, excluded from mainstream education.

The students feel that not all pupils liked school and it was boring for them, but instead of trying to help these pupils, teachers 'tell them off'. Pupils admitted that they have different relationships with different teachers and would behave differently based on this relationship. The students from years 9 and 10 said they would often 'wind up' the teachers who they didn't get on with because they felt they would get told off anyway. They also said that they had good relationships with teachers in primary school but they felt that these relationships change in secondary school.

"College is better, you don't get told what to do and you can have conversations with people". Female student year 10, excluded from mainstream education.

One young person said he would listen to teachers when he knows the information he is giving him helps him to stay safe but suggested he wouldn't listen otherwise. One year 9 pupil who has been excluded from school talked about a teacher who listened to him and helped him to get back into school. He said he thought he was "alright" and had respect for him.

The students talked about how they would like to learn and what makes for a good learning environment. We also talked about the people who help them learn and how they do this. We talked about their experience of learning and what stops them from learning.

What was really interesting was that in every instance the students talked about learning environments outside of the classroom where the people who helped them learn were seen as being experts in what they do. None of them related a good learning environment to a classroom situation and formal or academic subjects. They said that this makes them feel 'trapped'. The students gave examples of how they would like to learn and indicated that they would like to learn a mixture of academic and life skills. The pupils from HYPP talked about a lesson they planned where they went Go-Karting. They enjoyed the Go-Karting but what was really good was that they got to plan the lesson, do the work towards making it happen and make the decisions. They identified that they learnt a number of skills such as research skills, finance skills, team work, decision making, planning skills, health and safety awareness and risk assessment. Overall they felt they learned best when they could decide how they learned, where they could have a certain amount of freedom and be creative and be challenged in a safe environment.

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Sports and arts to assist learning were hugely favoured by the children and young people we talked to. They said they felt more comfortable when they could talk openly and express themselves without fear of being judged or being told what to do. They would like lessons where they could 'have a laugh', lessons where they could go to different places and talk to different people to see things for themselves.

"A classroom has four walls, which means you can't go very far". Young man year 8

They liked the idea of learning from people of a similar age to themselves, as long as that person was an expert at what they were teaching. All of the children and young people we spoke to defined an expert as someone who had experience in that subject area whether it be a footballer or a TV presenter, someone who was credible, who knew the subject, who could teach them something new based on their own experiences, someone who they knew of previously and who they respected. People who helped them learn had to have credibility with them and many examples of famous people were given as well as parents. They talked about learning one to one and in small groups, they talked about having plenty of breaks at times that suited them, they talked about having the right resources and mostly about having fun. They talked about an equal relationship between the learner and the person who helps them learn and felt that they could benefit from learning that way.

"If I'm bored I don't learn" .Female year 5.

School management.

We talked to the students about how their school is run and how much involvement they have in making decisions. We discussed the school council and its role and function in the school and their general opinion about its role and function.

What they told us was they didn't feel like the school rules worked. The pupils from Byker Primary School did feel as though their project had helped them to make their school a better place because they had the chance to say how the school could be better and about the school environment. The responses varied between those who were involved in the school council to those who weren't. Those who were involved in their school council felt they got a lot out of it and were making a difference. They felt as though they learned new skills and felt valued. Those who weren't involved in their school council didn't feel as though the school council made a difference in the school as 'nothing improves'. They felt that the school council was worthwhile in some ways, for example when it gets involved in planning events, or giving their opinions when asked. Generally, however, the students felt that they need adult permission to do things and this relies on a good relationship with the adults in the first

place and relies on someone who will let them make decisions. When the students were asked if they had been involved in making school rules or policies all of them said they hadn't.

Involvement in the wider community

The pupils talked about their involvement in activities outside of school and whether their school promoted such opportunities. We also talked about whether they felt as though they had the chance to make decisions about their wider community during school.

The feedback was variable and the case studies will talk in more detail about the individual school's involvement with the wider community. What the children and young people said was that a number of them were involved in a variety of other groups ranging from sports clubs, to the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP). School did offer them a number of extra curricular activities and they felt that their schools are getting better at recognising that what they do outside of school helps them learn and impacts on their experience of school. The UKYP member talked about his election and how the school let him talk to the other students in assembly and hold an election in school. However he didn't feel that the issues he discusses in his elected MYP role are informed by his wider group of peers, or how easy it will be to feed back to his peers in school time about UKYP projects. The pupils from Byker Primary School talked about their concerns about anti-social behaviour and as a result the Voices project and the school helped them to have a conversation with the local council about it. Thornhill School talked about bullying and making a film that they presented at a city centre cinema and have promoted in other schools in Sunderland.

Feedback from teachers.

Teachers from Thornhill School told us that although they had a school council they also shared the pupils concerns that the decisions weren't made by the pupils. They thought the most successful way of involving pupils in making changes to things like lessons was via pupil feedback sheets, which happens in tutor groups. They also felt that the school council could engage with the student body more widely via the tutor groups and with more imaginative communication. Teachers felt that pupils should have a limited say in how the school is run and staff should make any final decisions. Teachers said they didn't think that, when asked, pupils would feel as though they had a great deal of say over their own education but they did think it was important that pupils feel involved and have a sense of ownership. They said they thought initiatives such as the school council, peer mentoring, and feedback sheets helped reduce bullying in the school by helping pupils feel safe and listened to. Staff also commented that there was a resistance to change within the school

and discussions about how pupils could be further involved were often negative.

A teacher from Bishopgarth School talked about a number of ways that pupils are involved in the running of the school. These included consultation activities, leading on pupil assemblies and developing the school grounds. Several members of the teaching staff have taken part in TEEP training which promotes pupil participation in the school. The teacher felt that pupils should be enabled to make more weighty decisions and that teachers should involve more pupils in planning and preparing learning activities even though it takes more time at first.

Case study a.

Thornhill School, Business and Enterprise College, Sunderland.

Background.

Thornhill is a mixed comprehensive school in an inner city area of Sunderland with over 1200 pupils. It has had specialist status as a business and enterprise college since 2003. In a recent Ofsted report pupils said they feel they are listened to and can make a contribution to change. Pupils say that they feel safe from bullying, knowing they can talk to adults and peer mentors who will help them with any problems. The school believes it benefits from a creative arts programme, '*Arts Included at Thornhill*', which provides opportunities for pupils to get more involved with specialist art activities and tries hard to engage those pupils who often find it difficult to learn and be motivated in the classroom environment. The school says it has been progressing over the last five years and as a result has seen an improvement in the number of pupils achieving grades A-C at GCSE.

Pupil participation.

Bullying and the impact on young people's mental health was identified as an important issue at Thornhill school and, as a result, the teachers decided to try and tackle the issue by involving a then year 7 tutor group in developing a project around bullying in the school. The group was involved in making a short film commercial about bullying to be shown in the school and cinemas. The young people helped to decide the content of the commercial and were actors in the film.

The pupils are now in year 10 and have been recognised for their efforts, not only by school. They have received a number of awards and some of the group have also had the chance to meet Princess Anne, which they are proud of. As a result of being involved in the project some of the pupils feel they are more respected by teaching staff and are more listened to and valued.

The project exemplifies how the citizenship curriculum could engage pupils in conversations that really matter to them. The pupils felt that they were able to negotiate a learning outcome that was creative and inclusive and had an impact on them personally as well as more widely, in the school and wider community.

The pupils took on the role of peer educators and allowed them to benefit from the skills of professionals, in this instance a mental health worker and a filmmaker. This piece of work may have had the most impact on those who are directly involved, and some of the decisions were made not by the pupils, but

it did involved them tackling an issue that was of general concern in the school but promoting the issue in the wider community.

The school also developed a mentoring project where pupils have the opportunity to take part in training to support other pupils who may be having difficulties in the school. The school has invested a large amount of money in the training scheme and the mentors and pupils who have accessed the service have benefited from having someone their own age to talk to. The young people involved do feel as though they have learned valuable skills and have helped the school to be a better place.

Case Study b.

Byker Primary School, Newcastle.

Background.

The Children Decide initiative has been developed by The Children's Society Voices Project as part of Newcastle Children's Fund commitment to ensuring that as many children and young people aged 5-13 in Newcastle have the opportunity to have a say about the things that are important to them.

There are currently seven Children Decide groups running which enable children and young people to identify the issues that are important to them and plan the changes they would like to see happen. Groups meet weekly and nominate a captain and deputy captain to represent their group at monthly meetings where work is shared and discussed.

The Voices Project supports these groups to explore the issues and meet with appropriate key decision makers to affect change. Relationships and mechanisms currently exist with the local council, the Children's Fund Partnership, Government Office for the North East and the then Office for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Planning Kids Have Rights.

Byker Primary School was funded to run a linking school and home programme to reduce the number of school exclusions. The Children Decide group at Byker Primary School is called *Planning Kids Have Rights* and has been meeting for just over a year. The issue the pupils have been exploring is bullying and anti-social behavior. The group has designed a questionnaire about the issues and launched this at the Bullying Conference in November 2005. They decided to interview local people and find what their views were on anti-social behavior in and around Byker.

From this point the group decided to make a film and have been involved in some basic camera training as well as developing a work plan for the film. In March 2006 the group carried out interviews at their school and at the East End Library which were used in the film. The group decided the main points they would like to get across in their film and planned to use it in a school assembly so that most of the pupils in the school would see it. They are currently looking at the format of the assembly and hope to deliver it to other schools.

As well as making a film the group are also involved in several other pieces of consultation and have given their views to Government Office for the North

East (GONE) about why they think involving children and young people is important. This was part of developing a staff induction DVD to support GONE's strategy for involving children and young people across all their departments.

The Planning Kids Have Rights group are given time each week during school time to meet and have access to their own room as well as support from the school to carry through their ideas.

The project gives pupils the opportunity to influence agendas more broadly than those directly to do with the school. As a result pupils report a much better experience of school and feel a sense of belonging to their community. They can also see that the school is part of a wider community and meet the people who make decisions that affect their education. As the project allows the pupils to talk about any issue that matters to them it makes a reality of Article 12 of the UNCRC and the project workers help the pupils to have their voices heard, not limiting it to teachers, the head teacher, parents and governors.

The school benefits from the experience of project workers who come into the school as teachers don't have this task added onto their job. The children can talk more freely without teachers present and have a more effective voice and relationship with adult partners who can make change happen.

The children become more politically engaged, develop key skills such as, presentation skills, debating skills, developing relationships with different people such as their peers and adults and have a peer education and advocacy role. They don't have to worry about their involvement been assessed, nor do they have the pressures of performance, and have more opportunities to work outside of the school environment, attending conferences, talking to adults, other than teachers and parents, and other children and young people, without giving up their spare time outside the school day.

"Being involved has helped me to understand more things". Female year 6.

Case Study c.

Bishopgarth Community School, Stockton on Tees.

Background.

Bishopgarth Community School has room for 600 pupils. Each student has access to a personal tutor who gives advice on matters like college applications, employment opportunities and study skills. Open evenings are held throughout the year and parents are also welcome to visit at other times to discuss progress. Pupils are also offered the chance to take part in a number of different activities, for example the annual activities week brings the opportunity to learn archery, sailing, quad biking, disco dancing, fishing, arts and crafts. As well as activities the pupils also get the chance to take part in residential and school clubs, such as photography and sports. The school provides extra opportunities for pupils to study by providing extra curricular provision.

When inspected it was commented by Ofsted that;

“Bishopgarth is an effective school which provides pupils with a good quality of education. It is a school with a clear sense of purpose and direction. All members of the school community are valued and there is a firm belief that everyone in school can and will achieve.”

The schools follow an assertive discipline policy which lays out guidelines for good behavior. Pupils who follow the rules are rewarded and pupils who don't follow the rules will be given warnings and may be sent home. The school aims to ensure that all pupils have the chance to learn in a quiet atmosphere to promote calmness amongst pupils.

Bishopgarth School is also home to a special unit for pupils with physical disabilities in Stockton. It has purpose built premises, which include an exercise pool, two classrooms and therapy rooms, has good, easy access for wheelchair users and is an integral part of the school building. All pupils with disabilities spend most of their lessons in mainstream classrooms, but there is provision for extra support. All pupils from the special unit are entered for GCSEs, do work experience and have the chance to go onto college.

Pupil's involvement in school planning.

Pupils from Bishopgarth School were particularly keen to discuss a school planning project they initiated. The school council conducted a survey with pupils about the school grounds. They found out that pupils thought the school was dirty and thought this was owed to a lack of bins and a lack of pride in the

school, pupils also felt that they didn't have anywhere to sit down and talk to friends in nice comfortable surroundings and felt as though they were often moved on from places they liked to congregate. The school council compiled this information and after a discussion decided that they would like to change the environment outside of the school so that students felt more pride in their school and had a dedicated space to meet with friends. They applied for a Barclays New Futures Award which they won in 2003 and were granted a sum of money which they used to develop a garden area in the school. All the pupils had the opportunity to take part in a competition to design and plan their ideal garden and a committee of students was set up to work with an architect to oversee all of the plans and to ensure pupils involvement in all aspects of the planning.

Barclays New Futures has been the UK's largest education sponsorship with over £10m invested in over 750 school community projects since 1995. Run in conjunction with CSV (Community Service Volunteers) the programme has enabled thousands of students to create and run activities that had a positive impact on both their schools and their neighbours. Barclays New Futures offers a range of awards from £500 to £20,000 for projects that reflect the increasing focus on citizenship education. Schools and their students have addressed a wide range of issues. Students involved in the scheme have become ambassadors for initiatives in schools which are publicised and disseminated widely, through national and local newspaper articles, media events, conferences and newsletters.

The garden project has enabled young people to develop a range of new skills including planning, design skills, budgeting, consultation and public speaking as well as increasing the meaningful participation of young people in shaping the environment in which they like to learn which has led to increased pride in the school, less litter and more student and teacher cooperation. Teachers, the governing body and pupils worked in partnership with each other to achieve a successful outcome for the school as a whole and employed an expert to guide them through the process.

Case Study d

Hendon Young People's Project (HYPP), Sunderland.

Background.

Back on the Map is a New Deal For Communities regeneration project in the East End of Sunderland that is home to approximately 10,000 people. The national programme is funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department of Communities and Local Government) over a 10-year period. Back on the Map runs from 2001-2011.

Back on the Map aims to:

- Boost education standards and encourage lifelong learning
- Reduce crime and the fear of crime, improve community safety
- Provide decent homes in a clean and safe environment
- Increase job and training opportunities
- Improve the health and well being to residents
- Involve the whole community in everything they do

The area is well below the national and city average for achievement in SAT's and GCSE and participation in work based learning has declined over a number of years. Back on the Map's education strategy outlines their mission to improve educational attainment and establish a culture of lifelong learning. They aim to increase the percentage of pupils who get qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSE's at (A-C), so that the achievement of pupils will be equivalent to, or better than, the City average by 2011.

However, despite all of this, there is no secondary school in the Hendon and East End area, so pupils have to go to school in other areas of the city. This means they are faced with prejudice from other young people and teachers about the area they come from and are still under-achieving in comparison to their peers who go to the same school. In terms of education, Back on the Map it seems focuses mostly on the younger age range who benefit from a newly built community school.

Hendon Young People's Project is one of the community partners involved in the Back on the Map strategy. It aims to reach out to young people aged 5-25 in the Hendon and East End area who are not engaging in mainstream services via a range of different initiatives, including learning support for young people who are excluded from or self-exclude from school.

Alternative Education Programme.

The Neighborhood Support Fund (NSF) is a six year programme running from 2000-2006 funded through the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The programme supports work with young people aged 13-19 in local authorities in England with the highest levels of youth deprivation. NSF funded Hendon Young People's project's alternative education provision until the end of the academic year in 2005. This enabled them to work with a number of young people who faced the prospect of not taking their GCSE exams because they were excluded from school. With the support of the local school the project worked with the exam board to get the premises recognised as a valid exam centre. As a result 12 young people, some of whom hadn't been to school for three years, were entered for GCSE's.

Unfortunately HYPP hasn't been able to continue to offer young people the opportunity to take their exams at the project due to a lack of funding and staff moving on from the project. It also required a teacher from a local school to monitor the pupils in exams and this commitment wasn't continued beyond the first year. The young people in Hendon and the East End who are pupils at Thornhill School do, however, still benefit from an alternative education programme based in the project, where they can take part in gaining accreditation for their involvement. They take part in vocational learning and are involved in planning their curriculum with the workers from the project. They identify their own learning outcomes and set themselves personal targets that they work towards. This gives them much more ownership over and enjoyment in their learning. They learn in a smaller group, have workers who understand some of the difficulties they face and they aren't subject to the stresses that they feel the school gives rise to. However if they want to be entered for GCSE's they have to go back to the school to take the exams, which they often decline and miss out on gaining qualifications that they are entitled to. HYPP does give the young people the opportunity to learn a lot of skills at the project and boasts that many of the young people go onto college and employment.

Case Study e.

Porsgrunn, Norway

Background.

Porsgrunn is a town of 33,000 inhabitants. In the late 1980s and beginning of 1990, it suffered massive unemployment when the town's main employer made people redundant. There were additionally huge problems of pollution from the plant and a low level of civic pride in Porsgrunn. Participation in local elections was poor and the town was losing population at a high rate.

A group of senior local councilors, including the Mayor, decided to form a cross-party initiative to build renewed involvement in the democratic process from the bottom up, i.e. from early childhood onwards. Their statement of intent was as follows:

'We aim to build a positive identity for the whole community, based on the idea and strategy of children as fellow citizens.'

To this were added two further supporting statements:

- *'Children are to be seen as a resource, not a problem'*
- *'Every child is to be listened to and to experience being heard in everyday life'.*

The first of these promotes a view of children as positive contributors to collective life, not as teenage muggers, hooligans or truants. The second emphasizes the importance of not limiting involvement to children who are identified as bright or capable and therefore selected out to be among the chosen few.

As a result of the implementation of this policy, the endorsement of it by all parties and at the most senior level, Porsgrunn has elected young people to serve as full councilors, i.e. not responsible for youth issues only, on the town council every year since 1995. In 1995 out of the five young people elected four were 18 years of age at the time of their election. In the next local elections in 1999 five young people were again returned to the council, all of them 18 years of age at the time of taking office. In the 2003 elections three young people were elected. There are 49 councilors on the town council.

This success in bringing young people right into the heart of the political and administrative process was not realised overnight. Porsgrunn did, however, have the advantage of high-level cross-party political support for the initiative and the politicians gave practical expression to their commitment by appointing a Childhood Policy Coordinator, Kjell Lillestøl. He is responsible for

ensuring that all town planning and policy development are subjected to a 'child test' before implementation. He is also charged with ensuring that departments and agencies work together to fulfill policy.

As evidence of its commitment to the ideal stated above, Porsgrunn has also embraced the slogan '*the ten-year old child is an expert at being a ten year-old child*', there is recognition that 'expertise' is a complicated idea and not the sole prerogative of adult experts.

Involvement of schools, the universal service for school-aged children

As important as the child test and the cross-departmental working is the presence in each school of a contact teacher responsible for ensuring that children's issues are listened to, that the student council is supported, that children have equal chance to serve on the council, from age 6 to age 18, and that the decisions of each council impact on the running of the school. Councils are chaired and run by children. They do not meet at the behest of the head-teacher, which in some parts of Europe is still the pattern. Student councils have been so successful that the scope of their business agenda is no longer confined to school matters but ranges over any issue which concerns the community within which the school is located, local play parks, traffic schemes, lighting of roads, litter management etc. Student councils have as a result recently been redesignated youth councils and include Agenda 21 as part of their remit.

Teacher support for the process

They found that using the educational system for this initiative posed challenges both to the system itself and to those who were trying to effect change from without. Schools had to be convinced that making time in the school day for children to meet and discuss non-curricular issues, including practical investigation of civic issues in class time was a correct or useful use of children's time. It was also rapidly discovered that teachers were not able to deliver the support as specialist contact teachers without some additional training. No suitable training materials were available and these had to be written.

The contact teachers now go on a yearly training session to refresh their core skills.

Children's 'quick spend' money

Understanding that because of their age and immaturity, children need to see quick results as well as be part of a long-term strategy, the council makes over a small sum of money each year which the children have full control of, approximately £17,000 in 2004. The schools are intimately engaged in the

allocation of this money. All schools use school time to allow the children to debate their spending priorities and put these forward to the final meeting of their chosen pupil representatives. This meeting takes place once a year, in the Town Hall, with the mayor and other departmental heads present. The priorities are assessed, graded and voted on by the full children's assembly and funds awarded appropriately.

The granting of this sum of money, in terms of the total town budget a minute sum has had a huge impact on the self-belief of the children and on their sense that they are indeed full partners in the political process. It has resulted in more children aiming to become members of student councils and in a far better, closer understanding of how the town council itself operates. By the time young people leave school in Porsgrunn they know how the system works, they are not alienated from it and they have a sense that they can have an effect on its decision-making. Perhaps it explains why some of them take the next step and opt to become councilors themselves.

Case Study: Rovenemi, Finland

Background

Rovenemi is a small rural town in the Lapland region of Finland.

Future Workshop.

To promote pupil's participation in school the education department and the youth service hold an annual *Future Workshop* where for one day the whole school including pupils, teaching staff, cleaners, governors, cooks etc are invited to say what they feel are the important issues in the school and the wider community, youth workers are also invited to take part. Once the issues have been generated everyone is allowed to vote for their three most important issues. The issues are then discussed in smaller groups, where people can decide what action they think should happen and make a suggestion about who they would like to do it or could do it. They can also volunteer to be that person or have a role if they want to, but this isn't expected of them.

What is important here isn't so much the process and what is asked of the pupils, there are lots of examples of pupils generating issues that matter to them. More important is the commitment from schools that they will be dedicated to a partnership with everyone involved in the school, that adults and young people can talk to each other and come up with solutions for change together. This whole school approach ensures that everyone knows what's happening and over a 12 month period can monitor how their views have, or have not, been listened to, and can be actively involved in making things happen. It also means that everyone has the opportunity to be involved and it doesn't rely on one person to make the day a success, implement the actions or dictate the process.

As this model is applied in schools across the whole of the region, young people share a consistency of experience and expectation. Political power has been devolved to regions which means that pupils can have more of a role in affecting their education and influencing the development of education policy in their region.

Participation in Education

Summary of key points.

- Children and young people aren't involved in making important decisions about how the school is run and many of the things they are involved in are excellent but work in self-contained pockets within the school, which give opportunities to some but not all pupils.
- Schools mostly involve children and young people in making decisions about things which don't have a direct impact on the school, preventing them from participating fully in their education.
- Children and young people would like more opportunity to learn in environments that they are part of designing and that allows for their individuality and interests and abilities and to be taught by people who have a wide knowledge of the subject they are teaching and can help them learn via participatory methods.
- Young people who find it difficult to learn in a school environment are often less involved in making decisions about the school but they are often the ones who suffer most from this lack of involvement. Usually they are also the ones who have the most difficult relationship with teachers.
- Children and young people do enjoy being involved in making decisions and feel that it is important that they have this opportunity.
- Participation gives children and young people the chance to learn more skills, feel valued and become more politically aware.
- Teachers generally feel that children and young people should have a limited opportunity to influence how the school is run. This view is not shared by children and young people.

Conclusions.

It was difficult to inform Save the Children's practice around participation as they are leading the way in terms of helping other people think about participation and children's rights. Youth Policy Exchange was a relatively successful model for finding out the views of children and young people about their participation in education but ultimately their views won't influence Save the Children directly. It will however provide them with information they could use to influence policy and learning amongst teachers.

There was a breakdown at the beginning of the Youth Policy Exchange process as young people weren't involved in developing how they would be involved in the consultation. This was discussed via teachers and it is unclear how many of the children and young people had been asked if they would like to take part in giving us their views or knew what it was they were taking part in before they talked to us. Working alongside people who work with the children and young people ensures that you gain from their expertise and knowledge of the group but where possible children and young people should inform the structure of the conversation and any decisions to be made, otherwise full success is unlikely.

There was also a lengthy gap in getting information back to young people to look at, due to exams and school holidays, which meant that the quality of the feedback was not as in consistence as it could have been. Many of the children and young people had moved on from what they had talked about.

Some of the sessions were fragmented due to exams, with pupils only available for half a session etc. This again was indicative of them not being involved in designing the process. However, the findings were very interesting and should help Save the Children to promote some key learning amongst teachers and the pupils did take part in a fun process which they all enjoyed and made contributions to.

In terms of the process enabling children and young people to influence decision making the report needs to be followed up in 6-12 months to see if the information given from children and young people and the website has an impact on teachers, although this is often difficult to measure. Hopefully Save the Children will revisit the young people who took part and can look at ways to involve them further.

Bibliography.

Websites.

www.participationworks.org.uk

www.nya.org.uk - National Youth Agency

www.go-ne.gov.uk - Government Office for the North East

www.backonthemap.org

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Policy and guidance.

Building a Culture of Participation - Department for Education and Skills

Hear By Right and Act By Right - National Youth Agency

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Networks.

Regional Active Participation (RAP) contact mail@rywu.org.uk

Participation Worker's Network for England www.carneigie/ypi.org.uk

The Porsgrunn Model.

www.lillestol.no/english

www.porsgrunn.kommune.no.

Or e-mail to kjell@lillestol.no.

Appendix 1a.

For children and young people.

Save the Children UK - Promoting Participation in Education

Who we are

Save the Children is an international charity that works with vulnerable children and young people in the UK and overseas to make real and lasting change to their lives.

What we want to do

Save the Children is interested in promoting children and young people having a say in what their school and education is like. We believe that this is the right of children and young people and that it can make them both enjoy and achieve more at school.

We want to find out how children and young people take part in school life, whether it's through circle time, school councils, class discussions or perhaps interviewing people for teaching jobs or deciding what play equipment needs to be brought. We would like to talk to you about these things to find out what you think it is like to take part in making decisions, what are the hard bits of doing it and what helps it go right or makes it go wrong and what else is there that you might like to have a say in.

What we will do next

After we have talked to lots of schools we will put some of the information we get onto a website. The website will be used by people who want pupils to take part more in how their school is run and how children learn. It will have lots of examples of how schools have used these kinds of things to make their school a better place to be and learn so that others can learn from them.

We also hope that some schools will want to do more work with us to help them find more and better ways of involving pupils in decisions about the school and how they learn.

Appendix 1b.

For teachers.

Save the Children UK - Promoting Participation in Education

Background

Save the Children works with vulnerable children and young people in the UK and overseas to make real and lasting change to their lives. In England Save the Children works with children, young people, teachers and LEA staff to contribute to realising a quality education for all. In order to achieve this goal Save the Children believes it is crucial that children and young people are able to have a say in the kind of education they receive. Not just because it is their right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [articles 12, 28 and 29] but also because we believe it can lead to improved behaviour, interest and educational achievement as well as promote the values and behaviour necessary for people to fully take part in democracy.

The Project

Save the Children has recently carried out an informal survey of Local Education Authorities and Healthy Schools Coordinators to find interesting examples of the different ways in which pupils can be involved in developing and managing their education and schools. This can range from school councils who have made a big impact on school life to pupils sitting on the governing body, interviewing staff for recruitment purposes, being involved in writing school rules and policies, carrying out their own and peer assessment of learning, deciding the PSHE curriculum or designing their own classroom layout and learning methods. Lots of schools are already carrying out these sorts of activities and will have learnt valuable lessons along the way about how to do it and what the benefits are. Save the Children would like to find out about these examples so that they can be publicised and shared more widely amongst those working in education.

The Website

The information collected through this survey is to be used to collect a number of educational case studies that will form the major part of a website to be launched in April 2006. The site will exist to aid teachers and other education professionals in building in participation into their everyday practice, sharing information and resources to help each other with the process.

Case Studies

Save the Children would now like to collect some more detailed information in the North East about experiences of participation in school from pupil's and teacher's perspectives to inform this work and, hopefully, form the basis of some case studies for the website. We also hope that some schools will be interested in possibly forming partnerships to both help in any way possible with the process of involving pupils further and evaluating the benefits.

Appendix 2.

Session plan

Decision making.

Introduction exercise exploring everyday choices and decision making:

1. In groups of four give three sheets of flip chart paper.
2. Ask the group to list on one all the decisions they have made in the last 24 hours, on the second decisions in the last week on the third decisions in the last year.
3. Then ask the group to rank their decisions in order of importance 1 being not very important, 10 being very important.

Give out examples to help young people rank for example was someone relying on your decision, did it have to be done by a certain time, did it affect another choice you or someone had to make, did it cost anything, to it change anything etc.

4. Ask the group to place a sticky star next to the decisions that made a positive outcome and to list why/how they decided this.

Again give an example of what a positive outcome could be.

5. Ask the group to shout out what it feels like to make a good decision. Draw or write the key words.

School Rules.

1. Give out slips of paper describing rules and some blank pieces of paper so that young people can come up with their own. Ask the group to decide from the pieces of paper their description/understanding of rules.
2. Paper carousel: in pairs ask each to go around the flip charts with the following questions and ask them to write or draw their response based on their previous description of what they think rules are:
 - a. Does your school have a set of rules?
 - b. What is in them?
 - c. Who wrote them?
 - d. Do any students have a say about what is in them? Examples.

Pupil teacher relationships.

1. Split into four small groups. Ask each group to draw the outline of a body on the piece of paper. Give two groups the task of thinking about all the ways that students respect teachers and to draw or write specific things,

- examples and stories; one the left positives on the right negatives. Ask the other two groups to think about all of the ways teachers respect students again using words, drawings, examples, stories etc; again listing the positives and negatives.
2. Have a general discussion based on the exercise about how much the students feel teachers respect students and how much notice teachers take of student's opinions.

What makes for good learning.

1. Give the young people some post it notes and ask them to list all the topics they learn about in PSHE/Citizenship. On different post it notes ask them to write the subjects, if any, they would like to learn about in PSHE/Citizenship that they don't already.
2. Diamond ranking: Using the post it notes in smaller groups ask them to rank the post it's in order of importance.
3. General discussion: how much do teachers ask you about what you learn, example what subjects, what age, where you learn, how you learn i.e. films, speakers etc can the group give any examples?

And/or

4. Ask the group to describe their ideal lesson. What subject would you be learning about, how does the teacher help you to learn? etc.
5. Following on from this ask how much this currently happens, does this happen with some teachers but not others, why. If they enjoy lessons why? What works? Do they have any positive or negative examples?

School councils.

1. General discussion: do you have a school council? Can you describe what it does? How do people get onto the school council? How does it make decisions? What changes has it made to your school? - do they know, if no changes why not? How good is the school council at involving everyone in what it is doing? Do students get to talk to school governors? (Need better exercise or alternative exercise to help young people answer these questions.)
2. Agree/disagree debate.

School Policies.

1. Split into smaller groups. Ask each group to make a poster to help describe to the students what the school says about the following issues:
 - a) Drugs
 - b) Bullying
 - c) Sex Education
 - d) Exclusion/behaviour

2. At the bottom of the poster ask them to write the names of all the people who made these decisions/policies.
3. With information provided by the school about the above policies put some information into quiz format and ask the students whether certain facts are true or false
4. At the end of the quiz read out the answers and ask if they are surprised at any of the answers and which ones they already knew about and which ones they'd never heard of and about who was involved in writing the policies.

Appendix 3.

Teacher's Questionnaire.

Your response will contribute to a regional piece of work developed by the Regional Youth Work Unit, Regional Assembly and Save the Children UK.
Your feedback could be used to inform a new national website that Save the Children UK is developing to promote young people's participation in education to professionals.

How do you involve pupils in the running of the school?
Examples: school councils, sitting on/meeting with governors, interviewing for new staff, anti-bullying measures?
How well do you feel these initiatives work?
How inclusive are these initiatives?
What benefits do you see from these initiatives?
How are pupils involved in learning and assessment?
What benefits do you see from this for pupils?
What benefits do you see from this for teachers?
What else do you think your school could do to involve pupils more?
How does the school evaluate how well such initiatives are working?

How are these issues discussed amongst staff in the school?
How are decisions made about how pupils are involved in the school?
Or - Who has responsibility for deciding how much involvement pupils have in decision making in the school?
How does the school learn from others outside of it, for example other schools, the LEA etc., about these issues?
How much control do you think pupils in your school feel they have over their own education?
How important do you think it is for pupils to have a say in how schools are run?