

**Report of ACCS ‘Student Voice’  
seminar for teachers  
and school leaders**

**13<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

**Mullingar Park Hotel.**

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**ACCS & NCCA**

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Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools  
Cumann na Scoileanna Pobail agus Cuimsitheacha

*your school,  
your community*



# 'Student Voice' Seminar

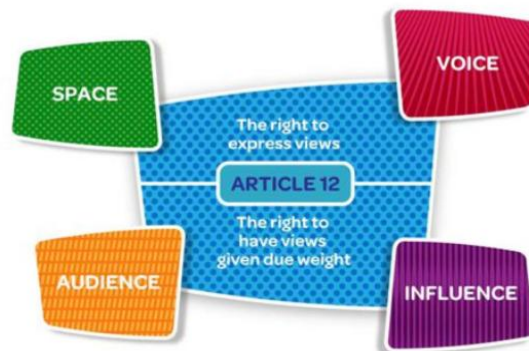
Day 1

## Introductions:

- Áine O'Sullivan (ACCS) welcomed participants and stated the aim of the session was to begin to explore how schools might create a culture of student voice in their schools.
- Gerard O'Sullivan (NCCA) introduced the session with a rationale for student voice and an overview of NCCA's involvement with JCT in an Erasmus project (with Slovenia, Netherlands, Scotland and Hungary) on the theme of student voice entitled '*A Bridge to Learning*'. An overview of the NCCA's approach to facilitating student voice as part of the senior cycle review process was also provided.
- Each participant introduced themselves with a brief reference to their school context.

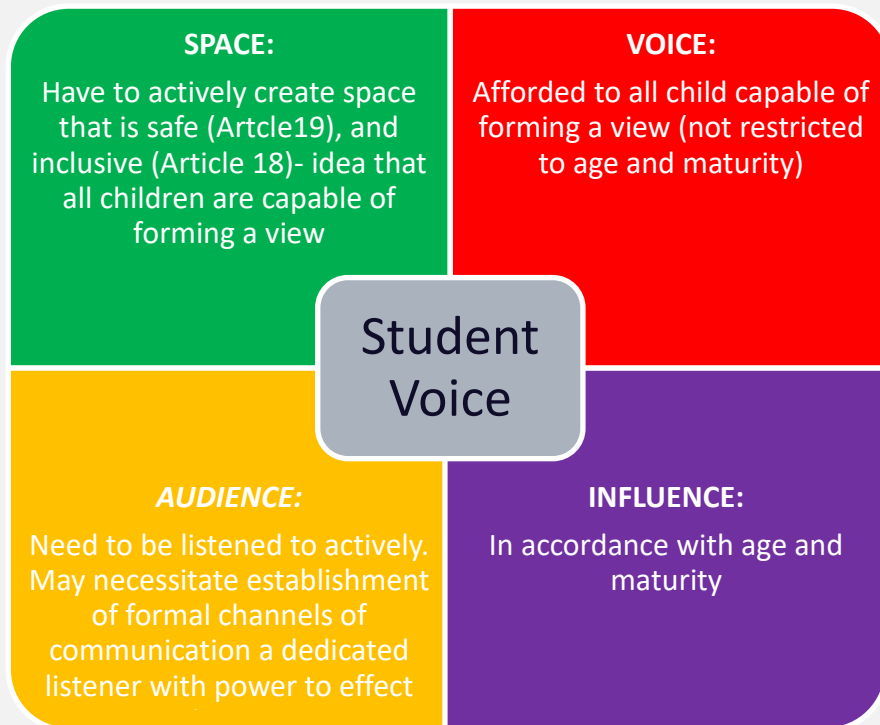
## Session 1: Context and approaches:

### Model of participation (Lundy)



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.



The work of Laura Lundy (Queen's, Belfast) and Paula Flynn (DCU) in the field of student voice was considered, with reference to the human rights and inclusion perspectives. *The Lundy Model of Student Voice*, rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which emphasises that voice is not enough but must be complemented by other factors, was discussed:

Student voice was considered in the context of a dual approach:

- Student voice as a feature of learning and teaching in the classroom
- Student voice in the representative sense- relating to ideas around leadership, social justice, wellbeing, activism in a whole-school context e.g. Student Council, student prefects

The session allowed participants to work in groups and consider what they understood student voice to be, and how student voice was evident in the practices and culture of the various school settings represented.

**The following areas were identified in these discussions and are listed in no particular order:**

**Student ambassadors/Students supporting peers/ Students actively involved in established school structures/Students in policy making/Students shaping their own teaching and learning experiences:**

- Head boy head girl, school prefect, mentor (Amber Flag), Meithil- prefect team- contribute to corporate events
- Enhanced student roles at open nights/ show/ PT meetings,
- Active student council Comhairle na nÓg, Attendance at Féilte Scoile.
- Sports captain male/ female, Big Brother Big Sister mentoring, Students trainers/ sports support, Caomhnóir, Lá Machnamh
- Jigsaw mentor training, Foróige – Leadership for Life, Peer support- students speaking at assemblies e.g. drug issues
- Student-led clubs, e.g. film clubs, Students speaking to primary school children
- Social justice initiatives e.g. YSI; student leadership- An Gaisce
- Student-led entrepreneurship projects e.g. mini-company, fundraising
- Peer teaching in SPHE class, Student speakers at graduation night, Links programme (TY-1<sup>st</sup> year)
- Cultivation of open-door policy by management and teachers to listen to students
- Intention to provide students with voice at board of management level
- Board of management contribution. Newsletter page, Friday news slot on PA, student publications
- Pastoral support structures aimed at giving student issues a voice
- Tutor and year head system- meeting with students
- Inter school support and interaction by schools in same community
- Norms and protocols, Student role in subject option provision
- Art work celebrated on walls throughout school
- Mental health committee, homeless committee, Action Ireland Trust, Wellness/ wellbeing/ health and fitness week, SEAI Energy Awareness Day (150 students in workshops over two days),
- Seachtain na Gaeilge events, Liturgical events, Intercultural day
- Policy formation: direction on teaching and learning (SSE involvement)
- Input to uniform ideas, dress code e.g. school jacket
- Input to healthy eating menu for school canteen
- Digital group looking at school strategy
- Online surveys for students in SSE, Online surveys to elicit feedback e.g. on experience of TY, LCA, Focus

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groups in relation to policy development, Linking Droichead with student input

- Students' liaison with parents' council
- Student stretch- a different 'twist' on materials/ subjects, Check and Connect, Virtual classrooms (Teams)
- Students sitting in on parent teacher meetings, Student self-reports
- Restorative meetings, Learning code, Schoology
- Development education, Localised citizenship education, Various themes identified in CSPE/ SPHE
- Robotics, Poetry Aloud, SVP, STEAM, creative arts, History in our community week, Space week, CFES involved students, Rainbow teams/ bereavement groups supporting students

**The meeting considered the above in terms of what is currently happening in schools. The issue of students being represented on NCCA structure was raised, although it was acknowledged that student voice was at the heart of curriculum review and consultation practices. It was agreed that the focus on classroom voice was necessary, especially in the context of junior cycle developments.**

## **Session 2: Student Voice as it is heard in the 'acoustic' of the school**

**This session explored the notion of student voice in the 'acoustic' of the school. The meeting considered how approaches to classroom practice could support more effective activation of student voice, including more effective framing of questions.**

**The work of Dylan William and Paul Black ('Inside the Black Box') was referenced', which emphasises impact of descriptive feedback as a formative assessment approach on student achievement.**

**The session allowed participants:**

- 1. to identify areas that they would like to see developed in their schools in the context of student voice, arising from hearing about practices in other schools.**
  - 2. to suggest approaches to next steps also.**
- How do school leaders support student voice in the classroom? How do we motivate and encourage teachers to engage at this level? How to ensure cohesion of student voice- a challenge for bigger schools – lots of voices acting in isolation. How do we scaffold student voice? Need to build students' confidence, problem solving skills? Suggested that development education an ideal vehicle for students to make voice heard in representative space
  - Capturing student voice in **mission statement** of the school. Notion of '**Listening School**' and how to place '**care**' at the heart of my school. Strong focus on **positive relationships**, conscious use of first names
  - Promoting **reflective practice**, Notion of **teacher voice**- space to reflect on learning, Assisting teachers to

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begin with slight adaptations to practice e.g. questioning: *'how does this work for you?'* More practical examples of **enabling student voice in class** and problem solving of obstacles, Student voice and follow up- providing students with a **problem-solving framework** to enable change and not just having a 'voice'

- More conscious invoking of **junior cycle** key skills, CBA and JCPA- students' thoughts elicited on how best to report for themselves rather than teachers deciding, Learning intentions (KWL strategy), Focus on reporting- how do we help students to acquire the language of learning?
- Approach- **small steps**- build on current practices, Need to work towards **coherent plan**, How to ensure we move beyond tokenism/ platitudes

### **Session 3:**

Dr Domnall Fleming of the School of Education, UCC, presented on his research on Student Voice. This included an overview of how policy developments, including *'Looking at Our School 2016'* align with student voice ideas.

#### **Among his key findings were:**

- Although we are beginning to use students to feed our self-evaluation needs of accountability and to some extent performativity, we are not vindicating their right to a voice and a say in matters that affect them.
- In the classroom we do advocate for agency and constructivist positioning for students. At whole-school level our engagement is either focused on accountability or tokenism
- Affording students, a voice through dialogic consultation in the classroom impacts positively on...
  - **relationships**
  - **pedagogical change**
  - **Improved student engagement, participation and learning**
- At whole-school level:
  - **Improved engagement and participation**
  - **Democracy and active citizenship**
  - **Inclusion**
  - **Retention and progression**

**The following taxonomy for considering the level of student voice was introduced:**

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Lens of participation to consider student voice (Hart's ladder)

8. *Student initiated shared decision making*
7. *Student initiated and directed action*
6. *Adult initiated, shared decision making*
5. *Students informed and consulted*
4. *Students informed and assigned actions*
3. *Tokenism*
2. *Decoration*
1. *Manipulation*

(Hart, 1992)

- His thinking about student voice began as a right from a democratic, active-citizenship constructionist perspective. It was the students' voices and the teachers' reactions that re-positioned thinking towards placing student voice at the centre of a social constructivist classroom
- Placing students as active agents and participants in the co-construction of learning in the classroom space is facilitated by the constructionist positioning of student voice as dialogue, consultation and challenge in the classroom
- Meaningful student voice reflecting agency, rights and a lived democratic experience should grow from here towards the whole-school.

**Of particular note is the following conclusion:**

- Student voice should arise in the first instance within the classroom relational, interactive and pedagogical space between student and teacher in the context of co-constructing learning and teaching that underpinned by equality, right and trust
- Meaningful student voice, reflecting agency, rights and a lived democratic experience, should grow from here towards the whole-school.

**Outcomes and next steps:**





## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



- Rung 8:** Young people & adults share decision-making
- Rung 7:** Young people lead & initiate action
- Rung 6:** Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
- Rung 5:** Young people consulted and informed
- Rung 4:** Young people assigned and informed
- Rung 3:** Young people tokenized\*
- Rung 2:** Young people are decoration\*
- Rung 1:** Young people are manipulated\*

*\*Note Hart explains the last three rungs are non-participation*

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992) Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre  
Created by The Freechild Project - <http://freechild.org>

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### ORGANIZING AND GOVERNING

Youth have a central role in the organization's structure, driving programmatic or strategic decisions. Youth are empowered to be part of shared decision-making processes and have the opportunity for youth to learn from life experiences and expertise of adults.

### YOUTH-INITIATED LEADERSHIP

Youth serve as peer leaders in a paid or volunteer capacity. Youth lead activities with their peers or with adults. Adults are involved only in a supporting role.

### YOUTH-INITIATED PARTNERSHIPS

Youth and adults join together as equals to accomplish programming, plan activities, operate the program, or complete specific tasks.

### ADULT-INITIATED, SHARED DECISION-MAKING

Projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with youth. Attempts are made to use youth-friendly procedures and language.

### INFORMED DIALOGUE

Youth give ongoing advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. Youth are informed as to how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. Youth are involved in evaluation of programming.

### ASSIGNED BUT INFORMED

Youth are assigned a specific role and informed as to how and why they are being involved. This includes inconsistent youth involvement or temporary consultations such as focus groups or surveys.

### TOKENISM

Young people appear to be given a choice, but in fact they have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

### DECORATION

Young people are used to bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by youth.

*Adapted from works by J. Nowicki and R. Hart.*