Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other | learning with each other | learning on behalf of each other

DEVELOPMENT AND ENQUIRY PROGRAMMES
PUPIL INVOLVEMENT IN NETWORKED LEARNING

A tool for helping pupils and teachers to create a vision of pupil involvement in school improvement, learning and teaching

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NCSL National College for School Leadership

This activity has been designed to help pupils and adults create a vision for pupil involvement in their school or network. It has been developed with the help of pupils, practitioners and academics from several different Networked Learning Communities (NLCs).

At an NLC Futures Thinking event, a group of 16 delegates spent an entire day discussing the issue of pupil involvement. Together, they created three different maps which represent networks at varying stages on the journey to fully involving pupils in every aspect of learning, teaching and school improvement. They also created an extensive list of ideas, questions and suggested activities for networks interested in pupil involvement. The activity was then further developed by delegates at a recent NLC conference on pupil involvement.

The three stages are named sitting, crawling and walking and are solely intended to help people taking part in this activity to discuss the issue of pupil involvement:

- **A sitting network** is one that has hardly started on the journey of involving pupils and may not even know where to begin.
- **A crawling network** is one that has started on the journey and has had some success with involving pupils.
- **A walking network** is well on the way to fully involving students and has had success with a range of different activities. The pupils feel their voice is listened to and their ideas are valued and acted upon.

What do we mean by pupil involvement?

Pupil involvement is a broad term used by the Networked Learning Communities programme to mean involving pupils and students in almost every aspect of learning, teaching and school improvement. Some examples of pupil involvement would include the areas currently known as:

- consulting pupils
- pupil mentoring
- student leaders
- students as researchers
- pupil learning walks
- pupil steering groups
- pupils as teachers
- the work of school and network councils
- pupil representation on network steering groups

Above all else, it means pupils and adults working together within their networks to achieve all of this.

Why would you do this activity?

By taking part in this activity you will:

- discover what pupils and adults think and feel about pupil involvement
- learn from, with and on behalf of the pupils and adults in your network
- create together a vision for pupil involvement in your network

Who should be involved?

This activity can be used by groups of any size but it is most suited to groups of around six people. It is important that the group consists of adults and pupils and that measures are taken to ensure that everyone's voice is heard equally. If the group is larger than eight people then it is advisable to split into smaller groups. If you have a number of discussion groups then you will need to include time at the end of the session for each group to share their vision.

Who should facilitate this activity?

This activity could be facilitated by:

- a pupil, teacher or classroom assistant from within your network
- a lead learner or headteacher
- your NLC co-leader
- your NLC facilitator
- an adult or pupil from another network

Ideally, your facilitator will have a good understanding of the activity and may have already taken part on a previous occasion. They will also need to be good at working with groups of pupils and adults and must not be afraid to ask challenging questions.

How long will it take?

To get the most from this activity you will need to allow at least one hour. However, if you need time for groups to feedback to each other then you may need a further 30 minutes for sharing your ideas and answering questions.

What resources are required?

Included in this pack are copies of the three maps of networks at different stages of development and a selection of cards with ideas, questions and suggested activities for moving your network forward. You will also need to make plenty of materials available around the room to record and capture all your ideas and discussions, for example flip charts, marker pens and Post-it® notes.

Introduction

5 minutes

Before the event, the facilitator will need to brief the participants and ensure that they are prepared for an interactive session, with pupils and adults working creatively together. The facilitator introduces the session by giving a brief outline of the task and by explaining that the central aim will be for the group to create a vision of pupil involvement in their network. On their journey the participants will be learning from and with each other, and learning on behalf of all the pupils and adults in their network.

Where are we now?

15 minutes

The activity begins with each group exploring the three maps of different stages of network development. As a group, they discuss how their network compares to the sitting, crawling and walking networks. It is essential that everyone has a voice and that pupils' and adults' views are valued equally.

What do we need to think about?

20 minutes

Once everyone has agreed on which stage of development their network most closely resembles, the group then looks at the set of cards and discusses the ideas suggested on how to move their network forward. Many schools and particularly networks, find they lie across or between two stages.

What is our vision for pupil involvement?

15 minutes

The group then creates their own vision of a map for pupil involvement in their network drawing on all the ideas they have discussed during the activity.

Next steps

15 minutes

During the final part of the session the group needs to decide on the actions that will make the vision a reality, who will take those actions forward and who will safeguard the vision.

Additional plenary for larger groups

Larger groups will need an additional plenary session where the different visions and lists of actions from each discussion group can be merged to create a network vision and an agreed way forward. It will be important to leave sufficient time for this activity.

The sitting map

Agree on a vision of what you want your network to be like and make sure everyone has a feeling of ownership.

Be prepared to take risks.

Only meet termly.

Popularity vote – not based on the ability of the candidate.

Councils just raise money to buy books and replace things, like music equipment etc.

Teachers write the agenda, and have the final say.

School councils
Only do what they are told to do – teachers don't really listen.

Setting is OK if your are in top sets, but not always so good in the lower sets.

Pupils
Told what to do, where to sit and when to speak.

Sitting

Parents
Get little feedback (mainly formal). Only learn about the school from their own children.

Disruptive pupils waste everyone's learning time. Maybe they don't feel valued or listened to?

Teachers
Too remote from the pupils.

Form captains have limited responsibilities – only do administrative tasks like collect registers.

'Stick to the curriculum' teachers only care about results.

Some teachers stuck in their ways. They don't see the point of pupil involvement.

How can you establish what the issues are for your network? How will you work together to try and address them.

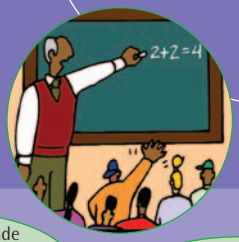
Heighten awareness of all the adults in the school and network at all levels. If they need persuading, organise for pupils to present their ideas to the staff. Above all else, the headteacher must be onboard.

Learning walks can be an excellent way to learn about the other schools in your network and other networks.

The crawling map

How can schools at different progressive stages work and learn together across a network to provide each other with mutual support?

Student councils will only have true status in a school if they are able to impact on learning, teaching and school improvement.



Crawling

School councils

Still tend to be made up of the popular students and not those best suited to the role.

However, teachers create the agenda.

Tend to focus on issues outside of the classroom, like toilets and the environment.

Chaired by a student.

Good discussions but no action.

Teachers seem to listen but still nothing happens.

A few teachers are trying really hard to get things moving.

Students attempt negotiation with teachers.

Some teachers try to move things forward

Poor communication

However, they still retain control.

No sense of community between teachers and students.

Most teachers don't yet really trust students to lead, decide or understand.

Teachers have fairly rigid ideas of how to teach and little real desire to listen to what students think about learning.

Control still mainly in the hands of the teachers – fear of losing control.

However, there is a concern to be seen as being student centred.

No sense of progress – a feeling of frustration and of being fooled.

Have regular review sessions for staff, presented by students, to update them on the work and the research findings to ensure that staff are kept up-to-date and see the benefits of pupil involvement.

Mentoring of younger pupils by older students can be a powerful way of sustaining the principles, passion, activities, methods of working and ongoing development within a network.

The walking map

E-communities can be places where pupils from all over the country (and the world) can build relationships, share ideas, problem solve together and learn from, with and on behalf of each other.

Walking

- More experimentation around the schools into areas like emotional intelligence. Students also carry out their own research into areas such as 'what makes a good lesson?'
- Learning walks to other networks to learn and share ideas, and possibly even to schools in other countries.
- Pupils are members of the network steering group or have their own steering group.
- Citizenship and involvement with the wider community.
- Leadership roles offered to pupils of all ages.
- Knowing that there are lots of ways to learn and that you have a choice.
- Helping to solve problems in their schools and across the network.
- Pupils are partners in learning, teaching each other and even teaching teachers.
- School Councils that have a real impact on improving their schools.
- Pupils are consulted on all major issues.
- Pupils are offered a range of different mentoring schemes including pupil-to-pupil, members of industry-to-pupil and adult-to-pupil.
- Sharing and solving problems together and looking out for each other.
- Something happens as a result.
- Students united – linking with other schools and networks, joint decision making and sharing ideas.

How can ICT enhance communication across and between schools? How can school councils and student researchers disseminate their ideas? How can you use ICT to consult pupils on a whole range of issues?

By asking pupils to conduct an enquiry into the transfer process, to rewrite the school prospectus, to visit each others' schools and to mentor younger pupils – they can help schools across all phases in the network, work together more effectively.

The running map

Students as researchers can carry out their own research into learning, teaching and school improvement in their own school and in other schools across the network.

A pupil steering group can report to the network steering group (through the student member) their research findings and their recommendations for how the network can improve.

Build your own vision

Student leaders can co-ordinate and lead activities across the school with adults acting as facilitators, if necessary.

When pupils discover their preferred learning style, and how they learn best, they can help teachers to facilitate their learning more effectively.

Sometimes you will need to work with other schools to solve problems, and other schools may come to you for ideas.

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