

PUPIL PARTICIPATION

Pupil participation in planning provision for special educational needs: teacher perspectives

ROSALIND MERRICK

There are legal, moral and practical reasons to involve pupils in planning provision for their special educational needs. We do not yet know how principles are implemented in practice. This study explored the views and experiences of 64 teachers with an interest in special educational needs through an online survey. Participants reported greater pupil involvement in everyday matters, less in conceptual aspects of planning. Effective strategies were based on good teacher-pupil relationships and school-wide systems for sharing pupil views. Participants gave examples of the impact of pupil participation on teacher insight, pupil motivation and material provision. 84 per cent indicated that they would like pupils to be more involved in decisions about their provision than they currently are. Barriers included the nature of children's difficulties and practitioner attitudes. Listening to children is intrinsic to good teaching, yet pupils also benefit from a more formal role in provision planning.

Key words: pupil voice, participation, educational decision-making.

Introduction

People have the right to participate in decisions that personally affect their lives. Under UK legislation and guidance, there is an obligation on schools to work

in partnership with pupils and their families when identifying desired learning outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and planning provision. As a means to achieve this, each school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) has a role in the strategic development of person-centred policies and practices. This article reports on a study investigating teachers' experiences of implementing these principles in practice. It explores what motivates them, what barriers they face and what successes they have had.

Why would children not have a say in the provision made for them? Provision for special educational needs has arguably always been about taking account of learner voice (Hallett and Hallett, 2014). One of the greatest threats to genuine participation is tokenism; unwittingly or not, adults trivialise children's involvement (Hart, 1997). According to the sociological analysis of James, Jenks and Prout (1998), children are regarded as social agents entitled to autonomy, but also as in need of adult protection and control. It has long been recognised that involving children and young people in educational decision-making demands a willingness to challenge existing power relationships (Partridge, 2005). Moreover, some have argued that there are practical limits to children's potential involvement. Views are different from observable reactions, and major decisions need to take account of far more than immediate preferences (Ware, 2004).

The terms *children* and *pupils* are used here to refer to individuals in full-time education, before the end of the academic year in which they turn 16. When exercising a function in the case of a child, the Local Authority has a duty to involve as well as support the child, according to the Children and Families Act 2014 (Chapter 6, Part 3, Section 19). There must, in particular, be regard to 'the views, wishes and feelings of the child', the importance of the child 'participating as fully as possible in decisions', and the child 'being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation'. This is in addition to the involvement of the parent. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), established the right of the child to freely express his or her views in all matters affecting the child, these views being given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care, 2015) states that the views of the pupil are to be gathered as evidence when assessing special educational need, and the pupil should be included in discussions to plan and review the educational, health and care provision. A person-centred approach underpins these guidelines for coordinated assessment and planning.

Pupil participation has a two-fold rationale: firstly, children have a principled right to be heard, and adults have a duty to listen; secondly, there are practical benefits to their sharing information and decision making (Frederickson and Cline, 2015). There is evidence that involving children in planning intervention makes sense and is achievable. Kennedy (2015) reported progress among Key Stage 2 children, who worked with learning mentors to agree and monitor goals for intervention regarding social, emotional and mental health needs. Participating children regarded their involvement as essential to their progress. There is also evidence from children and young people that involvement is welcome and possible, even among those with communication impairments (Merrick and Roulstone, 2011; Roulstone *et al.*, 2016). Pearlman and Michaels (2019) explored methods of interviewing pupils with a learning disability, and found some but not all were able to answer questions about their lives and preferences, hopes and aspirations.

A ‘person-centred’ approach is about individualising support, building in choice and sharing power, and has origins outside the school environment. In health and social care, person-centred planning is well recognised as an evidence-based practice that assists people in leading an independent and inclusive life (Department of Health, 2010). The term is associated with tools which aim to ensure services work together and focus on what is important for the person. However, teachers and school leaders need to be active in interpreting what person-centred planning means in a school context.

Since the latest legislation and guidance came into effect, some studies have set out to review how well principles are borne out in practice. Hellowell (2017) called for further research and evaluation into how the ‘moral imperatives’ of child-centredness and co-production are incorporated in practice. In her qualitative study of perspectives from a range of professionals on parent-partnership, she found concern about whether the changes would constitute ‘real empowerment’ (p. 425). Sales and Vincent (2018) consulted a number of parents, pupils and professionals. They found that changes in policy were not reflected in the attitudes or practices of all professionals; teachers acknowledged that listening to pupils could feel ‘a bit tokenistic’ (p. 73). Pupils did not feel 100% listened to, and some pointed out that ‘scary’ meetings were not the best forum for communication.

The research approach

This study aimed to describe views and experiences of teachers regarding current practice and perceived barriers to children’s involvement. Teachers who were

practising SENCOs, or who had a professional interest in the SENCO role, were invited to participate. The study investigated how involved children are considered to be in decisions about their special educational provision, and whether there are discrepancies between principles, teachers' own ideals and practice.

The study used a fixed design and interpretive methodology. The data are considered as a descriptive sample of a range of views and experiences which may fit other working contexts. Statistical generalisation to a wider population of teachers was not expected from the sample. Analysis was from a social constructionist perspective. The act of interpretation is seen as active engagement with the data. The investigator is a psychologist and speech and language therapist with a teaching background, experienced in working with staff and pupils in mainstream primary schools.

The study consisted of a single questionnaire, which was administered online. Questions were closed (forced choices and tick boxes) with opportunities to comment, thus generating both quantitative and qualitative data. Choices available within the questionnaire drew on recent analyses of children's involvement and evidence based recommendations (The Communication Trust, 2016). Questions included the following:

1. In your school, pupils may be identified as having special educational needs, and an outcome-focused plan is devised for them. How involved are these pupils in...
 - outlining their own needs
 - letting you know their experiences of school
 - identifying their personal outcomes
 - planning steps to reach the outcomes
 - giving feedback about what is helpful
 - developing ideas for improving provision?
2. Below are some strategies for eliciting children's views about their wishes and needs. Tick the box if you have used any of these for that purpose:
 - Asking yes/no questions, such as 'Do you like..?'
 - Presenting symbols or real objects to manipulate.
 - Art-based methods such as inviting children to draw a picture.
 - Games and activities that involve physical activity, such as children using cameras, giving a tour of the school.

Sharing pictures to get children talking.
Conversation in real time as and when issues arise.
Storytelling or role play.

3. Can you give an example from your work of when the views of a child had an impact on his/her special education provision?
4. Would you like children to be more involved in decisions about their special educational provision than they currently are?
5. What is the greatest barrier to involvement?

Participants

The 64 participants in the study were members of a SENCO network group and postgraduate students undertaking a course of study for the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination. A link to the online survey was provided for participants on a virtual learning platform and a county SENCO bulletin. Participants were predominantly highly experienced teachers. According to the data provided in the survey, 82 per cent of respondents had been practising for more than 10 years. The sample included teachers of children in nurseries as well as primary and secondary age groups; some were specialist teachers. The population included people teaching in English mainstream and special schools, urban, rural and suburban settings, some multi-lingual. The sample is likely to have captured these elements of diversity.

Ethical considerations

The study gained the approval of the University College London Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee and followed the tenets of best ethical practice set out in the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011). Potential participants were made aware of the purpose of the research beforehand through an on-screen information letter. They were given the opportunity to ask questions about both the research and its outcomes and given full details of how their responses would be used. The invitation was accompanied by a statement making clear the voluntary nature of the process and anonymity of participants. The time cost to participants was minimised by making the survey as straightforward to complete as possible. Participants were thanked in an onscreen message at the end of the data collection phase.

Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were integrated using a mixed methods approach. Forced choice and tick box questions provided measures of the overall perceived involvement of children, use of strategies and levels of satisfaction with children's involvement. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and comment boxes added depth to the analysis. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Lyons and McAllister, 2019). Initial codes were written from a systematic surface reading of the text, based on the words used by participants (e.g. *time, motivation, questionnaires*). Later, codes were collated into potential themes by linking, merging, contrasting and separating. These were then analysed at a more interpretive level, in order to capture implicit meaning by reviewing the data set and relating, comparing, looking for exceptions and contrasting. This generated a thematic map of analysis. Where there was a dominant story in the analysis, effort was made to retain accounts that departed from this, in order to capture evidence of the full range of perspectives. By asking interpretive questions and seeking answers within the data set, a small number of underpinning themes were defined. Categories and themes were described through the process of writing. Comments are quoted verbatim below, where these exemplify the emergent themes.

Findings

Teachers participating in this study provided evidence of a range of perspectives about pupils' participation in planning provision for special educational needs. They referenced their experience as teachers and as leaders, their feelings, their beliefs and their knowledge.

Defining involvement

Figure 1 shows how participants rated (on a 3-point scale) pupil involvement in six aspects of planning provision. The most common response was 'pupils have *some involvement*' (scoring 2 on the scale). Least involvement was reported in *developing ideas for improving provision*; 42% rated *no involvement* in this. The greatest degree of involvement was reported in *letting you know their experiences of school*; 50% rated children as having *considerable involvement* in this.

Ratings indicated that teachers were able to report greater pupil involvement in immediate and everyday matters, and less involvement in abstract and conceptual

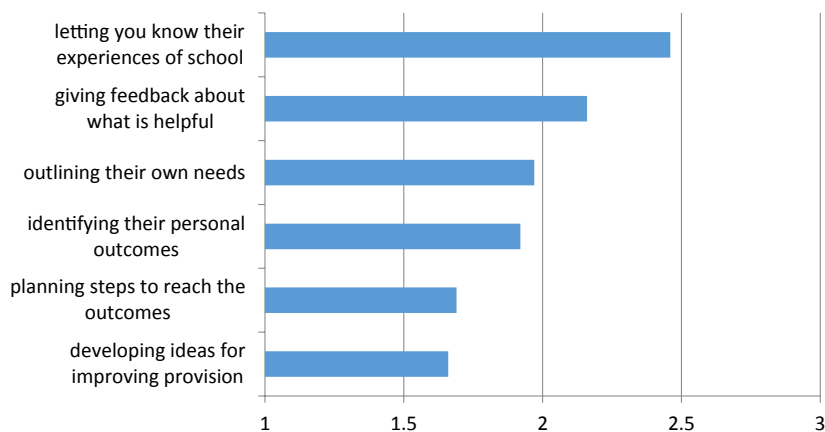


Figure 1. Degree of pupil involvement in aspects of planning provision [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

aspects of planning. Participants indicated that teachers readily acknowledged children's interests and concerns. They drew a distinction between this and the more skilled task of eliciting ideas and desired outcomes. Engaging children's participation in how to address their own concerns was seen as more challenging, more time-consuming and beyond many teachers' expectations of their pupils:

We get the pupils to share with us what they like and dislike about school, what they are good at and what they want to do better at, but it is hard to expect them to plan outcomes and steps to progress.

I see our role as the holder of the expert knowledge to enable their needs to be met in response to their concerns.

We know that children find it easier to communicate about activity when it is current or recent, particularly when they have communication difficulties (Roulstone *et al.*, 2016). Immediate interests and feelings may well be easier to communicate than far-off aspirations or abstract notions of ambition. Two things are important here, however. Firstly, knowing someone's reactions and understanding their preferences does not give insight into their views when making bigger decisions (Ware, 2004). Secondly, ambition and aspiration are affected by issues of class and inequality, and fragile among some groups in society (Riddell, 2010).

Teachers in the current study recognised the developmental nature of pupil involvement and its long-term importance in children's lives:

If our children feel included and empowered from the early stages, they should be more able to make decisions and take responsibility as they grow up.

Strategies for exploring views

Figure 2 (below) shows which strategies participants had used to elicit pupils' views about their wishes and needs. Two were by far the most popular: *conversation in real time as and when issues arise* (selected by 89% of participants), and *asking yes/no questions, such as 'Do you like...?'* (84%). This suggests that conversation and questions take precedence over methods requiring materials or extended activity. However, art-based methods such as asking the child to draw were common (66%). Just over half of all participants had used symbols and objects to help children express themselves and half had used pictures to get pupils talking. A minority had used storytelling or role play (30%) and games/activities that involve physical activity (25%).

From participants' comments, two themes emerged as important regarding methods of ascertaining pupils' views. These were the nature of the teacher-pupil

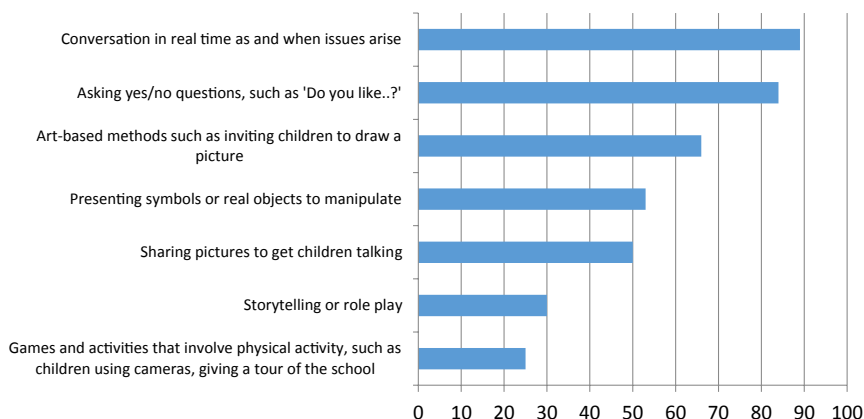


Figure 2. Strategies used to elicit pupils' views [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]

relationship and the type of language used, and school-wide systems for sharing information. Establishing the right kind of relationships with children was a key to success in eliciting children's perspectives. This was seen as a skill, and always linked to time pressure:

Having time and space to build an open relationship and hold the kinds of conversations that will elicit views.

Participants were actively considering how to ask the right sorts of questions to promote discussion. For many, this meant flexibility when interviewing pupils, and the use of solution-focused, open-ended questions. However, some also expressed the value of checklists and survey questions 'as a stimulus to foster and frame conversation'. On the one hand, many were trying to keep children 'comfortable'. On the other hand, there were also perceived benefits to having 'confronted' a child (with reference to behaviour that was impacting on learning). The focus throughout was on eliciting children's views and not being constrained by assumptions. Participants acknowledged the dangers of tokenism, wanting involvement of children 'in a meaningful way, not just to tick the box.'

Through gathering pupil views, I have learned time and again that we cannot presume to know what causes barriers or what they would find useful.

Too often the children's views are only sought via closed questions and in contexts where they might feel they have to answer in a certain way.

Importantly, participants described steps taken not only to elicit but also to formally share children's views through a school-wide system. Children's roles in the annual review of their education and health care plan included making invitations and greeting their visitors, sharing photographs of their learning, preparing a video recording or attending in person:

We ask our EHCP children to prepare a short PowerPoint for their annual review about their progress, likes and dislikes, successful support etc (with help of a TA). This is very empowering and sets the tone for the annual review.

Several participants stressed the importance of pupil participation across the year. Systems for this included termly 'one page profiles'. Children could 'get used to being evaluative and having their views listened to':

People forget that seeking views is an ongoing process and should not just happen to inform an annual review. There is a lot of quality information that pupils share that is not recorded.

Thus, strategies that were being used for pupil involvement were on the one hand basic to existing relationships and daily interactions between practitioners and pupils, and, on the other hand, were actively implemented in school-wide systems. These two strands are evident in the literature. Norwich and Kelly (2006) examined pupil participation in decision-making about special educational needs in 18 schools. Teachers in their study attributed successful pupil participation to a sense of respect and security, where ‘little things’ such as how one greets and interacts with children ‘make a big difference’ (p. 261), and also to clear structures for pupil participation. Together these contribute to the school ethos, which was considered to be the ‘outstanding and pervasive’ factor that determined how far children’s direct participation was supported.

Impact of children’s involvement

A majority (two thirds) of respondents were able to give an example case from their work of when the views of a child had an impact on his/her special education provision. The nature of the impact described by participants fell into three themes: teachers gained insights, which they used to improve teaching; pupils gained motivation; and pupil perspectives influenced resources and timetabling.

Talking to pupils gave teachers understanding of pupils’ needs, thoughts, feelings and priorities. This led to insight into how best to approach teaching or manage behaviour. Teachers discovered what helps a child to concentrate and they used this to get them started on tasks. They asked children what they enjoy, and used this to enhance their learning. A child was happier in school when his perception of being bullied was shared and he could hear the perceptions of the other children. A pupil’s relationship with staff improved when she shared her concerns and began to trust the adults to deal with them. Listening carefully to a child led one teacher to identify literacy difficulties and addressing these resulted in improved self-esteem. Insight into a pupil’s ‘mindset’ enabled one participant to influence attitudes to mistakes and growth.

Pupils gained motivation and a sense of purpose from their participation in the planning process, because aims set were more engaging and relevant. A pupil had

‘taken more ownership’ and made more progress. Some participants described children who knew better than staff what they needed. In one case, adults’ focus was found to be ‘misplaced’ and targets changed completely. There were examples of children recommending helpful strategies, such as a child with dyslexia requesting more paired reading. Pupils gave advice on effective support from the teaching assistant, leading to improved relationships and learner independence. Some expressed the importance of a quiet environment in which to concentrate or keep calm and this was arranged. There were examples of responsiveness to personal aspirations, such as learning the guitar. There were also examples of using children’s aspirations to make schoolwork relevant, such as learning money in order to buy their own chocolate, reading instructions in order to build models, and carrying out a computer-based intervention in order to improve computer literacy.

Pupils made specific requests, which were granted, such as choosing a laptop and software, being allowed to continue with the subjects that they enjoy, having a bespoke timetable. Provisions such as a whiteboard for drafting, or ear defenders to cut out background noise, had been made based on individual pupil perspectives.

Pupils have a try-out of equipment such as pencil-grips or a wobble cushion and a choice about what helps them.

One third of participants indicated that they were unable to give any example. There are methodological reasons why this result might be recorded, not least because a negative response would save time on completing the questionnaire. One respondent felt that without a leadership position they did not have this knowledge; this implies that teachers do not always have an overview of the impact of what they do. However, the overall finding could well be reflective of at least some teachers for whom the rhetoric of pupil involvement is not matched by practice.

Lansdown (2001) grouped meaningful approaches to involving children into three categories: *consultative* processes, *participative* initiatives and promoting *self advocacy*. According to this model, teachers in the present study were reporting on predominantly consultative processes, where pupils’ involvement is initiated and managed by adults. However, there were some examples of participative initiatives, where the balance of power was altered in favour of pupils and where children had some control over the outcomes. Participants gave evidence of some differences between the perspectives of adults and children, their

priorities and their knowledge, and described a system where assumptions were being challenged.

The vision

A large majority (84%) of participants indicated that they would like pupils to be more involved in decisions about their special educational provision than they currently are. For these people, there appears to be a discrepancy between their ideals and practice; qualitative analysis suggests that ideals had three bases.

Firstly, children are experts in their own condition, and can give practitioners insight into their own abilities and needs. This was particularly commented on with regard to understanding and managing children's behaviour and reducing children's stress. Children's role in reviewing and evaluating intervention was considered important. The comments below indicate practitioners' respect for the insights that they have gained from listening to pupil perspectives:

We cannot presume to know what causes barriers or what they would find useful.

We miss the little details that have a big impact.

They know their skills and strengths more than you.

We often give children more of the same. Finding out what they think and feel changes your whole perception.

Secondly, a sense of purpose arises from pupils' participation in target-setting. Involving pupils was seen as an important dimension of the teacher-student relationship, and particularly necessary for certain children. Children are more engaged in school life and more motivated to learn when provision is meaningful to them and relevant to their desires:

In my experience, schools that are prepared to be flexible and listen have been very successful with these pupils who have more investment in their futures and provision when they are more actively involved.

Children who do not 'buy-in' to learning need a different approach. Starting from their interests might be a way in. One of the biggest impacts on progress

is teacher-student relationships. Talking to children and involving them shows them you care.

Thirdly, some respondents took a developmental perspective. They expressed the view that pupil participation nurtures self-awareness, decision-making skill and self-advocacy, and the main rationale for pupil involvement was their need for these in the future. Attached to this was the ethical principle of respecting children's right to autonomy:

They need to be empowered to develop a healthy understanding of their needs so that they learn how to access support for the future.

Students need to have a say as it is affecting their future.

A significant minority (ten people) did not share the view that pupil involvement should increase. Rather, pupils were considered to be already as involved as they can be, given the nature of their difficulties: some children are too young, too disabled and/or unwilling to participate:

Unfortunately communication is a major issue for many of the children.

We do as much as we can to involve them, within the limits of their needs.

Some pupils refuse to attend the meetings.

The importance of participation for pupil motivation and well-being is well supported in the literature. Lightfoot and Sloper (2003) and reported the therapeutic benefits of consulting physically disabled or chronically ill children. Graham and Fitzgerald (2011) found that participation enabled young people to be more adaptable which, in turn, promoted their emotional well-being. Pupil empowerment and enhanced self esteem was a major theme emerging from the action research by Jelly and colleagues (2012) when they worked on enhancing the participation of children with SEN.

Barriers to involvement

When participants were asked what was the greatest barrier to children's involvement in decisions about their educational provision, two themes emerged from

the responses – the profile of the child and the attitudes of practitioners. Some children with special educational needs were judged to be unaware of their needs and to lack the capacity to make decisions, this being related to age and the nature of their difficulty:

It is sometimes difficult to get meaningful involvement from the youngest and those with the most severe needs.

Some children are not old enough to know what their success s criteria look like.

For a lot of the children we have with an EHCP they will not have the capacity to make logical and reasoned decisions due to their stage of development.

Communication in particular was singled out as a barrier, where, for example, children have autism spectrum disorder, speech, language and communication needs or complex needs. While some teachers indicated that difficulties communicating with children ‘can usually be overcome’ and that ‘the results are worth it’, they also indicated that ‘teachers lack the time to spend talking and working with these children’. It was acknowledged that engaging with children with special educational needs was a skill, that it required ‘time and understanding’, and that some teachers lacked expertise:

I think that it is a skill to elicit views of children with very complex needs, and this needs to be developed as part of CPD [continuing professional development].

It is commonly reported that age affects children’s degree of involvement, and that younger children are the least likely to have access to participatory initiatives. This has been the case among young children with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses (Lightfoot and Sloper, 2003). Adams and colleagues (2017) reported age as a factor, with young children’s views and opinions less commonly being included in Education, Health and Care Plans, according to a large national survey of parents and young people. Current findings indicate that there are teachers of the view that that many of the barriers presented by children’s difficulties and stage of development can be overcome, given the appropriate time, skills and training on the part of the adult.

Practitioner attitudes were considered a barrier to children’s involvement. Comments suggested that children’s capacity for participation depends on the

importance attached to pupil voice in the school, and adults' willingness to share decision-making power:

I wonder if school staff feel under pressure to be the 'experts' and therefore do not involve the pupils.

There is still a view that pupils may make unreasonable requests.

We don't give them a chance. We worry about what children might say. We need to be willing to see things through children's eyes and evaluate impact.

According to several participants, partnership with children needs to be embedded into the school system as the norm. In some cases this requires a 'cultural shift' and 'importance given to pupils with special educational needs by senior management'. Participants saw the need for more consistency:

Whilst these strategies are really helpful and informative, the over stretched timetable, busy teachers, the overload of new initiatives and menial tasks, often prevent these from happening as the norm and part of a robust system, merely ad-hoc add-ons.

There were examples of successful systems in place to learn about pupils' aspirations, such as for their annual review. There were also communication systems, such as using symbols to facilitate choice making, to express preferences and explore difficulties (Murphy, 1997). A main barrier to children's involvement was time and timetables. Where teachers are busy and juggling many initiatives and pressures, prioritising pupil participation was seen by respondents as a leadership task.

Some participants referred to an 'over-reliance on non-teaching staff'. The Code of Practice emphasizes the responsibility and accountability of teachers for the progress and development of all pupils in their class (Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care, 2015, 6.36). Participants felt that not all teachers were 'willing to take responsibility' and that schools lack the coordinated approach necessary to consistently individualise planning for children with special educational needs:

Changing people's mind set! Enabling the child to be involved helps everyone who is involved with that child! This enables the provision, outcomes and targets to be meaningful. Everyone needs to remember it for them!

This finding is consistent with Curran, Mortimore and Riddell (2017). These authors explored the views of SENCOs, and found that successful pupil involvement was attributed to the increasing accountability of class teachers for the learning of their pupils with SEN: in taking more responsibility, teachers were developing better relationships with pupils, which supported their involvement.

Conclusion

There is a paradox in that genuine pupil participation may be nurtured through small decisions and informal processes, such as conversation within teacher-pupil relationships where there is openness and flexibility, yet participation will be tokenistic if confined to small issues and not formalised within a school-wide system. Therefore, meaningful participation cannot be effected through good relationships alone, nor solely through formal structures or policies.

Listening to children and understanding how to engage with them was seen by respondents as an essential part of the teacher-pupil relationship. Teachers get to know their pupils, their interests, what they think and feel. This goes to the very heart of what teaching is. Because of the intrinsic nature of children's involvement in their teaching and learning, teachers may feel they are in a position to advocate for the pupil in the planning process, rather than involve the pupil directly, particularly when formal consultation is time-consuming. Respondents indicated that provision is often planned *for* pupils, with teachers taking into account the child's likes, interests and the background information that they give.

However, children also have the potential to provide important and sometimes unexpected insights into their own teaching and learning. Participants in this study offered a number of examples of pupils influencing provision, in terms of defining aims and desired outcomes, procuring resources and selecting teaching strategies. Children's involvement also has the potential to be enlightening, and indeed 'empowering', for the pupils themselves. In effect, pupil participation supports better teaching and learning, better outcomes for pupils, and helps teachers to do a better job.

There are limitations to the findings of this study. Firstly, participants in the study had a specialist interest in special educational needs. Their perspectives may not be representative, and involvement of pupils depends upon the capacity and willingness of all their class teachers. Secondly, the study focused on the involvement of children, but current guidelines include partnership with families. Children's

participation will be affected by the level of involvement of parents. Thirdly, the study records the perceptions that teachers have chosen to share; responses may be indicative of actual practice but cannot be taken as such without further exploration, through, for example, observation, ethnography and research with children and families.

Most teachers felt children should be more involved than they currently are in planning provision. Drivers for this were the potential for successful outcomes as a result of increased teacher insight and increased pupil engagement in learning, as well as a respect for children's right to autonomy. Pupils with communication difficulties, especially younger ones, may be deprived of these benefits, as teachers find these children among the most difficult to involve. The way in which teachers engage these children is an important area for further research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the participants of this research and colleagues at University College London for facilitating the study.

References

- ADAMS, L., TINDLE, A., BASRAN, S., DOBIE, S., THOMSON, D., ROBINSON, D. and SHEPHERD, C. (2017) *Experiences of Education, Health and Care Plans. A survey of parents and young people*. Department for Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-health-and-care-plans-parents-and-young-people-survey>.
- BRAUN, V. and CLARKE, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- CURRAN, H., MORTIMORE, T. and RIDDELL, R. (2017) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCo's perspectives of the first six months. *British Journal of Special Education*, 44, 46–64.
- DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION & DEPARTMENT FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE (2015) Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0–25 years. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>.
- FREDERICKSON, N. and CLINE, T. (2015) *Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and Diversity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- GRAHAM, A. and FITZGERALD, R. (2011) Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Well-being: does 'having a say' matter? *Children & Society*, 25, 447–457.
- HART, R. (1997) *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- HELLAWELL, B. (2017) A review of parent–professional partnerships and some new obligations and concerns arising from the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice 2015. *British Journal of Special Education*, 44, 411–430.

- JAMES, A., JENKS, C. and PROUT, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Columbia: Teachers College Press.
- JELLY, M., BYERS, R. and FULLER, A. (2012) *Involving Pupils in Practice: Promoting partnerships with pupils with special educational needs*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- KENNEDY, E.-K. (2015) The Revised SEND Code of Practice 0–25: effective practice in engaging children and young people in decision-making about interventions for social, emotional and mental health needs. *Support for Learning*, 30, 364–380.
- LANDSDOWN, G. (2001) *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making*. Florence: UNICEF.
- LIGHTFOOT, J. and SLOPER, P. (2003) Having a say in health: involving young people with a chronic illness or physical disability in local health services development. *Children & Society*, 17, 277–290.
- LYONS, R. and MCALLISTER, L. (2019) Methods in qualitative methodologies for research in the field of communication disorders. In R. Lyons and L. McAllister (ed.), *Qualitative Research in Communication Disorders: An Introduction for Students and Clinicians*. Guildford: J&R Press.
- MERRICK, R. and ROULSTONE, S. (2011) Children's views of communication and speech-language pathology. *International journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 13, 281–290.
- MURPHY, J. (1997) *Talking Mats: A Low-Tech Framework to Help People with Severe Communication Difficulties Express their Views*. Stirling: University of Stirling.
- NORWICH, B. and KELLY, N. (2006) Evaluating Children's participation in SEN procedures: lessons for educational psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22, 255–271.
- PARTRIDGE, A. (2005) Children and young people's inclusion in public decision-making. *Support for Learning*, 20, 4.
- PEARLMAN, S. and MICHAELS, D. (2019) Hearing the voice of children and young people with a learning disability during the Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP). *Support for Learning*, 34, 148–161.
- RIDDELL, R. (2010) *Aspiration, Identity and Self-belief: Snapshots of Social Structure at Work*. London: Institute of Education Press.
- ROULSTONE, S., HARDING, S. and MORGAN, L. (2016) *Exploring the Involvement of Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Their Families in Decision Making: A Research Project*. The Communication Trust.
- SALES, N. and VINCENT, K. (2018) Strengths and limitations of the Education, Health and Care plan process from a range of professional and family perspectives. *British Journal of Special Education*, 45, 61–80.
- HALLETT, G. and HALLETT, F. (2014) Editorial. *British Journal of Special Education*, 41, 3, 226–230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12077>
- THE COMMUNICATION TRUST (2016) *Involving children and young people with speech, language and communication needs: A toolkit for education settings*. The Communication Trust.
- WARE, J. (2004) Ascertaining the views of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 175–179.

Correspondence

Rosalind Merrick

Email: rosalindmerrick@gmail.com