Targets from previous assignments

Target 1	**To continue to display original and independent thought when proposing recommendations and critically evaluate a synthesis of opposing research** *I have continued to display original and independent thought and have critically evaluated opposing research.*
Target 2	**Avoid repetition of sentence structure:** *A variety of sentence structure has been used throughout*
Target 3	**To keep on doing what you are doing:** *Worked hard on the assignment*
Target 4	**Make sure you apply all readings wherever possible:** *All readings have been included where possible*
Target 5	**Proofread your work:** *All sections of my work have been proofread*

How do special schools ensure that Article Twelve of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is successfully implemented with children who have difficulty communicating verbally?

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BA (Hons) in Primary Education with QTS

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March 2020

Frontispiece

This is to certify that, except where specific reference is made, the work described in this research project is the result of the investigation carried out by the student and that neither this research project nor any part of it has been presented, or is currently being submitted in candidature of any other award other than in part for the degree of BA (Hons) in Primary Education with QTS of Trinity Saint David University of Wales. I understand that any work I use without reference constitutes plagiarism, which may lead to the failure of this module.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to take this opportunity to gratefully thank the staff and pupils from the school involved in this research project for their assistance and valuable contribution. With special mention to the Primary lead teacher interviewed for their time, patience and valuable information. Thank you to the headteacher and Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNco) of the school for allowing access for the author to interview the staff and pupils during their elective practice.

Furthermore, special thanks go to Dr. Sioned Hughes and Nanna Ryder of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David for their help and constant support throughout the development of this research project.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The research project aims to explore the issues and policies that surround the implementation of Article twelve with children who have difficulty communicating verbally. Article twelve of the UNCRC stipulates that all pupils have the right to 'express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them' (Unicef, 2020a, p.1). However, it is often considered to be challenging to achieve in practice for children that have difficulty communicating verbally (Glazzard *et al.,*2015; Pearce and Wood, 2016; NCSL, 2007). The research project aims to develop my knowledge and understanding of the topic to improve the effectiveness of my professional practice. This will be achieved through primary and secondary research and the observation of best practice in a special school setting in which it is hoped to influence my pedagogical approach in similar situations.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is 'an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people' a comprehensive set of fifty-four rights or articles (GovUK, 2020, p.1). Pupils may experience difficulty communicating verbally for a wide range of reasons (Peer and Reid, 2016). Within School A, where the research is being conducted, pupils have a range of additional learning needs that can affect their verbal communication including Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Global Learning Delay (GLD) alongside behavioural, emotional, social and sensory difficulties (SchoolA, 2020).

The United Nations Committee for Human Rights found that school children in the UK were 'not systematically consulted in matters that affect them' and made recommendations for the UK government to improve meaningful and effective participation for all children in schools (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2003, p.34). The Welsh Government (2019) has since introduced the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 to ensure that the UNCRC is considered in all government legislation and policy which highlights Wales' commitment to ensuring children's rights.

Furthermore, both the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 (Hwb, 2020) and the Draft Additional Learning Needs code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2018a) documents are underpinned by pupil voice. When fully implemented, schools will be required to consider the views, feelings and wishes of all learners, including enabling the participation of those with ALN, to create a

fully inclusive education system where learners co-construct the curriculum. This will support the development of a range of skills, such as questioning, effective communication and teamwork and will help pupils' attainment of all of the four purposes of education and develop skills that will benefit learners throughout their lives (Devi, 2013; Donaldson, 2015).

I hypothesize that special schools will use a multi-faceted approach to ensure that pupil voice is promoted throughout all aspects of school life, similar to what the researcher has previously observed in mainstream settings, but that it will be adapted for children with difficulty communicating verbally.

My interest in this subject was stimulated during my previous Professional Teaching Experience (PTE) where I observed practice within an Integrated Specialist Teaching Facility (ISTF). I was fascinated by the experience and was keen to know more about special education in Wales to enhance my knowledge and understanding to make an informed judgement whether it is a potential area I would like to work within.

A wide variety of research methods will be used to explore the topic. Firstly, a thorough search of the available literature surrounding the topic will be conducted, analysed and reported (see chapter two). Furthermore, to collect primary data, the researcher will visit a special school. Data will be collected from school policies, pupils' work and other documentation. Furthermore, the researcher will undertake learning walks, learning observations and semi-structured interviews with both pupils and teachers. The data from these experiences will be collected in the form of field notes, photos and videos. The data will be analysed, reported and discussed within chapter four.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The researcher has undertaken a thorough search of the available literature within the chosen topic to identify important research that has already been completed and is relevant to the research topic. This secondary research has included books, journals, government documents and other reputable sources. When reading, critical analysis was used to ensure the literature used was of high-quality, relevant to the discussions and supported by evidence. Articles that did not meet this criterion were excluded. Furthermore, secondary research has identified many themes that surround the research question. However, due to the nature of this research project and to ensure sufficient depth of the chosen themes, it will not be possible to discuss all the identified themes.

The secondary research has identified many sources of information on pupil voice and the UNCRC and similarly practice in special schools. However, it has been challenging to find high-quality, relevant articles that bridge both areas of interest which suggests that there is a gap in the current research.

What is the UNCRC and Article Twelve?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and is ‘designed to empower children’ (Unicef, 2020b; Lyle, 2014, p.216). Nearly every country in the world, including the UK, has ratified and is bound by law to ensure its implementation. The UNCRC (Unicef, 2020a, p.1) has 54 articles, each of equal importance that covers every aspect of a child’s life and outlines their ‘civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights’ and how governments and adults should work together to ensure that all children can enjoy these rights. Unicef (2020a, p.1) highlights that every child has these rights, whatever their ‘ethnicity, gender, religion, language, ability or any other status’. For this research project, the researcher has chosen to focus upon the twelfth article of the UNCRC which states that ‘every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them’ (Unicef, 2020a).

What is pupil voice?

MacBeath (2006) defines pupil voice as a pupil or pupils’ participation, contribution and influence within an educational context. Pupil voice initiatives in schools would normally

include the consultation, feedback and engagement of pupils in their education and relate directly to Article twelve of the UNCRC (Cook-Sather, 2014).

The number of pupil voice initiatives in schools worldwide has significantly increased since the introduction of the UNCRC as schools seek to improve the quality of the education that they provide (Pearce and Wood, 2016; Lundy, 2007). Special schools in Wales have equal responsibility under the UNCRC as mainstream schools to ensure that the rights are enacted.

Why is pupil voice important?

BERA (2016) states that various studies have highlighted the many benefits of implementing pupil voice in schools, such as; increased pupil engagement, improved relationships and communication and supporting the development of a school community. Pupil voice is particularly important in special schools as it helps to ensure that pupils' views and ideas are heard and communicated, develops life skills and helps to minimise the adversarial nature of decisions that impact upon their lives (SENMagazine, 2020).

Challenges

The NCSL (2007, p.3) highlights that schools often face challenges ensuring that Article twelve is implemented with children with additional learning needs (ALN) as these pupils can be harder to reach due to their communicative ability. Helen Sanderson Associates (2020) highlights that all pupils in special schools do communicate with us, need to be listened to and are entitled to have a voice in their education. However, they may not use words to communicate or may find verbal communication difficult so as adults we need to find other methods of listening to their views, feelings and wishes (HelenSandersonAssociates, 2020).

Furthermore, schools must be aware that just because they have some student voice initiatives in place, it may not involve or consult all pupils. Lundy (2007, p.924) and Pearce and Wood (2016) both support this view and highlight the importance of evaluating pupil voice initiatives to ensure that a diverse range of children are involved and that participation is not exclusively for the 'articulate and literate'. However, the Welsh Government (2018a, p.33) highlights that pupils with ALN 'can become anxious, overwhelmed or intimidated' in unfamiliar situations and 'may struggle to fully participate or express their views'. Practitioners need to be mindful that not all children will want to participate in pupil voice

initiatives. Maslow's (1987) Hierarchy of Needs theory would support practitioners asking pupils if they wish to take part or not and respecting their wishes whilst ensuring the option to participate remains available.

Furthermore, Pearce and Wood (2016) highlight a further challenge with student voice initiatives in that students may just 'reproduce the dominant voices' in the room. Pupils may simply agree with or repeat the leading adult because they feel pressured or lack the autonomy to express their views. Lundy (2007) supports this view, highlighting that such initiatives have the potential to present concerns of undermining adult authority to both pupils and practitioners. Practitioners need to create an inclusive, equitable environment for student voice initiatives where pupils feel able to share their views openly and without fear.

Strategies to ensure pupil voice in a special school

Schools can use a wide range of whole-school strategies to incorporate pupil voice and promote their pupils' participation. Furthermore, Unicef (2020d) has a three-stage Rights Respecting Award that all schools can work towards achieving. The process supports schools in embedding pupils' rights in all areas and over 300 special schools in the UK are registered with the scheme (Unicef, 2020e). Moreover, the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) has a Super Ambassadors scheme that special schools can sign up to that sets termly challenges to ensure that all pupils know about their UNCRC rights. Estyn best practice reports (2018a; 2018b; 2019) highlight a wide range of strategies that mainstream schools in Wales have successfully implemented to ensure a whole school approach to pupil voice, however there are no similar reports available for special schools in Wales.

Firstly, a whole-school positive ethos can help to create a school culture that guides and promotes children's rights and pupil voice (Estyn, 2018b). The National Assembly for Wales (2001, p.19) highlights that a school's ethos should 'underpin pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development'. Estyn (2018b) and Ofsted (2014) exemplify two schools that have successfully embedded pupils' rights and pupil voice into their culture through the inclusion of rights within their school ethos. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory model would support the involvement of all stakeholders, such as parents and pupils, to create a school ethos statement and highlights the positive influence that this two-way communication can have. However, special schools can often experience challenges with parental engagement for a range of reasons (SecEd, 2016). Furthermore, it has taken the reports' schools many years to fully implement the changes and see the impact (Estyn,

2018b). Special schools that wish to embed children's rights and voices effectively within their culture will need to be fully committed to successfully implement the change and be aware of and plan effectively to minimise their impact of the challenges. However, if implemented successfully, the literature indicates that it will positively benefit all stakeholders.

Secondly, having a school council became law in Wales in 2005 (Estyn, 2019). A school council is a group of students 'that are elected by their peers to represent them and their views' (NI DfE, 2020, p.1). Estyn (2019) highlights that school councils can be an effective way to promote and encourage pupil participation in schools. However, Edinburgh University (2010) highlights that school councils' agendas are commonly controlled by untrained adults, are limited by having no spending budget and only involve a few pupils. Additionally, a NFER (2002) report found when asked only 40% of pupils thought that school councils were an effective way of listening to their ideas. Special schools in Wales are required to have school councils that represent the student body; however, as many children in special schools have difficulty communicating verbally, it may be more challenging for the school council to gather their views, feelings and wishes. School Councils UK (2018) offer training for staff and pupils that special schools could utilise to help to plan and improve the effectiveness of their school councils by enhancing their awareness of the common student council issues, such as communication and participation, to maximise the student voice impact of the school council. Furthermore, school council leaders could adapt in-class communication strategies to use with the pupils to maximise their participation. If special schools ensure that their school councils have adequate training, funding, resources and influence, secondary research has indicated that this can have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning, behaviour and well-being. In turn, this will support Wales' attainment of the well-being goals as detailed in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015b) by creating a more equal, healthier and resilient Wales.

Thirdly, Unicef (2020c) suggests that individual classes could create a rights-based charter of the UNCRC rights that are most important to them for use in the classroom. The process will help to make the rights real and meaningful to the children and will help develop a sense of ownership and pupil voice over in their learning and classroom (Unicef, 2020c). However, children in special schools may require scaffolding support to create a class charter. Vygotsky (1978) would support teachers rewording the rights to simplify them or the inclusion of images to scaffold the pupils' understanding and enable all learners to access

the activity. Unicef (2020e) has downloadable resources that could support schools to convey the convention through words, pictures or symbols (Appendix 1). The charter can be displayed in the classroom to celebrate rights and raise their profile with the pupils.

Strategies for communication

Special schools can use a range of strategies to support pupils' augmentative and alternative communication skills when they are unable or have difficulty communicating verbally (Peer and Reid, 2016). Mitchell (2014) outlines that special schools can use strategies such as; gestures and expressions, Sign Language, Makaton, communication boards, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or voice synthesisers to develop and encourage pupils' communication in the classroom and in turn, pupil voice. Some of these strategies, such as gestures and expressions, do not require physical resources and can be easily incorporated by practitioners into the classroom. However, other strategies, such as voice synthesisers, require varying levels of resources which can be costly for schools to purchase the digital software and hardware required. Mitchell (2014, p.210) highlights that by practitioners providing the required support to scaffold pupils' communication skills it will help pupils to 'learn functional communication skills' which will, in turn, support pupil voice.

Additionally, special schools can use one-page profiles to further promote the successful implementation of pupil voice in the classroom. One-page profiles contain information about a pupil's character, things that are important to them and how best to support them (Welsh Government, 2015a). They can be a collaborative document written by staff, parents, the pupil and any other agency and can help to provide a person-centred approach. Welsh Government (2018a) highlights that practitioners have a duty to identify and understand how a pupil would like to communicate and participate regardless of their capacity. Devi (2013, p.803) suggests that practitioners should observe pupils' 'behaviour and interactions closely in order to understand their way of communicating with the world' and this information can then be included with the pupil's one-page profile document to support other adults when communicating with the pupils. Furthermore, it would support the successful implementation of the pupil's voice within their education as it enables them to be heard even if they are unable to communicate themselves.

Summary of Literature Review

Schools should ensure that their practitioners have an excellent understanding and value the importance of Article twelve and the UNCRC. Furthermore, this ethos needs to continue throughout the school with the parents, pupils and other stakeholders. This will help to ensure that Article twelve and pupil voice is successfully embedded within all aspects of the school. However, every special school will have pupils with different needs and abilities. Schools will need to adapt their strategies and provisions for communication and participation to suit their pupils to ensure that Article twelve is implemented to its full potential.

Chapter Three: Methodology and research design

When planning the methodology for this research module, it was essential to consider ethics. Ethics are a set of principles or rules that should guide our conduct during this module (Reynolds, 1979; Robson, 2002). Prior to the elective placement, an ethics form was completed, which was approved by the university's ethics committee (Appendix 2). The researcher adhered to the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2019), university ethical research guidelines (UWTSD, 2020), General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (ICO, 2018) and the Education Workforce Council (EWC) Code of Conduct (EWC, 2019) at all times. Ethical considerations are essential to minimise the risk to ourselves as researchers and also to the university and the elective school. Furthermore, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the elective school or participants are not named and will be referred to as 'school A', 'child A', 'teacher B', etc. Before taking any photos, signed consent was gained from the school (Appendix 3) and class teachers were consulted to ensure individual children who did not have parental consent for photos were not included. At all times during the placement, the researcher will follow the EWC (2019) code of conduct by behaving professionally and ensuring that all data collected is stored, analysed and reported accurately to uphold the good name of the researcher, university and elective school.

During the elective experience, the researcher gathered data through observation and questioning during a school learning walk. Whilst the learning walk did not focus solely on the primary area of research, it was not time-consuming and it provided an excellent foundational base of the school layout and context to begin the research and further ideas of areas to explore. Additionally, the researcher gathered various school policies (Appendix 4), school mission statement (Appendix 5) and school development plan (Appendix 6) data. Furthermore, individual pupil profiles were accessed for each class that was visited. It was ensured that all data was anonymised by redacting all names or another identifying data and stored securely in line with ethical research and GDPR guidelines (BERA, 2019; UWTSD, 2020; ICO, 2018).

Over a few days, a wide range of learning experiences were observed, such as assemblies, lessons and interventions as both a participant and non-participant observer. The information gathered took the form of photos, field notes and pupils' work. It was ensured that all staff knew that the purpose of the research was not to judge their teaching, to minimise the bias of the researcher's presence. Koshy (2011) would support the use of a non-participant observation method that was preferred by the researcher. It was found to be less subjective and did not allow the researcher to bias observations by subconsciously introducing what they wished to see. However, at times it was challenging to act as a non-participant observer as the children often initiated interactions that may have distorted some of the observations. Additionally, Koshy (2011) highlighted that observations can impact behaviour so it is important to consider that the presence of the non-participant researcher may have affected the behaviour of those observed. During observations field notes were made, however, Green (2002) supports the findings that it was challenging to observe and make field notes at the same time which may have potentially resulted in the loss of data. The use of videotaping, with consent, could have been used alongside field notes to minimise this issue

During the elective experience, the researcher used a semi-structured interview technique to gather qualitative data around the chosen question. Whilst a general questionnaire for all would have taken less time, interviews were chosen as they allowed for the adaptation of questions for the range of different participants (Green, 2002). The semi-structured interview method that was used supports Koshy's (2011, p.87) views, as it allowed the interviewer to 'probe for further' information with open questions about pupil ambassadors when they were mentioned in a previous answer which would not have been possible with a structured interview approach. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) highlight the challenge of encouraging conversation whilst remaining neutral during interviews which support the researcher's findings. Whilst interviewing teacher A about the school council it was found to be challenging to neutrally discuss the exclusion of some classes without influencing the interview. However, it was essential to appear neutral to minimise the bias of the responses.

Before beginning the interview, the researcher followed BERA (2019) guidelines by verbally reinforcing that their responses were voluntary, confidential and assured participants that they could withdraw at any point. Adult participants were given the prepared letter (Appendix 7) to ensure they understood the nature of the research and asked for consent verbally. The researcher told pupil participants interviewed that their answers were for university work and

asked for their verbal assent to help. Additionally, teachers were asked for their consent to interview their pupils and the researcher familiarised themselves with the pupil profile information for each child to ensure their approach was appropriately adapted for their needs. A double-sided smiley face card (Appendix 8) was placed on the table during pupil interviews to allow them to withdraw non-verbally at any time if they wished. The researcher prepared a letter (Appendix 9) for the school to send to parents on their behalf to inform parents of the research but was told by the school that it wasn't required. To minimise any safeguarding risk to the researcher or participants and follow the university's ethical research guidelines (UWTSD, 2020), the researcher has a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and participants were not interviewed alone. In the case of a participant disclosing a safeguarding issue, the researcher ensured they were aware of the school's safeguarding policy and officers.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) and Koshy (2011) both highlight the importance of interview location so all interviews were conducted in their normal classrooms to ensure a familiar and comfortable environment. This approach was practical and ensured that it minimised any inconvenience for participants. However, challenges of this approach were encountered during an interview with Child A when the background noise of the class and morning routine distracted the pupil, broke the flow of conversation and potentially resulted in lost information.

The research was limited by the amount of time spent in the school. Teacher B discussed and acknowledged the impact that 'Attention Autism' sessions had upon pupil voice, however as the school had special events scheduled due to 'internet safety week', which altered normal timetabling, it was not possible to see an 'attention autism' session. There were videos available of the 'Attention Autism' sessions which would have been beneficial to the research however, we were not granted access to them. Furthermore, there was no school council or eco-council meetings timetabled that would have been beneficial to the study. If the study were to be repeated, it would be beneficial to visit for a few more days to be able to interview more pupils and observe a wider range of experiences in multiple age groups.

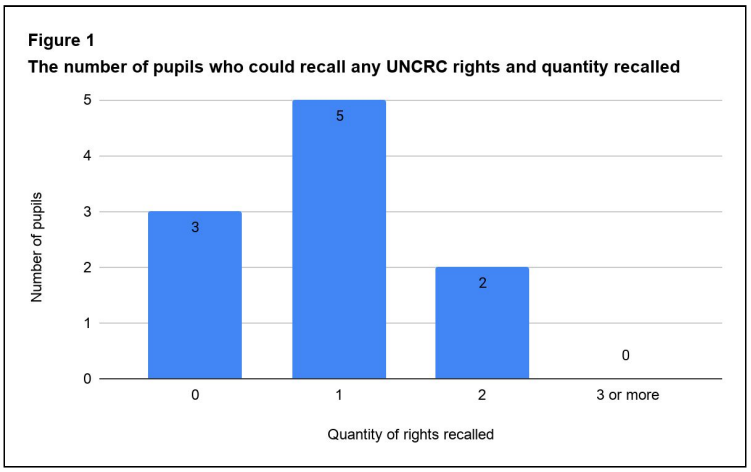
Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

This chapter will summarise and discuss the findings from a seven-day elective placement in School A where a wide variety of strategies were used to promote and develop Article twelve. The researcher will use a triangulation approach by considering policy and practice alongside theory to discuss the findings.

During an interview with Teacher C, the ALNCo, it was stated that all the children in school A have difficulty communicating verbally for a range of reasons (Appendix 10). Each year group was split into two bands, E-band and G-band, defined by the local authority. E-band were typically pupils with a global learning delay diagnosis and G-band were typically pupils with a complex autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis. In both bands, pupils typically also experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Pupils' awareness of their rights as a whole school

During a semi-structured interview with Teacher D, the pupil ambassador lead (Appendix 11), we discussed the rights display in the school entrance foyer that was seen during the learning walk (Appendix 12). The display was in a high traffic area of the school and the colourful design appealed to the children. Teacher D explained that the school has previously had a right of the month. However, they changed monthly and it was felt that there were not sufficient opportunities during one month to embed each right because it was evident within their work that the children were not secure and could not remember them. The quantitative data from semi-structured pupil interviews support this as when asked, the children, including school council members, were unable to recall more than two of the rights (Figure 1). Embedding rights into the school culture was identified as important by Estyn (2018b) and Ofsted (2014) during the literature review.



To counteract this, this year the school has decided to adopt four rights to focus upon during the academic year, each linked with one of the four general principles (Appendix 13) to improve their approach to the implementation of the rights. One of the chosen rights was Article twelve. It was noted during the literature review, that Unicef (2020e) suggests this approach for use within special schools. As the rights are all interlinked, it is likely that the other rights may naturally be included (Unicef, 2020a). However, a potential issue with this approach is that the children may not be sufficiently exposed to the range of all the rights due to the restricted focus. This was a new approach to the embedding of rights in School A, however, the writer suggests the school could improve the implementation of this current approach further by introducing a three-year rolling program which would still allow the longer timeframe to embed an individual right yet would allow twelve individual rights to be covered over the three year period. Furthermore, the school council could organise an annual pupil vote to decide what rights were included which would provide an opportunity to promote pupil voice within the process. Welsh Government (2018a, p.25) would support this approach as the pupils ‘are enabled to participate as fully as possible’ in planning and decision making.

Embedding pupil voice within the school ethos

During the induction, Teacher C explained the school mission and ethos statement to us. The statement was proudly displayed around the school in multiple places (Appendix 5) and has been recently created in collaboration with all stakeholders. Bronfenbrenner (1979), who was identified in the literature review, would support the positive involvement of all stakeholders. Teacher C explained that pupil voice had featured heavily during its creation as the school strongly believed that the ethos had to be a meaningful statement that the pupils had ownership of. The acrostic style ethos was designed to be inclusive by including

visual ‘symwriter’ images alongside simplified text to make the ethos accessible, understandable and easy to remember for all. Pupil voice and rights underpin each aspect of the ethos as it encourages stakeholder communication, positive relationships and pupils’ achievement of their full potential.

Using the school council and eco-council to promote pupil voice

School A has an active school and eco council. The elected pupils meet with a lead member of staff every half term to discuss school issues. The school has a silver rights-respecting award from Unicef and a silver eco-schools award. During the elective placement, neither council had meetings planned, which did limit my research as I was unable to see an actual meeting take place. However, semi-structured interviews with the lead member of staff for each council and several council members were able to be conducted.

Firstly, many classes had two elected representatives, one for the school council and one for the eco-council. However, some classes were not included. During my interview with Teacher A, the school council lead, they explained that some of the younger G-band classes were not included within the school council and eco-council as they would not be able to understand or interact. Teacher E, the primary phase lead, stated that in previous years the school council had sent out class questionnaires to gather the views of classes that were not represented within the school council. These were filled out by the staff based on their opinions of their behaviours and interactions. The findings from the literature review support this approach of using a range of methods to ensure the participation of a diverse range of pupils to communicate the voice of all pupils. However, during the interview with Teacher A it became evident that the questionnaires had not been utilised since 2017 and the views of these classes were no longer being formally gathered. The writer suggests that the questionnaires could be reinstated or replaced by a visit from a member of the school council to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to have their views, feelings and wishes heard.

Secondly, Teacher A and Teacher F listed tasks the school council and eco-council have taken part in during the academic year such as; supporting staff recruitment, helping to plan a school disco and buying recycling bins for the school grounds. Kent (2012) highlights that student voice can offer an important and unique perspective in the recruitment of a teacher. Teacher A showed the researcher a set of 10 questions that the school has created for the students to ask applicants during the interview process (Appendix 14). Teacher G stated

during her recent interview, the school council had asked her questions during the interview process. However, pupil voice during the interview process was not apparent as pupils were not given the opportunity to write or adapt the questions guided by their feelings, views and wishes. Overall, the process appeared to be dominated by the adults which Edinburgh University (2010), within the literature review, highlighted was a common issue with school councils. However, Teacher A highlighted that the school council panel process is used to observe the interactions between the applicants and children which does suggest that the process does play a role in the selection of staff. The writer suggests that the school council could take a more independent role in the writing of questions for applicants with the teachers acting as facilitators, if needed, to scribe or support. This would give the students a greater voice in the process as their feelings, wishes and views would be heard and would support the implementation of Article twelve.

Finally, Teacher A, D and F all stated that they had no training for their additional roles and all indicated that they felt training would benefit them and the pupils (Appendix 11). The writer suggests that the school could organise school council training for staff and pupils, such as the training offered by School Councils UK (2018), that was identified in the literature review. Whilst specialised staff training can be expensive and difficult to fund with limited school budgets, Lyle (2014) identifies adult attitude as one of the key barriers to successful implementation of the UNCRC in schools. The training would support staff's awareness and attitude of promoting communication and participation and help to maximise the impact that pupil voice has upon the school.

Development of pupil voice in the classroom

Each class in school A has a class charter of rights displayed on the classroom wall that all included Article twelve (Appendix 15). In many classes, the charter had been co-created by the children which promotes pupil voice as they collectively decide which rights to include. However, in some of the G-band classes, where the pupils' needs are greater, the staff had created it for the children. Student voice in the creation of class charters in these classes was limited due to this. Devi (2013), noted in the literature review, would support the staff using the pupils' behaviour and interactions to guide their choices for the class as indicated in their interview responses.

Furthermore, each class had a check-in display, where pupils can communicate their feelings to others during the school day (Appendix 16). Estyn (2018b) supports both class

charters and check-in strategies highlighting that they are effective, positive strategies for pupils to express their opinions and listen to others. However, Welsh Government (2018a) and Maslow's (1987) Hierarchy of Needs theory, noted in the literature review, highlight that pupils with ALN may struggle to participate in such activities due to feeling anxious, overwhelmed or intimidated. Pupils should be encouraged by staff and peers to participate, where possible, as it promotes and develops pupil voice and life skills. The literature review highlighted the importance of practitioners creating an inclusive, equitable environment where pupils can share their views, feelings and wishes.

Teacher G stated that she used KWL Grids (Appendix 17) to plan the learning with her class before commencing each topic. With the teacher acting as a scribe, the children would decide together what they want to learn over the course of the topic which promotes pupil voice in the planning. Donaldson (2015) and the Welsh Government (2018a), both identified in the literature review, would support this inclusive approach where pupils co-construct their curriculum. Furthermore, pupil voice was further evident during Teacher G's lesson. I observed a pupil ask a question "What is a beetle?". Then unplanned, the teacher initiated a discussion on beetles with all pupils and found a video of a beetle for the children to watch. In this instance, pupil voice played a significant part in leading the learning. Donaldson (2015) and Piaget's (1957) Constructivism theory would support the child-led nature of this teaching approach and highlights it can improve engagement and motivation. The researcher suggests that this approach should be implemented as best practice throughout the school to improve pupil voice within the classroom. However, Featherstone (2013) highlights that further training may be required to implement this approach which could be arranged for staff by the senior leadership team.

Strategies that support the communication of pupil voice

School A uses a range of communication strategies to develop the communication skills of the pupils which in turn helps to promote pupil voice as the children will be able to communicate more effectively. The whole school used the Makaton language programme to support pupils' spoken language with signs and symbols (Makaton, 2020). The researcher observed several pupils who were non-verbal and used Makaton to effectively communicate their feelings and wishes throughout the school day. Additionally, a six-stage augmentative communication system called the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) was used with the pupils with little or no communication capabilities to initiate nonverbal communication through symbols or picture cards (Peer and Reid, 2016). Teacher B did state

the PECS scheme was time-consuming as new symbols had to be made regularly and to consistently encourage use. However, Teacher B stated that school data has consistently shown that pupils make significant improvement in a short period of time when using the PECS scheme (Appendix 18). Peer and Reid (2016), discussed in the literature review, support the researcher's findings that communication strategies that support pupils' augmentative and alternative communication skills enable pupils to communicate their feelings, wishes and views more effectively thus promoting pupil voice.

Summary of results and discussion

Finally, many of the areas that were investigated during the elective placement had been recently introduced or adapted. This supports Teacher A's interview comment (Appendix 10) that the school is constantly reviewing school policy and prioritises the embedding of pupil rights and pupil voice within the school, which was identified as key to success throughout literature review. Furthermore, the positive approach to pupil voice within School A was supported by all interactions with school staff who consistently put the pupils first, enjoyed their job roles and their interactions with the children.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The study aimed to explore some of the issues and policy that surround the implementation of Article twelve with pupils who have difficulty communicating verbally. This has been achieved through primary and secondary research alongside an elective placement where the researcher has explored many of the relevant issues, policies and the challenges of successful implementation of pupil voice in practice. A summary of the elective findings was presented to a member of School A's senior leadership team with thanks (Appendix 19).

From the research project's evidence and findings, it is concluded that it is essential that special schools in Wales continually evaluate the effectiveness of their pupil voice initiatives to ensure that a diverse range of pupils can have their views, feelings and wishes heard. Furthermore, special schools need to ensure that pupil voice is embedded within their ethos and all other aspects of the school to maximise their positive impact upon all stakeholders. Additionally, schools can consider training to support staff and pupils and minimise any barriers. This will support the effective communication of student voice through the school council and other methods.

The evidence and findings from this research project may have wider implications on mainstream schools as they often have a significant number of pupils with ALN and have a duty to ensure the inclusion of all pupils within pupil voice initiatives (StatsWales, 2020). Furthermore, Estyn could consider commissioning a best practice pupil voice report or guide based upon special school practice to exemplify best practice.

Future research within this field could potentially investigate how pupil voice is implemented with pupils with ALN that are educated in an ISTF unit within a mainstream school. The implementation of pupil voice within an ISTF unit may present different challenges to that of a special or solely mainstream school, yet the researcher was unable to find any data related directly to this particular field. Furthermore, another direction for further research could investigate the impact that participating in pupil voice initiatives has upon the lives of pupils that attend a special school outside of school. As teachers, our role is to support pupils'

achievement of the four purposes of education and develop transferable skills that will support them to ‘play a full part in life and work’ as valued members of society and this research could assess the effectiveness of pupil voice initiatives on their lives (Donaldson, 2015, p.29.

Lastly, the research project has developed my knowledge and understanding of special schools and their approach to the implementation of pupil voice. The experience gained will be valuable if I decide to apply for jobs in the special school sector. Furthermore, many of the strategies encountered could be adapted to suit a mainstream school and would support all pupils and particularly pupils with ALN or poor language skills. Additionally, the professional learning element of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (Welsh Government, 2018b) highlights the importance of practitioners consistently extending their knowledge, skills and understanding to progressively develop their pedagogy throughout their professional careers. This experience has improved my research literacy skills and will support the attainment of the professional learning element of the standards.

Word Count: 6496 words

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