Case Study

R U Listning Project

Planning and Decision-making: Intergenerational Dialogue in Saxilby, Lincolnshire

A group experience

The R U Listning project aimed to improve representation and community engagement by including young people in decision-making processes.

Take Part Lincolnshire is part of the national Take Part Pathfinder Programme created to promote Active Learning for Active Citizenship.

Funded by: Department for Communities and Local Government

There is a need to respect the rights of young people when they make a serious contribution to dialogue and not patronise them in the process.
1. Project purpose

- Explore an important facet of active citizenship learning and development; the ability to take part in community decision-making and civic life
- Challenge adults in authority by allowing a group of ten year olds to actively engage in planning and decision-making over village improvements
- Organise a youth club for 8-13 year olds through the above process

2. Project activities

Promotion and outreach/ engagement processes

The engagement activities of the project built on the work of the first phase of "R U Listening" from previous years. Four schools were identified through the project and over forty children participated in learning activities at the ALAC conference. Due to staffing changes at the Local Education Authority (LEA), Saxilby Primary School was chosen as the main focus for Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) work due to existing links (e.g. an ALAC learner working with children in the school). The participants consisted of a group of ten year olds and a similar number of adult learners and councillors at each session.

Course content or forms of experiential learning

The group was set up to create planning and reflection workshops that brought together young people and councillors in meaningful learning activities, supporting the empowerment of young people and the enrichment of local planning discussions. This has taken the form of active learning about local issues, such as steps to reduce litter and dog fouling, and a youth club for under 13s. The project has provided the opportunity for children to attend events at the university and for non-teaching adults to work with school children.

3. Project outcomes

Assessment and critical reflection

The learning was a two-way process. In addition to the skills the young people gained, the adults learnt how young people engage with and offer their own distinct contributions to issues that concern everyone.

The project was valued by the students, the school and by the local parish, district and county councillors who worked with the young people to find ways to explore their ideas and develop workable plans. The process enabled young people to put their classroom citizenship education into action through participating in semi-formalised decision-making.

The project has culminated in the inclusion of an 8-13 Youth Club in the village plan as well as new relationships with councillors, youth managers and community police officers. To add to this, young people in the village now have a say over local decisions.
4. **How Take Part support/ funding helped make the project more effective**

In the case of the *R U Listening* project, the school-aged participants were less experienced in *active citizenship* but wanted to learn how to engage in local village decision-making processes to make things happen. They wanted to have a ‘voice’ in local decision-making.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline reflections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social change / justice</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Ensuring young people also have a say in village planning processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Promote social solidarity to strengthen communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Enable people to identify common issues/problems and finding solutions</td>
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<td><strong>Inclusion / participation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Real participation of young people in village politics and decision-making</td>
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<td>✓ Workshop activities to identify issues and to generate civic actions</td>
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<td><strong>Challenging inequalities</strong></td>
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<td>✓ Using formal decision-making protocols to help challenge the inequalities in discussions created by the ‘authority’ of older generations</td>
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<td>✓ Enhance and/or develop skills that enable learners to engage in local decision-making</td>
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<td><strong>Promoting diversity</strong></td>
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<td>✓ Young people and adult learning; how to communicate/what others offer</td>
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<td>✓ Enable excluded groups to become more active citizens and to find their voice</td>
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5. Lessons learnt

Specific Learning Needs and Barriers to Participation

Although young people are engaged in formal education, they have very few opportunities to engage in informal learning with adults and local decision-makers outside the school curriculum. Therefore there is a need:

- For spaces where children can talk to a range of adults in the community about issues that concern them
- For this form of public engagement to be taken seriously and for adults to respect children as active citizens able to engage in discussions over building a civil society
- To identify suitable mechanisms to do this, and to bridge the gap between generations
- To provide for the needs of young people e.g. alternatives to plenary conference sessions
- To respect the rights of young people when they make a serious contribution to dialogue and not patronise them in the process

The commitment of the adult participants has been critical to this project (notably councillors, youth service workers, school governors, teachers and police officers) for other adults to learn how to interact with young people in ways that support them, without being patronising, and to mutually develop the learning processes needed for this interaction.

6. When project funding finishes...

Local councillors are learning how to engage their younger citizens in serious planning conversations by developing processes for young people to contribute to the writing of the parish plan and the presentation of issues at council meetings.

Contact details

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