

Children's voice can be non-verbal, but we should still be listening

Transcript

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What's interesting about the research field in general is that most of it is done with older kids and young adults. There are a group of us working in the field with young children and I think teachers of young children know that kids can have a voice even at a young age, but it's not reflected in the research agenda, particularly well. Voice can be non-verbal, and it can be not saying something. But it also can be behaviours. I have met many one year olds who have a voice and are very clear in their opinions, when they like something when they don't like something. They have a voice, and we react to it. The benefits of student voice to the child are about a knowledge of self knowledge, of self as an active entity within the social dynamic. It's learning about self in relation to others. It's learning about self and your rights as an individual in a democratic society. Within a literacy perspective, it's about learning about speaking and listening, you know, how does it feel to be listened to? How do I speak appropriately to be listened to? How do I express myself? It's the fundamentals to literacy, speaking and listening. I think it's about feeling like you have a role to play in your school, and in the organisations and experiences that you have an impact on you.

My definition of student voice is very open, it doesn't have to be just the things that might be labelled as student voice, it is about good relationships between adults and children and children and other children. Looked after children are often seen as not having a voice, particularly because they are seen as marginalised within the school system. They looked after kids are ones, who maybe haven't had that support from home, but also their heads are just full of other stuff. And so when your heads are full of other stuff that's happening to you, why would you concentrate on what's happening in school, but that's relatively unimportant, it's the relatively safe bit, it just happens around everything else. And so finding ways and spaces and tools that will support a voice for this group is really important. They are a group that often has lots of formal decisions and very important decisions made about them. The Scottish legal system asked them to have an opinion. And so the Children's Panel does help and speak for them, and they do take on board their opinion. But when it comes to things like school and less formal situations, they often think well, that in perspective, that doesn't look so important. So how can we support them in having a voice in all aspects of what happens to them, not just the big

stuff, but also the stuff in school and stuff where they may be feel that they're not having a happy time.

Teaching is all about relationships. And it leads to better relationships, in my opinion between adults and children generally, for those children, for whom relationships between adults and children are difficult. It's got to make that better. If we understand each other better and where we're coming from, that's got to be an improvement and that will reap dividends for academic outcomes.

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