OUR Voices · OUR Schools

Involving young people in decision making in schools
DESIGNING VOICE INITIATIVES

Designing Voice initiatives

Young people are very different, with a variety of needs, interests and experiences. They can differ in their levels of confidence and motivation to be involved in decision making in schools.

Designing interesting and worthwhile approaches to listening to and involving young people informed by the Lundi Model of Participation is important for building a positive culture of listening in schools.

Universal Design Principles

The Universal Design Principles can help in planning inclusive and worthwhile Voice initiatives in school, irrespective of the group of young people involved.

When the desire is to listen to and involve young people as a student community, you will need to think of as many ways as possible to allow young people to express their voices and different ways in which they can become involved. In this way you will maximise the voices and talents of the young people involved.

Consider the following in planning a Voice initiative:

Carry out impact research

Who are the young people that your planning to work with? What their particular needs and interests in the context of school? Explore how you need to cater for the inclusion of all young people in your target group. Check in with the young people involved from the outset to ensure you have identified all of the important considerations.

Representation

When you set out to involve young people and explain to them the purpose of your Voice initiative, where appropriate, consider

- Using multiple ways to share information
- Providing alternatives for auditory information
- Providing alternatives for visual information
- Defining vocabulary
- Explaining symbols
- Illustrating key concepts non-linguistically
- Providing background knowledge
- Highlighting critical features, big ideas and key relationships

Expression

You will want to encourage young people to articulate their responses and ideas in ways that best suit them. Where appropriate,

- Provide for written, verbal, visual or physical responses
- Allow for sign language
- Provide options for accessing tools and assistive technologies
- Consider individual or group responses
- Maximise digital technologies

Engagement

If you want to get your young people engaged in a campaign or project

- Provide options that increase individual choice and autonomy
- Ensure there are ways of being involved that are varied in levels of challenge and support
- Provide ways that foster collaboration and communication…..develop a team spirit
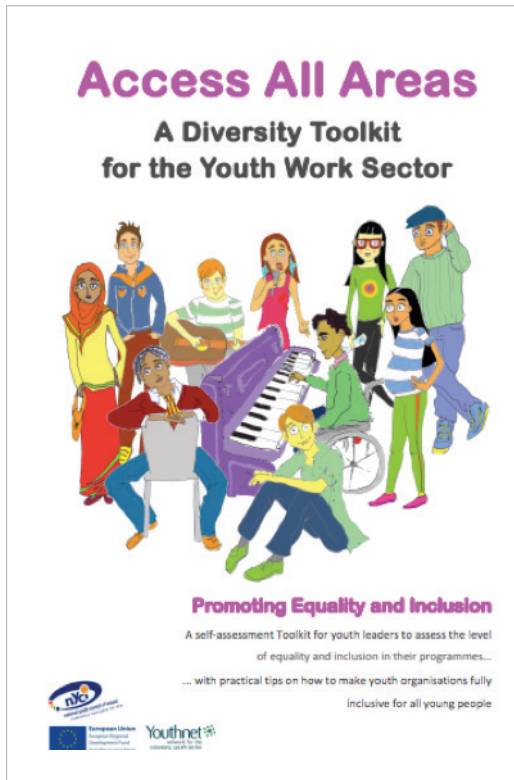
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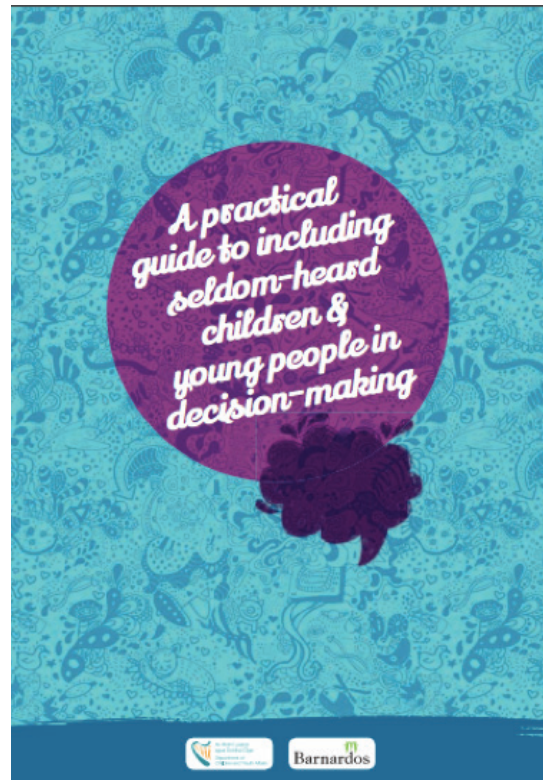

National Youth Council of Ireland

Let's Act on Inclusion includes a video series which provides important insights and considerations before embarking on Voice initiatives with different groups of young people in your school:

The videos include guidance and suggestions for starting conversations with different groups of young people including

- Young people interested in mental health
- Young travellers
- Young LGBTI+ people
- Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Young people with sensory or physical disability
- Young people with learning disabilities

For more ideas, check out Access All Areas – a diversity toolkit for the youth work sector.

Check out this resource for great suggestions and methodologies for including seldom heard young people, and young people more generally, in decision making.

The following methodologies can be useful in designing initiatives to listen to and involved young people in decision making in school. This list is not exhaustive and should only be seen as a start.

Jig Saw strategy	Think, pair, share
Blue Sky Thinking	Brainstorm
Diamond 9	Placemat
Ranking ladder	Dotmocracy

Finally, icebreakers are useful to include at the start of the Voice session. They allow young people to feel at ease and/or to get to know other young people in the group. For some ideas, click here.