



# Look who's talking

*Eliciting the voices of children, by Kate Wall, Claire Cassidy and Lorna Arnott*

**M**uch has been written about children's voice and methods for consulting with children in relation to Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but there is general anxiety and uncertainty about how best to hear the voices of very young children (Clark, 2005: *Ways of seeing: Using the Mosaic approach to listen to young children's perspectives*). A project called Look Who's Talking, hosted by the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde, aimed to address this gap in the work of children's rights and participation by making explicit some key factors to be considered by those working with young children.

## Developing dialogue

Throughout 2017, we ran an international seminar series funded by the University of Strathclyde, bringing together researchers and practitioners who work with young children (birth to seven). A graphic facilitator captured a visual record of these seminars that went beyond a transcription of the group's dialogue to synthesise thinking. From this we have published a set of talking-point posters which can be used in schools and nurseries with the intention that they start dialogue between practitioners, children and families.

## Eight factors for developing voice

We have identified eight factors that work in harmony to prompt questions and thinking for all those who work with

and for children: Definition; Power; Inclusivity; Listening; Time and Place; Approaches; Processes; and Purposes. Such work, we assert, should be undertaken in such a way as to ensure that the dialogue is ongoing, adapting to the children's and adults' growing competence and confidence. The elicitation of voice, therefore, requires a dialogue that is receptive to the contexts and individuals involved; this dialogue obviously should include children. The dialogue should involve people interacting with one another, but also with the concepts featured in the eight factors. While each factor may be considered individually, it is also important that they are treated as inter-connected and inter-dependent. We suggest that adults adopt an enquiring stance and give careful consideration to the implications for their intentions and actions in their context. This requires a commitment to the voices of children, but also deliberate attention to their own voices as professionals.

## The Look Who's Talking community

The talking-point posters are available to download free from [www.voicebirthtoseven.co.uk](http://www.voicebirthtoseven.co.uk). In addition, the project website provides further information to support practice eliciting voice in schools and other organisations. Finally, we are currently engaged in a number of writing projects to explore the use of the principles and talking-point posters. We are always interested in innovative practice, so if you would like to share how you are using the posters please contact us: [kate.wall@strath.ac.uk](mailto:kate.wall@strath.ac.uk)



**Voice allows us to express who we are**

What is voice?  
 What is not voice?  
 How does voice link to rights?  
 When is voice not appropriate?



**Voice is about power**

Who owns what is said?  
 What is the balance between collective and individual voices?  
 Who is asking the questions?



**Everyone has an equal voice**

Does everyone have an equal voice?  
 How do I know when someone is excluded?  
 Do I value some voices more than others?  
 Is opting out a key part of inclusion?



**Voices should not have to be loud to be heard**

How do I listen to conflicting voices?  
 Who listens to me?  
 How do I listen non-judgementally?  
 How do I hear silent voices?





**There is always time for voice**

- How does space shape voice?
- How much space is given to child:child voice?
- When do adults act as voice role models to children?
- Which tools and techniques are supportive of voice?

**Open dispositions support voice**

- Am I patient?
- What skills do I need to support voice?
- How do I allow for the unexpected?
- How do I reflect on the process?
- How do I record voices?



**Processes should enable voice**

- How comfortable am I taking risks?
- How do I build trust with different groups?
- When is voice risky?
- How do I use voice to move things forward?



**Shared goals will advance children's voices**

- What am I doing this for?
- What have I got to lose?
- How will I evaluate this?
- What are the children getting from this?

