Guidance Note 9 Involving marginalised young people in the design of their own education

From the Report: Education for the most marginalised post-COVID-19: Guidance for governments on the use of digital technologies in education

ACT THREE (OF THREE): GUIDANCE NOTES

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Guidance Note: Involving marginalised young people in the design of their own education[1]

Context

There is good evidence that students learn better when they are actively engaged in the learning process. Involving students more in their own learning is thus an integral part of a shift in pedagogy away from traditional more didactic modes towards more constructivist theories of education and teaching practice. Like most change, this can be challenging. In many cultures such a shift is often resisted because it is seen as undermining traditional models of authority, power and knowledge sharing between generations.

The extent to which children, young people, and indeed adults doing vocational courses are involved in decisions over the curriculum and their modes of learning varies hugely between and within different countries. Ultimately, decisions about 'learners' voices' require careful and challenging balances to be made. To what extent should students be active agents in organising, directing and implementing their own learning? How much are students simply viewed as teaching recipients? How well is each student understood? Do those who administer education and teach take account of the daily challenges each student might face?[2] Is the balance between the influence of central government agendas, school leaders' and teachers' influence, parents' influence and the influence of students themselves optimal?

The most important reasons why it is important to engage students in their own learning processes include:

- Learning outcomes are generally improved.
- Young people take more interest in their learning if they have invested time and effort in helping to design it.
- Involving young learners enhances their sense of responsibility.
- Teachers and facilitators can learn much from their pupils and students, and thus improve their teaching strategies and skills.

There are many examples of good practice in the involvement of learners in the education process (see below), but almost all of these are based within schools or tertiary institutions. Most 'educationalists' and government officials have little real experience of the lives of the poorest and most marginalised children and adolescents not in school, and are therefore ill-placed to design educational systems and learning opportunities best suited to their needs. This is particularly so when digital technology solutions are designed 'for' rather than 'with' marginalised people and communities. Hence, it is always very important to involve young people who have never been to school in designing

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1   Lead authors Gavin Dykes, Janet Longmore and Tim Unwin.

2   For example: which students are hungry, which students are living in insecure circumstances, which students have caring responsibility for their parents or younger siblings (or even their own children), and which students are critical economic contributors to their families and communities?

curricula, content, and the digital systems used to interact with the learning resources intended to educate and support them. The eSkwela alternative learning system (ALS) designed in the mid-2000s in the Philippines was one example, though, where out-of-school youth were explicitly asked about their learning aspirations as an integral part of the design process (see Tan, 2010; and Unwin et al., 2007).

Digital technologies can themselves also be used to help inform teachers and administrators about the varying ways through which different children learn most effectively, but all of these raise fundamentally challenging ethical questions.[3] China has thus been at the forefront in using the latest technologies, and especially AI, to track what children are doing while they are learning in real time, thereby enabling teachers to intervene more appropriately and precisely to help each child improve their learning outcomes.[4] However, these are passive means of learning from children, and seem unlikely to have the positive cognitive impact of actually engaging with children in their thinking about and experiences of learning.

> **❙ Guidance**
> The following five principles are essential for governments who wish to create education systems that engage effectively with the learners for which they are intended:
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> 1. **All aspects of digital learning, including platforms, access and content, should be designed *with* rather than *for* young people.** Particular attention should be paid to the needs and insights of the most marginalised.
> 2. **Governments should design specific programmes to develop learners' voices, contributions and responsibilities as a continual process** not only within schools, but also in informal learning settings.
> 3. Young people learn much from each other. Hence, **they should be encouraged to work in teams when using digital technologies, to encourage mutual assistance, support and responsibility.**
> 4. It is essential to have resilient systems in place that **encourage and support peer-to-peer learning and collaboration**, especially during times of crisis. Online learning can be a lonely process, and many young people find it difficult to complete online learning by themselves.
> 5. **Partnerships that involve civil society can help bridge the gap between government priorities, private sector approaches, communities and the needs and interests of young people** (see also *Partnership Guidance Note*).
> 6. Great care should also always be involved in safeguarding young people involved in such initiatives.

3   See for example Terzon, E. (2017) *How the rise of apps in Australian classrooms is coming with privacy and learning concerns*, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-13/rise-of-parent-teacher-behaviour-apps-in-australian-classrooms/8340414.

4   See Wang, Y., Hong, S. and Tai, C. (2019) China's efforts to learn the way in AI start in its classrooms, *Wall Street Journal*, https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-efforts-to-lead-the-way-in-ai-start-in-its-classrooms-11571958181.

Examples

Examples of good practices in youth engagement include:

- Apps for Good (materials for students), https://www.appsforgood.org.
- Connected North, https://www.connectednorth.org/en.
- Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT), https://www.dotrust.org.
- Delhi's Happiness Curriculum (2019), http://www.edudel.nic.in/welcome_folder/happiness/HappinessCurriculumFramework_2019.pdf.
- Phillipines eSkwela initiative (see Tan, 2010 below).

Suggested further reading

- Flynn, P. (2017) *The learner voice research study: Research report*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Government of Ireland.
- LD Online (2017) *Include students in the learning process*, http://www.ldonline.org/article/65096/.
- Quaglia, R.J., Corso, M.J., Fox, K. and Dykes, G. (2016) *Aspire high: Imagining tomorrow's school today*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Robotics*biz* (2020) *Top 15 robotics competitions in 2020*, https://roboticsbiz.com/top-15-robotics-competitions-in-the-world.
- Tan, M. (2010) *eSkwela: ICT for the alternative learning system*, APEC ICT4D Expo, https://www.seiservices.com/APEC/WikiFiles/9.3.pdf.
- Torbjørn Moe (2009) *You decide, Cisco (Norway)*, https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/en_us/solutions/industries/docs/education/YouDecide.pdf.
- Unwin, T., Tan, M and Pauso, K. (2007) The potential of e-Learning to address the needs of out-of-school youth in the Philippines, *Children's Geographies*, 5(4):443–462.

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