

4 different examples of alac in practice *continued*

2.4 Intergenerational dialogue for Planning and Decision-making

Participants

Young People, (i.e. those normally excluded from community decision-making processes).

Promoting and Outreach / Engagement Process:

This builds on the work of the first phase of the 'R U Listening?' Project undertaken in previous years. 4 schools were identified through this project and 40+ children participated in learning activities at the ALAC conference in 2006. Due to staffing changes at the LEA, one school (Saxilby Primary) has been chosen as the main focus for ALAC work in 2007/08. The group consisted of a group of children from Year 10 and a similar number of adult learners at each session. There are also additional links to the school (i.e. an existing ALAC learner from the Project Managers group with children at the school).

Course content or forms of experiential learning

The aim of the group of 10 year olds and councillors at Saxilby has been to create planning and reflection workshops that can involve both parties in meaningful learning activities; supporting the empowerment of young people and the enrichment of local planning discussions. This has taken the form of developing active learning about local issues, e.g. steps to improve the physical environment of the village and to create a youth club for under 13s, as well as learning about planning and decision-making processes and developing the skills and experience of engaging in intergenerational dialogue.

The project has initiated and supported this process by resourcing supply teachers to release the class teacher in school time, resourcing a facilitator help develop the process of dialogue, and inviting initial participants and organising a space to meet (with catering) to enable non-teaching adults to work with school children outside the school premises in an atmosphere conducive to learning. Workshops exploring potential actions and associated considerations were organised and an Action Plan for the under 13s Youth Centre was developed by those involved (as part of the Saxilby Parish Plan).

Reflective Practice

The project was valued by the school and by local parish, district and county councillors who worked with the young people to find ways to explore their ideas and develop workable plans. The learning was 2-way with adults learning from the experience the ways that young people of this age may engage with issues that concern all ages and offer their own distinct contributions – through formal planning and through agreed direct actions as young citizens. The project has also begun to challenge the accepted practice that young people should be excluded from involvement in local democracy and decision-making because of their age and offers an alternative possibility that both age-groups can learn to be more active citizens.

Specific Learning Needs & Barriers to Participation

This group is already engaged in formal education but ironically young people also have very few opportunities to engage in informal learning with adults and local decision-makers, outside the school curriculum. There is a need for spaces where children can talk to a range of adults in the community about issues of concern to them. This form of public engagement needs to be taken seriously and for adults to respect children as active citizens able to engage in discussions about building civil society and issues of social justice. Suitable mechanisms to do this need to be identified, such that active learners are able to find ways to 'bridge the gap between generations'. The needs of young people may require different approaches e.g. alternative music activities provided as a parallel yet (linked) stream to plenary conference sessions. Perhaps most importantly there is still a need to find ways to respect the rights of young people to make a serious contribution to dialogue and not patronise them in the process. Critical to this project has been the commitment of the adult participants (notably councillors from parish, district and county, youth service workers, school governors, teachers and police) to learn how to interact with young people in ways that support without patronising to mutually develop the learning processes for all concerned.

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Taking responsibility ourselves -
not just coming to moan

ALAC Participant

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4 different examples of alac in practice *continued*

Take Part aims and objectives

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 and to make things happen. They wanted to have a 'voice' in local decision-making. Councillors and officials from a variety of (largely public sector) organisations also wanted to learn how they could facilitate and support this kind of engagement and who else needed to be engaged in the process to make it have real impact.

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[Young people in the project] are very important to us [councillors]. To be honest we've not been able to get young people involved [before this project]. Older people are very good at coming forward and saying what they'd like

ALAC Participant

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Headline reflections

Social change / justice

- Ensuring young people also have a say in village planning processes
- Promote social solidarity to strengthen communities
- Enable people to identify common issues/problems and finding solutions

Inclusion / participation

- Real participation of young people in village politics and decision-making
- Workshop activities to identify issues and to generate civic actions

Challenging inequalities

- Using formal decision-making protocols to help challenge the inequalities in discussions created by the 'authority' of older generations
- Enhance and/or develop skills that enable learning to engage in local decision making (including planning, facilitation, negotiation and reporting skills)

Promoting diversity

- Learning of young people and adults – how to communicate / what others offer / who else should be involved and why
- Enable excluded groups to become more active citizens and to have their voices heard

Outcomes & lessons for the future

Working with young people at Saxilby School enabled us to explore another important facet of active citizenship – the ability to take part in community decision-making and civic life. The 'R U Listening? Project' challenged local councillors and others in authority to talk to a group of 10 year olds who wanted to contribute to discussion about how to improve village life – by actively addressing issues such as litter and dog-fouling and by contributing to parish decision-making about whether the village could organise a youth club for 8-13 year olds. The project has culminated in the inclusion of an 8-13 Youth Club in the village plan and the development of new relationships between young people, councillors, youth managers and community police officers.

The process also showed the relevance of democratic protocols – the young people putting their classroom citizenship education into action through formalised decision-making processes that enabled them to have their vote regardless of, and because of the presence of other adult authority figures. Local councillors are also learning how to engage in serious planning conversations with its younger citizens and are developing with the young people processes that can contribute to the writing of the Parish Plan and the presentation of issues at council meetings.