



Achieving social change: An account of practice from collaborative action research in Fairisle Infant and Nursery School

The Research-Practice Partnership

The **School Voices Research-Practice Partnership** aims to support schools in **responding to student diversity** and **improving learning outcomes** for all, whilst at the same time **promoting inclusion**. This will be achieved by focusing on **students' voices and dialogues** between teachers and children and young people through **participatory research approaches**.

The Partnership has been partly funded by **UKRI – Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)**. The Partnership consists of a collaboration between: **University of Southampton** and three **hub schools (St John's Primary School, St Mary's CE Primary School, Redbridge Primary School)** that were involved in an earlier pilot study. The hub schools and the University of Southampton support other schools in introducing these ideas through collaborative action research, considering the complexities within each school context. For more information - www.schoolvoices.soton.ac.uk

The school

Fairisle Infant and Nursery School, guided by the mission of 'Expect success,' is committed to promoting excellence and inclusivity in education within Southampton's Lordshill District Centre. The school accommodates over 300 pupils aged 2-7 across 11 classes, including Nursery through to Year 2. Serving a diverse community, 30% of students speak English as an additional language, with representation from 27 different languages. Additionally, 32.3% of pupils have Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), 11 have and Education health Care Plan (EHCP), and there are around 84 students with Individualised Educational Plans (IEPs). Fairisle consists of the senior leadership team, 15 teachers, and 30 support staff including Nursery, and has been part of the Bridge Education Trust since March 2023.

Core values such as mental health, positive relationships, collaboration, creativity, and empowerment are integral to Fairisle's approach. The school employs varied teaching methods and utilises ICT (Information and Communications Technology) to actively engage students in practical learning experiences, fostering a caring ethos alongside high expectations for pupils. The school also emphasises staff well-being, engages families in school life, and promotes community involvement seeking to make a positive impact within the community.

Research focus and process

Fairisle Infant and Nursery School undertook two projects aimed at fostering children's personal development through social action, aligned with the school development plan and participation in the

"Light the South" campaign for Southampton Children's Hospital.

A. Change Makers Project

Led by the headteacher, this initiative aimed to build children's confidence, independence, and resilience through social action. It sought to promote values such as openness and compassion, nurturing future leaders committed to creating a better world. The main research question was:

Can engaging in social action increase confidence, resilience, and independence?

The headteacher invited all Year 2 students to join the 'Change Makers' group. 15 pupils volunteered to take part, including ones with low confidence. The group met in five 45-minute sessions:

Session 1: Introduction of the project and a baseline activity using blob trees (a visual tool with a tree and genderless figures that is used to explore emotions) to assess children's confidence. Initial ideas and opinions on improving the world were also shared.

Session 2: Discussions on personal priorities and potential changes across home, school, community, and globally using voting boxes.

Session 3: Exploration of qualities of change-makers and emotional awareness exercises. Continued reflections on important issues.

Session 4: Role-play activities to enhance communicative skills. Final discussions on voting box topics, including concerns about ocean litter and its impact on animals.

Session 5: Discussions about how children wanted to carry out their social action (e.g. fundraising, making a poster, making a speech etc.)

B. Art and Social Action Project

Led by the art subject leader, this project used art as a medium for children to express themselves and discuss important issues. It aimed to enhance confidence and amplify the voices of all pupils in the class, particularly those who are classified as having special educational needs or those who receive emotional literacy support, or have

difficulties in expressing themselves verbally. The research question was:

Can art be used as a communicative measure for children to talk about what matters to them most?

All Year 2 students from one class participated in four sessions:

Session 1: Discussions on important issues and pupil voice, explaining what it means to have a voice and how this can be achieved in a school and beyond the school.

Session 2: Deepening of reflection on what is important for the children through collaborative work. Activities included Diamond Nine and voting. The session ended with examples of art addressing issues such as climate change.

Session 3: The teacher encouraged pupils to express their individual concerns through drawing.

Session 4: Completion of artworks and discussion on positive contributions to society.

Participatory methods

Visual Representation Methods:

Throughout the projects, pupils engaged in visual activities to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas, promoting early self-expression and amplifying voices that might otherwise go unheard.

Confidence Tree Drawings – Blob Trees: Children were asked to indicate their confidence by positioning themselves on a tree.

Change-maker Silhouettes: Using human silhouette



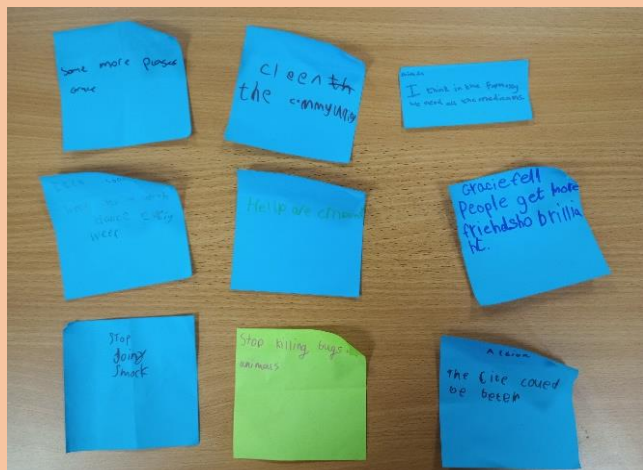
Human silhouettes made by students

templates, students identified essential qualities for effective change-makers.

Artwork of What Matters Most: Students expressed what is important to them by drawing pictures.

Voting and Decision-Making Methods:

Voting Boxes: Students actively engaged in voting activities, completing the stem sentence "If I could make one thing better, it would be..." for home, school, community, and the world, sparking lively group discussions on themes such as love, kindness, and environmental protection. Additionally, students voted on the most pressing issue from a list of nine topics discussed previously.



Students' responses to the stem sentences

Diamond Nine: In groups, children prioritised the same nine important issues promoting collaboration and the expression of ideas.



Students carrying out the diamond nine activity

Emotional Awareness Methods

Emotions thermometer: Using coloured paper, pupils expressed their emotions about topics such as family and litter. This activity, guided by colour-coded emotions (e.g., Red for anger, Blue for happiness), emphasised the importance of emotional awareness in developing change-makers.



Students voting for the most important issues according to them



Students using coloured paper to express emotions

Role-Playing: Students engaged in role-playing scenarios, practising as speakers, listeners, and disruptors. This activity developed change-maker skills by emphasising active listening and respect for others.

Emotional Check: Students used thumbs-up, thumbs-down, or horizontal thumbs to express confidence levels and emotional responses.

Outcomes

At the end of the process, children decided on raising awareness and money for the Deaf Awareness Society, since one of the Change Makers has a sister who is deaf and we the school had an increase in pupils who have challenges with their hearing. This happened during a non-uniform day. It was also decided to fundraise for the Children's Hospital through a raffle.

Pupils' confidence and independence grew. Encouraging children to share their ideas not only boosted their confidence but also developed their critical thinking and empathy. This process fostered a sense of responsibility in addressing local and global issues. Progress was evident as more children became active participants, including one boy who initially was reluctant but eventually became one of the group's most confident speakers.

The use of Art enabled students to express personal values, such as a girl highlighting the importance of caring for siblings or a boy being sensitive to colour blindness due to family experiences. By engaging students in critical thinking and creative expression and promoting their self-awareness and emotional well-being, this approach embraced individual perspectives and created a space where students felt truly heard and valued.

Key ideas emerging

Encouraging student expression and becoming proactive citizens: The methods used facilitated critical thinking skills and creative freedom in art, enabling students to express what was important for them, in their own unique way. The process also promoted active citizenship, allowing students to identify and prioritise important issues affecting their immediate environment and beyond, and motivated them to analyse their world and become empathetic and proactive citizens.

Future Directions: Developing lifelong leaders:

There is a commitment to share this experience with all staff and to extend initiatives beyond specific year groups in other age groups. By

encouraging critical awareness and empathy, these initiatives aim to develop students who are not only active participants in their community but also pursue positive change in society.

Teachers' and Students' thoughts

Student change-maker

The world's our home...
I'll just say: No, it's
everyone's world'.
Because it's our home!

If we have compassion and hope and that open-mindedness and ability to be inquisitive, then we can make a positive impact in this world, doesn't matter what age.

Headteacher

Year 2 teacher

The children have lots going on and appreciated the time to reflect that their thoughts were heard and valued.

Teacher team

- Lucy Sevier (Year 2 teacher)

Headteacher: Juliette Owens

Research team

- Professor Kiki Messiou
- Dr Jay de los Reyes
- Chinmaya Potnis
- Ping Dong
- Josette Crispin
- Karen Ibáñez Riquelme
- Maria Giulia Tongiani

We would also like to acknowledge the participation of many children and other staff in the school who have contributed in various ways.