

## **Can I put the pupils voice at the heart of our 'request for support' form and what will I learn in the process?**

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### **Introduction**

In this account I intend to tell the story of how a 'request for support' form came to be changed and to identify the part I played in making the changes. I will also describe how, in the process of changing the form, I became clearer about my own values and became more confident in sharing those values with my colleagues.

The form in question is that which requests support from the Specialist Behaviour Service in Bath and North East Somerset, which is the organisation I work for.

A form is, in simple terms, just some words on paper - we complete them all the time to get money, passports, employment, services, tax bills and so on. We provide information in order to get something in return. However you can also learn a great deal, by the way that the form is structured, the language used, the kinds of questions asked, about the organisation it belongs to and the values of that organisation. For example has an effort been made to make the form user friendly? Is the language accessible? Does it have to be completed in black ink inside the boxes or can it be handwritten and allow room for creativity?

Some forms can be completed in a few minutes; others involve collecting information from other people and places. The questions asked determine what actions the person completing the form will have to make in order to complete it and therefore get whatever it is they are requesting. It became apparent to me during the course of the development of our form what a powerful tool a form can be in both demonstrating and promoting the values of our organisation.

Colleagues attending the weekly 'Conversation Café' have supported me in writing this narrative. This is an informal weekly breakfast meeting at which we reflect on our practice and discuss ways to make more public our personal or embodied knowledge. We have shared a wide range of literature, some of which I have referred to in this account. More invaluable still has been the critical feedback of my colleagues. I have found these discussions invaluable in clarifying my values and identifying how they underpin my practice. In my account I include a video-clip in which I am expressing the value of 'unconditional positive regard' (Rogers, 1996) which I believe that I bring into my educational relationships. The expression of this energy and value forms an explanatory principle in the explanations I give for why I do what I do in education. My desire to live this value as fully as I can explains why I worked so hard to amend the 'Request for Support Form'.

In answering my question, using a narrative form, I am supporting the current moves to bring narrative research into the mainstream of educational research (Clandinin, 2007). I am also drawing on McNiff's (2007) approach to educational research in which she shows how she uses narrative to create her own living educational theory. McNiff uses Whitehead's (1989) original idea of a living educational theory as an explanation of an individual's educational influence in their own learning and in the learning of others. Current government policy to make teaching a masters level profession does not recognise this type of narrative research in its assessment criteria. I hope to demonstrate, through using this method myself, the validity of exploring my living educational theory.

## **Context**

In 2003, the Government published a green paper called Every Child Matters. This was prompted by the death of Victoria Climbié, the young girl who was horrifically abused, tortured and finally killed by her great aunt and the man with whom she lived. The report into Victoria's death had particularly identified the failure of the services where she lived to share information about her and that there was a lack of integrated working and accountability. The Children Act of 2004 provided the legislative framework which brought together the separate departments of education, social care and health into one organisation namely Children's Services.

The Every Child Matters website states the following:

*The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to*

- *Be healthy*
- *Stay safe*
- *Enjoy and achieve*
- *Make a positive contribution*
- *Achieve economic well-being*

*This means that the organisations involved with providing services to children - from hospitals and schools, to police and voluntary groups - will be teaming up in new ways, sharing information and working together, to protect children and young people from harm and help them achieve what they want in life. Children and young people will have far more say about issues that affect them as individuals and collectively.*

*Over the next few years, every local authority will be working with its partners, through children's trusts, to find out what works best for children and young people in its area and act on it. They will need to involve children and young people in this process, and when inspectors assess how local areas are doing, they will listen especially to the views of children and young people themselves.*

DCSF 'Every Child Matters' website

There are two major challenges here for those working within Children's Services.

Firstly professionals from different disciplines and training are expected to work together. It might be over simplifying matters to say that each of the three types of professionals involved-educationalists, social workers and health professionals-believe that their profession is the most important! However each has perceptions of the others which are often quite entrenched and not conducive to cooperative working.

Secondly there is a much greater emphasis on the participation of young people and their parents. This is an area where social care is probably more advanced than either education or health. The medical model of 'you've got a problem, I'll diagnose and treat it' and the educational model of 'I know some things and I'm going to get you to learn them' are not participative. Asking for pupils views on their education or patients views on their treatment are often only required at inspection time.

The development of the request for support form was an opportunity to address both of these challenges.

### **Background**

Although I have devised a number of forms in my time as an educationalist I was not involved in the initial Specialist Behaviour Service 'request for support' form. The purpose of the form was for schools to use to request support from one of the Specialist Behaviour Service teams. We began to use the first version of the form in early 2007.

One of the things that made it different from other forms in use at the time was that it had to be signed by a parent as well as the school requesting support. The reason given for this on the form was for data protection purposes-parents are agreeing for the sharing of information about their children.

The form fairly soon became amalgamated with another form requesting support from the various teams within Inclusion Services. Some revisions were made at this stage that, again, I was not involved with.

The form in Appendix A therefore is the combined Inclusion Services/ Specialist Behaviour Service form which has been in use for the last year and around which most of work revolves.

### **What are my concerns?**

Schools send their completed request forms into our Service. My job is to collect all the requests for each Area Support and Placement Panel and then create the Panel agenda that includes both new requests and updates of current interventions. Before each meeting I prepare a précis of the request and usually speak to the person who has made it. I do this because I often feel that form has not given me the whole picture. Sometimes they are incomplete but more often than not it is because I want to have a sense of the pupil and their parents and I don't get this from the form or accompanying paperwork.

At the Panel itself I present the new cases, taking care to give as rounded a picture as possible. As schools are requesting support for pupils with SEBD inevitably there is a focus on the difficulty. I consider it my responsibility to keep alive a view of the whole child-not just the difficulties they are having.

Over the last year I have become frustrated at the lack of information given on the form in the box 'pupils' successes and interests'. These are almost all presented as the adults' view of what these might be for example:

*'He focuses well in some lessons where he has a good relationship with the teachers'*

*'Above average progress in Maths, Music and Technology'*

*'She is very kind and caring toward pupils of lower ability and ensures they are included in activities'*

### **Why am I concerned?**

I often wondered how the forms came to be completed in the first place. I know that parents were involved because they had to sign the form but often, I suspected, this was an afterthought, rather than them making a significant contribution. Equally although there is a space for the pupil's views more often than not this is left blank. Very occasionally the pupils themselves have filled this in and I always make sure that I read this out at the Panel.

As is often the way several things happened around the same time that prompted me to want to change the form.

Over the last year or so we have begun to use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) within Childrens Services as a way of capturing the needs of young people and identifying appropriate services to meet those needs. One of the principles of the CAF is that is as much a process as an end result ie how it is done and the conversation between child, parent and professional is as important as the end result. The CAF training emphasises that the process of completing the form is a partnership and that the authentic voice of both parent and child should be heard.

*'CAF is a tool to support early identification of wider need and to support a coordinated response. It must be considered more broadly than 'a form to be filled in' and should be a collaborative process ensuring all information is recorded fully and agreed by the child/young person and parents/carers. CAF enables and encourages information held to follow the child/young person and enhances effective communication and practice*

- *Children and families should be involved throughout. CAF cannot be undertaken without the explicit agreement of children, young people and their parents/carers.*
- *Common assessment should identify strengths and build on what can be achieved by the child/young person and/or family'*

*Guiding principles for undertaking Common Assessment in B&NES Dec. 2007*

I had been mulling over the CAF and how it related to our 'request for support' form when I was alerted to the research that Lynn Attwood (B&NES parent partnership officer) had published on the parents' views of professionals. This showed that parents are often very critical of the professionals with whom they interact. Lynn includes many comments about the lack of consultation, partnership and poor communication with parents about what is happening with their children.

*'The research project arose from some parents explaining to the Parent Partnership Service their difficulties in working with professionals and, in particular, being distressed by negative communication directed towards them and their children. In addition the researcher had witnessed some less than desirable interaction between parents and professionals...this is a fundamental area to address as a means of improving childrens' outcomes and working in partnership'*  
*An evaluation of communication between education professionals and parents and its impact on families and working in partnership with parents*

Lynn Attwood MA 2007

Lynn came to the Conversation Café to discuss her findings with us and this prompted me again to consider both how I personally involve parents and also how the 'request for support' process, for which I am responsible, involves them.

The following week I received a form from a school requesting intervention by the behaviour support service and in the successes/interests box the referrer had put 'sport and guinea-pigs'. I was intrigued by this comment. Sport is quite often put as an interest but I had not come across an interest in guinea-pigs before. I wondered how the referrer knew that the boy concerned liked guinea-pigs and wished I knew more about this. (We had guinea-pigs when I was growing up and so my imagination had leapt to the wood and wire runs my Dad used to make and the frequency with which our guinea pigs met untimely deaths).

I talked about the forms and the sport and guinea-pig boy at Conversation Café that week and said how I would like my form to be more like the CAF form in the way that it involves pupils and their parents in the request process rather than it being something which is done to them. We talked about transforming the form so that the pupil's voice in particular came through loud and clear. I remember us discussing how much of the form could be changed and that maybe it would be too radical to change the whole form but that by changing how and where the question of young people's interests or successes was captured could change how the form was completed. I thought that if the referrer had to put the pupils' and parents' own words in they would have to have had a proper conversation with both and I could legitimately send the form back if it had not been completed in this manner. It seemed to me that I had a power to change something in a subtle but significant way.

I was aware that there was already a group of people meeting to look at how our Inclusion Services 'request for support' form could be merged into a single point of entry form for all of Childrens Services. Before I had time to find out who was on this group I was asked by my line manager to join it; I agreed with alacrity!

### **What I did**

The first meeting I attended about the form was held at the end of March 2008. Various professionals from health, early years and inclusion services were present. It happened that I knew all of them and I think this was helpful as what I had to say was seen in the context of their knowledge of me and my long involvement with and commitment to young people in Bath and North East Somerset.

They had met previously to discuss this form and the meeting in March 2008 was intended to be the last before launching the new version. I was given the opportunity to explain how I thought we should take advantage of the revision to follow the example of the CAF and make the pupil and parents voice more central to the request for support. This was met with general agreement and, as there were other concerns expressed for instance how the form would work from an IT point of view and what guidance would accompany it, it was agreed that there would be a further meeting to explore these issues with the Assistant Director responsible for this area of work.

When the group met again toward the end of April 2008 many of the same discussions were reiterated. I explained again my views about the pupils' voice and we agreed that we would include a section on the first page of the form and where the pupil and parents view of the current situation and reason for the request would be recorded in addition to their views of the pupils successes/interests.

A number of other alterations were agreed. These included taking out the need for accompanying paperwork but including more information about who else was involved with the pupil. We agreed that a revised version would be tried out with some schools and settings and that if everyone was OK with the final result we would not need to meet again and the form would be issued for use at the beginning of the new academic year.

I received a copy of the revised version in May 2008 (Appendix B). I was disappointed, as it did not seem to me to be hugely different from the original. It somehow lacked the question which would ensure that whoever was completing it had to have had a conversation with the pupil concerned. I expressed my concern to the person organising the revisions and it turned out that I was not the only one still unhappy. Frankly I had begun to question whether I was being too obsessive about this idea and that perhaps I should be content with moving the successes and interests box to the front and including parents and pupils' views. However I decided I was not content and that I should do my best to be clear about how I wanted the form to be different. I want the form to have the pupil's own voice within it, verbatim, not interpreted by anyone else.

A further meeting was therefore arranged to address the outstanding concerns. Earlier on the same morning at Conversation Café I asked for help in finding a way of genuinely including the pupil and parents perspective. We had a wide ranging discussion about the purpose of the form and how far it was possible to ask open-ended questions of the pupil which might promote an exciting conversation between referrer and pupil but that might not seem relevant to the purpose of the form ie requesting support. For example it was suggested the question might be 'what float's your boat?' in other words what is the pupil excited about?

However I have to keep reminding myself that the form is not for my use only! The form will be completed by a wide range of professionals and will be requesting support from a wide range of professionals so it seemed to me whatever question was asked needed to relate more closely to the request for support.

In the end we came up with the question 'what could make things better for you?' which seemed to be both pertinent and open-ended.

About an hour later I met with 3 other people - the CAF coordinator who had been working on the form, the school nurse team leader and the early years team leader. We therefore represented 3 of the 4 recipients of the form. There was no-one present from Inclusion Services.

We worked through a list of concerns, which included mine but also some voiced by health (its still too education focussed), early years (its still too school focussed) schools (the guidance on the first page is still too confusing). We had a further discussion about the principle of putting the pupils voice at the heart of the form and debated how far the form was a 'door opener' and how far a participative process. Having agreed that ideally it should be both we debated what question to ask of the pupil/young person. I floated the Conversation Café one – 'what could make things better for you?' but the view

of the meeting was that there were two questions needed – one which captured something about successes and interests (sport and guinea pigs) and one about views of the current situation and what help might be needed. Sue, the school nurse, suggested some wording which they use for recording information which was strengths and difficulties and eventually we agreed that the bottom box on the front page would be divided into 3 and would have pupil, parent and school/setting's view of the pupil's strengths and difficulties *in their own words*\_(or drawings).

This would then negate the need for the following question –reasons for the request- as the reasons should be apparent from the responses to the strengths and difficulties question.

We then agreed that we still needed to include at the end of the form both the pupil and the parent's view of the request.

Caroline, the CAF coordinator went off to make these changes and some others to the guidance page and this version is in Appendix C

### **How I did it**

I was able to influence the development of this form in a number of ways. I have worked for Bath and North East Somerset and before that Avon County Council for 16 years. I have had several different posts but all of them have been to do with supporting vulnerable young people and their families. Consequently I have had the opportunity to develop working relationships that go back years. I enjoy feeling that I am part of a system where I am known and I know others. I am genuinely pleased to see people I work with or have worked with in the past and find out how things are going for them. It also means that people know me and know what I have done in my work. I believe that I have a reputation for commitment to young people and their families and wanting the best for them.

The quality of the work relationships I have and the knowledge that others have of me I think meant that my views were listened to and taken on board even though I came to the redesigning process quite late on.

Over the years I have come to recognise the relationship between the work that I do and the values I hold. My belief, which comes from my Buddhist practice, that every one of us is of value and has a unique contribution to make to the world underpins my interactions with both pupils, parents and work colleagues. In his essay 'A sense of purpose' Daisaku Ikeda, President of the Buddhist organisation to which I belong, writes:

*Everyone has some kind of gift. Being talented does not mean just being a good musician, writer or athlete. There are many kinds of talent. You may be a great conversationalist, or make friends easily, or be able to put others at ease. Or you may have a gift for telling jokes, selling things or living economically. You may be punctual, patient, reliable, kind or optimistic. Or you may love taking on new challenges, be strongly committed to helping*



*others, or have an ability to bring them joy. Without doubt, you possess your special jewel, your own unique talent.'*

Daiseku Ikeda, 2004 page number?

It is this belief that also has supported my determination that the uniqueness of each pupil be recognised when the request for support form is used. I was delighted to note that my colleague Marie Huxtable, APEX Coordinator for B&NES, had used this quote in a recent article (Huxtable 2008) and see this as evidence of how I have been able to introduce my beliefs to others in a helpful but not intrusive way.

### **Reflection – so what have I learnt?**

When I reflect on this narrative I am aware that I have reached the end of a chapter rather than the end of the story. The process is far from complete. Although the new form is ready to be used there are issues to be tackled about how to launch it, how to make sure all other old forms are destroyed and what to do when it is returned incomplete. It remains to be seen how the form is used by referrers and whether it does indeed promote conversation with pupils and parents. Will it mean that the referrer has a greater knowledge and fuller picture of the young person and their parents than they would have done otherwise? We shall see. What I think I have learnt for myself in this process is that if I am sure about my beliefs and values and able to articulate them then it is possible to effect change.

For example, in the video-clip at:



<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=cDcggqlb7J4>

I am expressing values which give meaning and purpose to my life and which I use as explanatory principles for why I do what I do I am always open to other people's ideas and can easily get enthused by them. This can lead me into hopping from one idea to another or being swayed by contradictory arguments. During this process however I stuck to my determined principle of making sure that the pupil's voice would be heard and that the voice that is heard is one of possibility not just of problem. I am pleased with the result.

In reviewing, at Conversation Café, what I had done the thought occurred to me that only I could have made these changes. I was in the right place at the right time and seized the opportunity to put my values into practice. I will now find out if the pupil's voice will be heard.

When I reflect on the *process of writing* this narrative I am very aware of the constraints of the written word and, in particular, describing how I live my values at work. Were I to have related this story in person to an audience I think they would have a much greater understanding of how I came to effect the changes to the form than just by reading what I have written. An audience would, I think, be able to experience the energy and commitment which I bring to my work and the warmth and compassion I bring to my relationships. Our challenge is to find a way of showing this energy without actually being in its presence

## References

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### Appendices

Appendix A Original version of the form (before January 2008)

Appendix B Revised version of the form (May 2008)

Appendix C Final version of the form (July 2008)



8. Please indicate particular areas of success for the pupil.	
9. Other relevant information:	
10. Please attach relevant information such as:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational Plans and Review <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance Record for previous 12 months <input type="checkbox"/> Most recent school report <input type="checkbox"/> SEN Statement, if applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Any other relevant information	<input type="checkbox"/> FTEX Record <input type="checkbox"/> CMEQ report, if applicable <input type="checkbox"/> EP report, if applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour Diary
11. Please indicate the type of support you feel will be of most benefit to this pupil (SBS only):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour Support <input type="checkbox"/> Integration Support <input type="checkbox"/> Placement in the PRU <input type="checkbox"/> Personalised Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> College Placement <input type="checkbox"/> Other – Please outline below:
12. Exit Strategy (SBS only):	
Expected duration of support intervention:	
How will the pupil be supported following the intervention?	
Please confirm the level of funding/other resources that will be available to the pupil from the school's delegated resources:	
13. Please indicate what you hope will be the outcome for the pupil:	
14. Parents' / carer's views on this request	
I give permission for my child to be discussed, information to be shared and for support staff to work with my child.  Parent's Signature: ..... Date: .....	
15. Pupil's views on this request	
16. Signature of Headteacher (requesting Agency)	
Date:	

<b>Request by:</b> (Name of school/requesting agency/LA/health department)			
<b>Contact Person and Phone Number</b>			
<b>Position Held</b>			
<b>Child/young person</b> Forename(s)	<b>Surname</b>	<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>Yr Group</b>
<b>Male</b> <input type="checkbox"/>		<b>Female</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
<b>Address(es)</b>		<b>Telephone Nos:</b>	
<b>Name of Parents/Carers</b>		<b>Relationship:</b> (Please indicate parental responsibility)	
<b>Unique Pupil Referral No.:</b>			
<b>School/Setting (if relevant)</b>			
		Looked after <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Please give details of strategies implemented to date, indicating what has been successful</b>		<b>Please give a full account of the reasons for this request</b>	
<b>Please indicate particular areas of success for the child/young person</b>			

Other relevant information or agency involvement (e.g. fixed term & permanent exclusions, additional language needs, Early Years Action, special educational needs, School Action, School Action Plus)			
Tick if school age and not on school roll <input type="checkbox"/>			
Attendance %		Total unauthorised absences	
Please attach relevant information (where appropriate) such as:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Early Years Action Plus <input type="checkbox"/> Developmental journal <input type="checkbox"/> SEN statement <input type="checkbox"/> Educational plans and reviews (IEPS, PSPs etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance record for past 12 months <input type="checkbox"/> Any other relevant information		<input type="checkbox"/> Children Missing Education Officer's report <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Psychologist's report <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour diary <input type="checkbox"/> Fixed-term exclusion record <input type="checkbox"/> Financial statement for sponsored daycare <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment levels/key stage results	
Please indicate the type of support you feel will be of most benefit to this child/young person.			
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsored daycare <input type="checkbox"/> Family/parenting support <input type="checkbox"/> Speech and language support <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour support <input type="checkbox"/> Integration support <input type="checkbox"/> CMEO home visit <input type="checkbox"/> Consultation/support in action planning		<input type="checkbox"/> College placement <input type="checkbox"/> Placement in the Pupil Referral Unit <input type="checkbox"/> Personalised learning <input type="checkbox"/> School nurse support <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment of complex psychological and/or learning needs	
Please indicate the best outcomes for the child/young person following intervention		Please outline the longer-term support that you will offer following the support requested	
[Specialist behaviour service only] Please indicate the expected duration of the support intervention			
Parent/carer's views on this request:			
Consent must be obtained before proceeding with this request <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/carer			
I give permission for the information relating to my child/young person to be shared and for appropriate staff to undertake work.			
Signed..... Relationship.....			
Child/young person's views on this request and signature (if age appropriate or over 12 years)			
Signed.....			
Signature of referrer			Date
Signed..... Position held.....			



**REQUEST FOR SUPPORT**

☒ Please tick where appropriate (delete empty box first and paste ticked box)

<b>Request by:</b> <i>(Requesting agency/organisation)</i>	
<b>Contact Person and Phone Number:</b>	
<b>Position Held:</b>	

<b>Child/Young Person</b>		<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>Year Group</b> <i>(if relevant)</i>
<b>Forename(s)</b>	<b>Surname</b>		
<b>Male</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Female</b> <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Ethnicity:</b>			
<b>Address(es):</b>		<b>Telephone Nos:</b>	
<b>Name of Parents/Carers</b> <i>(and address if different from above):</i>		<b>Relationship</b> <i>(indicating parental responsibility):</i>	

<b>Setting/School</b> <i>(if relevant):</i>	
	In care <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>NHS Number/Unique Pupil Number:</b>	

<b>Please indicate strengths and difficulties from the point of view of:</b>		
<b>1) child/young person</b>	<b>2) parent/carer</b>	<b>3) requesting agency</b>

<b>Please give details of strategies implemented to date, indicating what has been successful:</b>	
<b>Other Agencies involved (and name of practitioner, if known):</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Health Visitor <input type="checkbox"/> Connexions <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Offending Team <input type="checkbox"/> Social Care <input type="checkbox"/> CAMHS <input type="checkbox"/> GP	<input type="checkbox"/> School Nurse <input type="checkbox"/> Children's Centre Services <input type="checkbox"/> Midwife <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
<b>Please indicate or give details of the service/support requested:</b>	
<b>Children's Centre Services</b> (e.g. Stay & Play sessions, Extended Services)	<b>Inclusion Support Services</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Children Missing Education Service <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Psychology Service <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Support Service <input type="checkbox"/> Portage
<b>Specialist Behaviour Support Service</b>	<b>School Nursing Service</b> <input type="checkbox"/> School Nurse
<b>Please indicate the best outcomes for the child/young person following intervention:</b>	<b>Please outline the longer term support that you will offer following the support requested</b>
<b>Child/Young Person's view of this request:</b>	
<b>Parent/Carer's view of this request:</b>	
<b>Signature Consent</b> (SBS, Learning Support, Educational Psychology, Children Centre Services):	<b>Parent/Carer(s) consent:</b>
<b>Verbal Consent</b> (School Nursing Service only):	<b>Headteacher (SBS only):</b>
Verbal consent given by parent <input type="checkbox"/> by young person <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Request made by:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Request acknowledged (office use):</b>	<b>Name:</b>
September 2008	