

Doing Dialogue

To design a participative process for a consortium of UK science centres aimed at young people aged between 14-19 years old to feed into a national public consultation.

Section D: Implementation of the Procedure No. 14: Doing Dialogue Support Material

Doing Dialogue Project Consulting with Young People

Background

The Doing Dialogue project was a two year project funded by the Wellcome Trust which aimed to embed dialogue and discussion events in the regular programming of science centres. Ecsite-uk ran the project which had four science centre partners, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum, Museum of Science and Industry Manchester, Centre for Life, Newcastle and Glasgow Science Centre.

Previous debate projects (Debates with a Difference www.scizmic.net) run by Ecsite-uk had highlighted potential areas for development and the project would address these areas:

- Facilitation training
- Content writing, and delivery of discussion and debate events
- Participation in policy making (consultation)
- Marketing the events to participants

The project was divided into areas of responsibility with the different science centres taking a lead role in developing that area for the others to use in their events.

Participation in policy making

How do you validate the opinions of young people? More and more British school students are being asked to voice their opinions with the introduction of new exam syllabi and curriculum reviews.

The participation in policy making (consultation) strand of the Doing Dialogue project sought to find out how this could be done.

Prior to the start of the project discussions had been held with Nuffield Council on Bioethics who were interested in broadening the age range of participants in their public consultations namely attracting young people aged between 14-19 years to take part.

For each of their public consultations the Nuffield Council on Bioethics www.nuffieldbioethics.org will recruit a working party made up of a wide range of experts within that field. They will be responsible for deciding the framework of the consultation document, questions that need to be addressed, the analysis of the responses received and the writing of the final report.

The consultation Nuffield Council on Bioethics was running at the start of the project wasn't necessarily the first choice of topic for young people being 'The ethics of prolonging life in fetuses and the newborn' http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/fileLibrary/pdf/NCOB_prolong_life_consult_paper.pdf. The final report has been subsequently renamed 'Critical care decisions in fetal and neonatal medicine: ethical issues' http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/fileLibrary/pdf/CCD_Short_Version_FINAL.pdf.

Working with the Communications and External Affairs Manager of Nuffield Council on Bioethics we received a copy of the consultation paper. We needed then to reframe the questions within the document to work with our particular audience of young people. At this stage it needs to be remembered that teachers are the ones who will make the decisions about whether to bring a group or not so it has to 'attract' them and make it worth their while. Curriculum links were essential to attracting teachers.

This process is an integral part of the material writing days and needs to be agreed by all if more than one centre is taking part.

If you are using public consultations as a basis for your work sometimes the consultation papers can be confidential at the time you receive them so check with the consulting body as to the status of the consultations. The key is to keep talking to the consulting body; they will be happy to work with you to make the process as easy as possible.

It needs to be remembered that each working party is made up of different experts and will have slightly different expectations of what information is needed and how that is to be presented.

Make use of the expertise of the working party

- Send draft materials to members of the working party for approval and any suggested changes.
- Ask for them to come to the events as speakers. This has the additional benefit of allowing them to see the events in action and how engaged the young people become in the topic.

Once the consultation questions were decided on, the writing of the materials took into consideration the information we needed to gather. The responses to the tasks completed by the young people would give us their opinions. The actual format of recording the responses developed with the project according to the needs of the information required by the working party. They may want statistical information about the demographic of the young people consulted in terms of age and gender.

At the start of each event the introduction told the young people taking part that they were contributing to a Public Consultation and their results would be fed back to Nuffield Council on Bioethics. Facilitators commented that the groups felt motivated by this to consider their responses more carefully.

Consideration needs to be taken into account as to how you will feed back your results. Remember each working party has individual requirements and the results from each science centre needs to be collated.

Presenting to the working party

We were lucky to be able to go in person to present our results to the working party which is an excellent opportunity. We answered questions about the events and expanded the information they had received in the report and received feedback from them about the results we presented which could then be taken forward to the next consultation.

Working with Nuffield Council on Bioethics certainly added value to the work we did with the young people and highlights the growing expertise science centre staff are developing in facilitating debate and discussion with their audiences.