

Editorial

Dr Mark Fox

This issue of EPRaP specifically focuses on the Children and Families Bill (2013) and the subsequent SEND (2014) Code of Practice. These articles celebrate the opportunities that the code has given us to change our practice. It largely focuses on one aspect — the voice or participation of children and young people (CYP). These articles reflect the very real thought and attention these authors have given to trying to change their practice and empower CYP.

The impetus for change for these authors has come in many different ways. For some it started as a research project as part of a university qualification. Lauren Thorne and Irvine Gersch's exploration of The Little Box of Big Questions 2 opens up how children view their own individual learning and introduces a new resource that EPs can use. However, if a research project was the formal starting point for some of these articles, their origin was often deeper and more personal. So Imogen Howarth's article on using action research to ensure the meaningful involvement of children in assessment goes back many years to her work helping developing the use of communication aids. Sam Kelly's article on ensuring children with dyslexia can advocate for themselves reflects his own experiences of secondary education. Some of the articles come from working as a practising EP. Nazam Hussain's reflective piece is a way, through supervision, to raise issues of really getting inside the child's head and understanding their perspective. Hayley Vingerhoets and Kirsty Wagner's article is a response to being asked to help an EPS think about how to change practice around the voice of the child. Meanwhile Julia Crane was tackling the issue from an organisational perspective in terms of the increasing demands on service in terms of time and energy to produce psychological advice. Sarif Alrai tackles the same issue but from an individual point of view — is it possible to co-construct psychological advice?

All these articles provide ideas for developing practice in terms of empowering CYP. However, the Children and Families Bill (2013) and the subsequent SEND (2014) Code of Practice are not just about giving CYP a voice. They also provide an opportunity to reconceptualise our work (Fox, 2015). They offer an opportunity for us, as educational psychologists (EPs), to change our culture — the way we do things around here — in terms of our behaviour, our values, our assumptions and our norms. However, it is not clear how, or if, this is happening in the EP profession.

One reason for this is that we have a very individualised culture as EPs. There are differences between different training courses and between and within Local Authority (LA) services. EPs pride themselves on this diversity, which extends to recognising and celebrating individual differences both within the profession and between different schools and children. This individualised culture then militates against a top-down, central, organisational/professional shift in direction following the code.

Change also has a psychological impact — “all real change involves loss, anxiety and struggle” (Fullan, 1991, p. 31). Change requires passing through “zones of uncertainty” (Schon, 1971, p. 12), where we are not certain of the best way of reaching the end point, or even if it is of value.

Change, as promoted by the Code, will have different meanings for different EPs. For the new TEP it will be the only framework they will have been taught; for some experienced EP it may challenge the way they have worked for many years — or open up longed-for opportunities for change. For the manager in the LA it may be an opportunity to reorganise the Children Service — or a time to retire. The point is that these reactions are not right or wrong but that they are different responses to the code.

Therefore EPs will see the code in different ways. We may see some of the opportunities for change as being of value and some not. This will affect what we will and will not implement.

		Change actually implemented	
		Yes	No
Change is of value	Yes	1	2
	No	3	4

What we are aiming for is change in Box 1 — change that is of value actually implemented. Too often all that happens is that change that is of no value is implemented or change that is of value is not implemented (Boxes 2 and 3).

Of course Box 4 is also valuable in so far that change that is of no value is not actually implemented. It may be worth considering which of the various changes that the code proposed do you feel fit in Box 4, e.g.:

- Applies up to the age of 25
- Allows for personal budgets
- Ensures a Local Offer is clear

However, it is likely that there are things in Box 2 — changes based on the code that we think are actually of value and have not yet been implemented. Central to the code is that in order to change a plan is needed. In this editorial I will try to connect this process of planned change to how we as EPs can also change. By using this analogy it is hoped that there is some reciprocity between understanding the forces of change on the CYP and on us as EPs.

Person-Centred Planning

Fundamental to the new Code is the concept that having a plan — an EHC Plan — is a requisite for change. Maybe fundamental to changing practice as an EP is also having a plan that includes aspirations, outcomes, needs and knowing who will support you. One of the changes I have made in my practice is using the PATH (Planning Alternatives Tomorrows with Hope*). Is this person-centred planning, PATH, helpful for EPs on our journey (Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1993)?

* I would like to thank Nicola Cann for embedding me in the PATH process.

The dream

The first step is listening to the voice of the EP (and maybe your 'parents' — the service). In organisational change terms this is equated to developing a vision. The vision is about how you would like things to be in the future — without any constraints to hinder your thinking. What are your hopes and values that will guide you? The vision energises and motivates the EP. The vision may be kept alive by having a slogan. What is your slogan as an EP? *Positive psychology, keep kids sane*.....? The vision is about cultural change in terms of different ways of working, different ways of consulting, of assessing and of communication through reports.

Positive and possible

What do you want to be doing in one year's time that you are not doing now? Imagine a year has passed since you created your vision. Looking back on the past year what has been achieved towards the vision? What have you done differently in terms of organising your time, undertaking assessments, consultations? Have you introduced new resources, programmes or material into your practice? What have you done in terms of sharing your vision, your values and beliefs? How do your colleagues see you as different? How do you feel? These are your goals — the outcomes you want to achieve by next year.

Now

What is the present scenario (Egan, 2013)? What is it like now? This scenario may be at a number of levels. It may be about your individual skills and knowledge and attitude. It may also be about the macros system in terms of the service you are in, its position in relation to other services and the LA. Finally there is the meso level — the economic and social reality of the country. Ways of thinking about this level have been captured in the austerity paper in this issue.

Strengths

The techniques from Appreciative Enquiry may be used to enable you to recognise the strengths of both yourself and your service, what you have already accomplished in terms of implementing the code both yourself and your service. What is going really well?

Who's on board?

The question is who will help us with your journey? Will other EPs, members of your service? Will the LA or the AEP or the DECP? Who are your allies in making change happen? It may also be the SENCOS, the parents and also the CYP that you work with.

The code is clear that the focus for the Plan is the individual child in their family — or in our terms the EP and their Service. How closely intertwined are your and your service's aspirations?

Next steps

The EP then needs a strategy. One of the criticisms of the code is that it still uses an individual deficit model of needs. If this was applied to ourselves, the argument would be that the first strategy is to look at your deficits as an EP. What do you not do well at the moment? Where do you need to build your skills? The other way of looking at it is to look at your strengths — what is it that you are presently delivering well in schools in terms of the code? Could you do this better?

There should be a Golden Thread from the Dream, Goals, Now, Strengths and Next Steps. The goals should be specific for you — the individual EP.

Reflections

So do EHC Plans work to make change happen? Maybe by trying it ourselves the benefits and issues will become clearer. The code emphasises the cyclical process of Plan–Do–Review. The PATH process is one of planning. Nothing changes if you do not. In this editorial I am encouraging all of us, as EPs, to be reflective about change. For some, as described at the beginning of this editorial, this may be about researching an area. For others, it may be embedded in our practice — which either is going very well or could be improved. If our role is to help others change — and particularly CYP with SEND — then it seems to me to be a prerequisite that we understand how to manage change in ourselves. In particular, we need to acknowledge that change can be difficult and therefore requires planning — whether that is research or practice. However, to actually change maybe we all need to listen and respond to our own values of why we are EPs in the first place. We each need to experience giving voice to our own EHC plan if we are to embrace the opportunities the code provides for the profession of EPs.

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