

VOICES INTO ACTION

A Framework for the Meaningful Participation of Learners and Families in Educational Decision-Making

REAL PROGRESS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS CAN ONLY HAPPEN WHEN WE ...



RECOGNISE



LISTEN TO



UNDERSTAND



ACT ON

... ALL VOICES

Learners and families rarely influence the educational decisions that directly affect their lives, even if they are given opportunities to share their opinions in their classrooms and communities.

The **Voices into Action (VIA)** project explores ways to develop a more participatory approach to educational decision-making, with learners and families at the centre.

It proposes the VIA Framework for Meaningful Participation in Inclusive Education, a reflective tool which outlines practical and ethical considerations before, during and after participation.

What are 'voices'?

The communication of values, beliefs, views and perspectives of learners and their families.

What is 'meaningful participation'?

The recognition and inclusion of learner and family voices as **equal** and **integral** to discussions across all system levels. This involves ensuring **active agency** and **shared power** to initiate ideas and influence decisions.

The VIA Framework for Meaningful Participation in Inclusive Education

The VIA Framework builds on a model of child participation developed by Laura Lundy (2007)¹. It applies the model's four concepts of **'Space'**, **'Voice'**, **'Audience'** and **'Influence'** to the education context, and extends it to include families in addition to children and young people, taking into account key ethical considerations.

Policy-makers, school leaders, teachers and other education stakeholders may use the VIA Framework to:



Consider and act upon the voices of all in decision-making, especially those who are marginalised or vulnerable to exclusion



Develop all stakeholders' capacity (knowledge, understanding and skills) to listen and share their voices



Embed and uphold an ethical approach at all stages (i.e. safety, accessibility, vulnerability, bias and transparency)



Sustain, evaluate and continue to improve participation for diverse stakeholders, across different systems and contexts

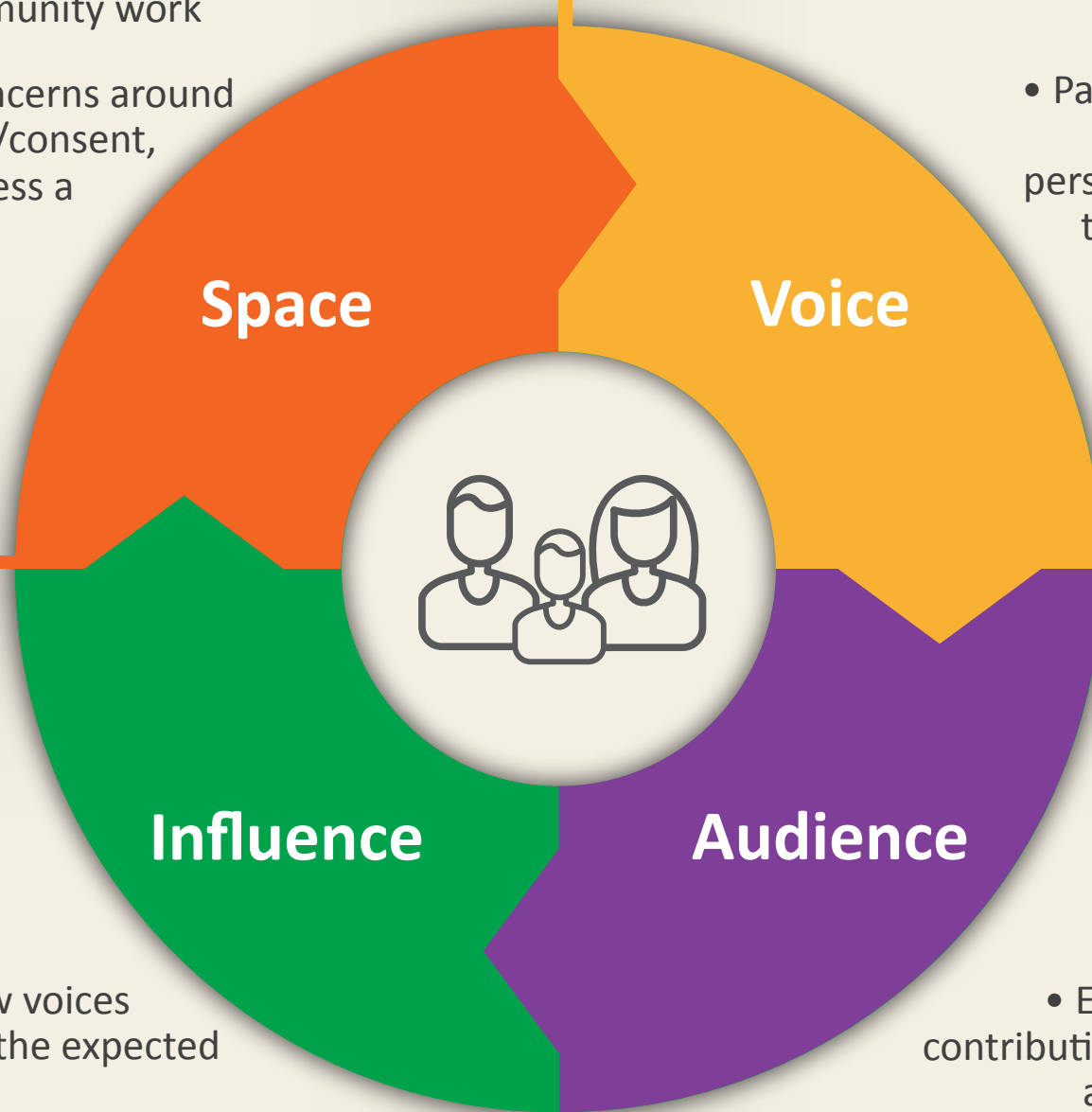
VIA Framework

Create safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express voices

- Minimise selection bias by ensuring that marginalised groups are included
- Make use of technology, intergenerational approaches and non-governmental organisations' community work
- Pay attention to concerns around accessibility, assent/consent, safety, right to express a view and right to information

Facilitate free expression of voices in the medium of choice

- Discuss topics that are meaningful, relevant and beneficial to the individual/group
- Provide accessible preparatory material and appropriate support to build capacity for participation
- Pay attention to concerns around vulnerability, personal data and the right to guidance from adults



Act on the voices

- Ensure clarity and transparency on how voices are acted upon and the expected impacts
- Give appropriate feedback to all participants and involve them in the evaluation processes
- Pay attention to possible misinterpretation of voices and unintended consequences

Listen responsibly to the voices

- Encourage and value the contributions of intergenerational and diverse perspectives
- Access appropriate support and means to understand and interpret the views expressed
- Pay attention to power imbalances and unconscious bias

Access the VIA web area to learn more about the project, the framework and the VIA online toolkit, an interactive resource offering information and examples of practice:

www.european-agency.org/activities/VIA

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¹ Lundy, L., 2007. "Voice" is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' *British Educational Research Journal*, 33 (6), 927–942. www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01411920701657033

