

Use of Talking Mats to gain student voice at the Ponds School

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Short Abstract

At the Ponds School, we have strived to ensure that we actively seek to gain student voice about things that matter to the students. Our school has had success in using Talking Mats to support student voice. A Talking Mat is a visual communication framework which supports people with communication difficulties to express their feelings and views. This tool is used in conjunction with the students' own robust Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems which help to expand on their responses.

We have used Talking Mats for a variety of purposes. These include getting opinions about the following:

- Student feedback about what they liked or didn't like about a lesson
- Student opinions on where they have gone for community access
- Preference for people who can support them with health care needs
- Preference for whole school rewards on Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) reward days.
- How students feel they are going with their own personalised learning goals
- Evaluation of AAC trials or current use of AAC
- How students feel about the regulation tools/strategies used to support them
- Their experience of school so that they can be supported to write their own graduation speeches
- Students giving an opinion on post school options

The school Speech Pathologist is a licensed Talking Mat trainer and has been training the staff at the school to use Talking Mats with their students. We hope to continue to expand the use of Talking Mats to gain student voice across all aspects of schooling.

Long Abstract

At the Ponds School, we strive to ensure that we actively seek to gain student voice about things that matter to the students. The school is based in Western Sydney and is a School for Specific Purposes (SSP) which serves students with a moderate-severe intellectual disability

from Kindergarten to Year 12. Many students are non speaking and require Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems to be able to use and learn language.

The school leadership were keen to gain student voice to ensure that students were consulted on matters that impacted them. One of the barriers to obtaining student voice was that many students either didn't have their own communication systems or they were not fluent in the use of their system in order to give a range of opinions about different topics. Our school has had success in using Talking Mats to support student voice. A Talking Mat is a visual communication framework which supports people with communication difficulties to express their feelings and views. This tool is used in conjunction with the students' own robust AAC systems which help to expand on their responses.

We have used Talking Mats for a variety of purposes. These include getting opinions about the following topics:

- Student feedback about a lesson
 - Things I like, don't know, like
 - Things I can do myself, don't know, need help
 - Things I did well, not sure, not so well
 - Things that helped me, not sure, did not help me
- Student opinions on where they went for community access
 - Places I liked, don't know, don't like
 - Places I want to go to, don't know, don't want
- Preference for people who can support them with health care needs (e.g. toileting)
 - I want, I don't know, I don't want
- Preference for whole school rewards on PBL (Positive Behaviour for Learning) reward days.
 - I want, I don't know, I don't want
- How students feel they are going with their own personalised learning goals (This particular Talking Mat is included in the student's end of year report)
 - Going well, not sure, not going well
 - I can do this myself, I'm not sure, I need help
 - I want to work on this, not sure, I don't want to work on this
- Evaluation of AAC trials or current use of AAC
 - I can do, not sure, I can't do
 - I like, not sure, I don't like

- How students feel about the regulation tools/strategies used to support them
 - This helps me, not sure, this does not help
 - I want to try, not sure, I don't want to try
- Their experience of school so that they can be supported to write their own graduation speeches
 - I like, not sure, I don't like
- Students giving an opinion on post school options
 - I want to go, not sure, don't want to go
 - It's important, not sure, not important

The school Speech Pathologist is a licensed Talking Mat trainer and has been training the staff at the school to use Talking Mats with their students. We have learned a lot about how this tool can be adapted for different students (e.g. eye gaze, partner assisted scanning, vision impairment) and we have also learned a lot about the types of questions that are useful to ask. We hope to be able to share what our students have taught us and to continue to expand the use of Talking Mats to gain student voice across all aspects of schooling.