

4.Engaging Children And Young People In The Solutions (Co-Production)



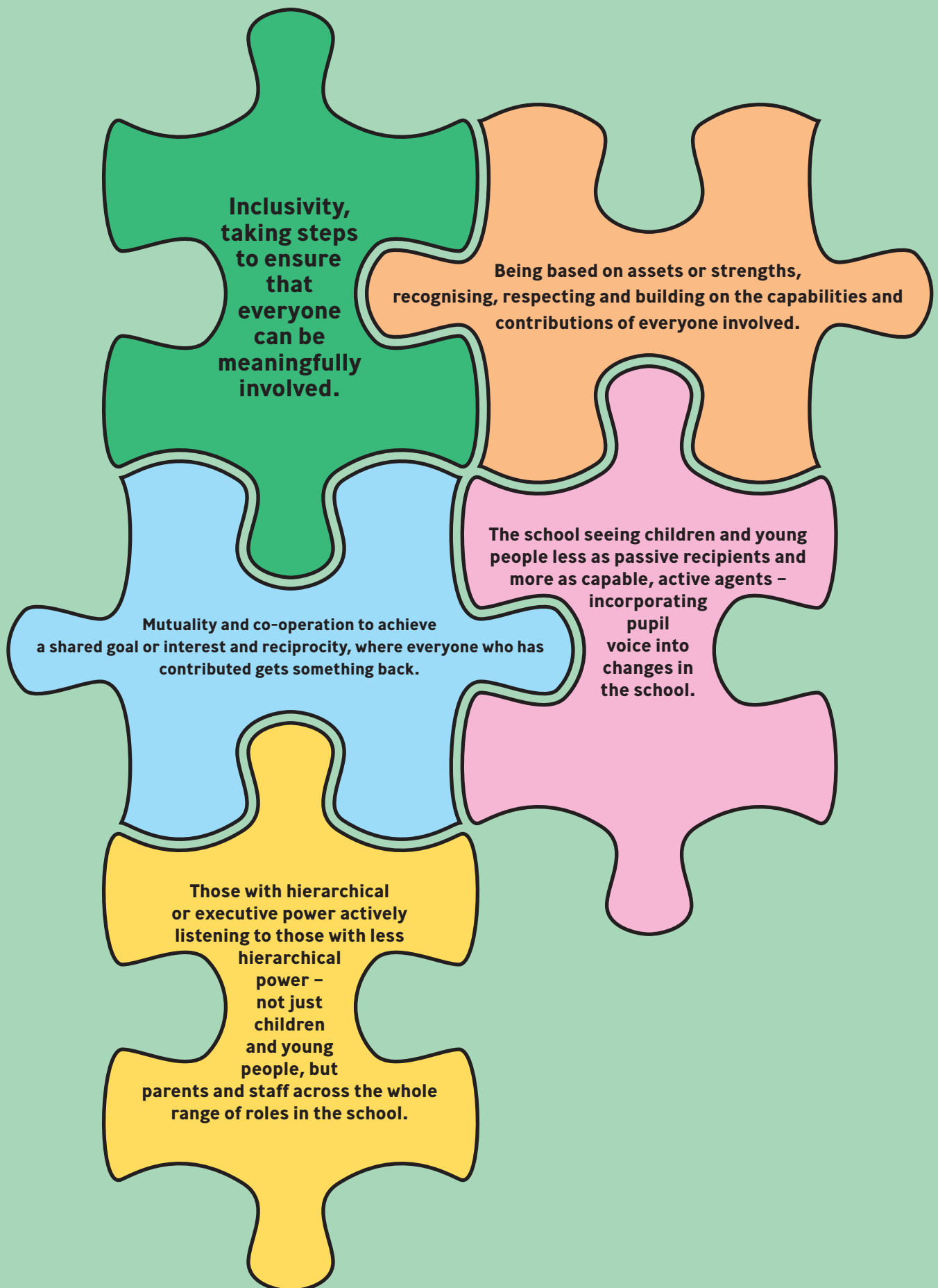
"Remember that there is a huge gap in cultural understanding between adults and young people. Young people are growing up in a rapidly changing digital environment, and issues that impact their mental health can arise very quickly."

Co-production

Co-production is a way of working that utilises the experience, knowledge and skills of a range of stakeholders to design, produce and deliver better services and resources. It is a highly participative version of "engagement", which is perhaps a more familiar term to schools.

Co-production is a value-based approach that, in this context, views children, young people and parents as assets with important knowledge and skills that can be harnessed to promote positive change. Rather than being a formula that everyone follows regardless of what they are trying to achieve, it is often seen as a set of principles that should be followed, with clearly recognised good practice in terms of process.

Some of these values and processes are:



What does co-production mean for schools in addressing resilience and mental health?

In schools, co-production means children and young people, working with parents and staff, bringing their perspectives together to improve the resilience and mental health of the children and young people in the school. It recognises that management, teaching staff, support staff, children, young people and parents all have valid experiences and perspectives on school life, and that together they can create solutions that are bigger than the sum of their parts.

In a whole school approach to resilience, everyone who has direct experience of the school can make a valuable contribution to identification of areas for improvement and co-produced solutions. Just being part of co-produced solutions and improvements can enhance participants' wellbeing and the wellbeing of the school dynamics.

Benefits of well-implemented co-production approaches include:

- Participative and contextualised learning opportunities

- Encouraging inclusivity and reciprocity

- Developing a sense of community and independent peer-networks

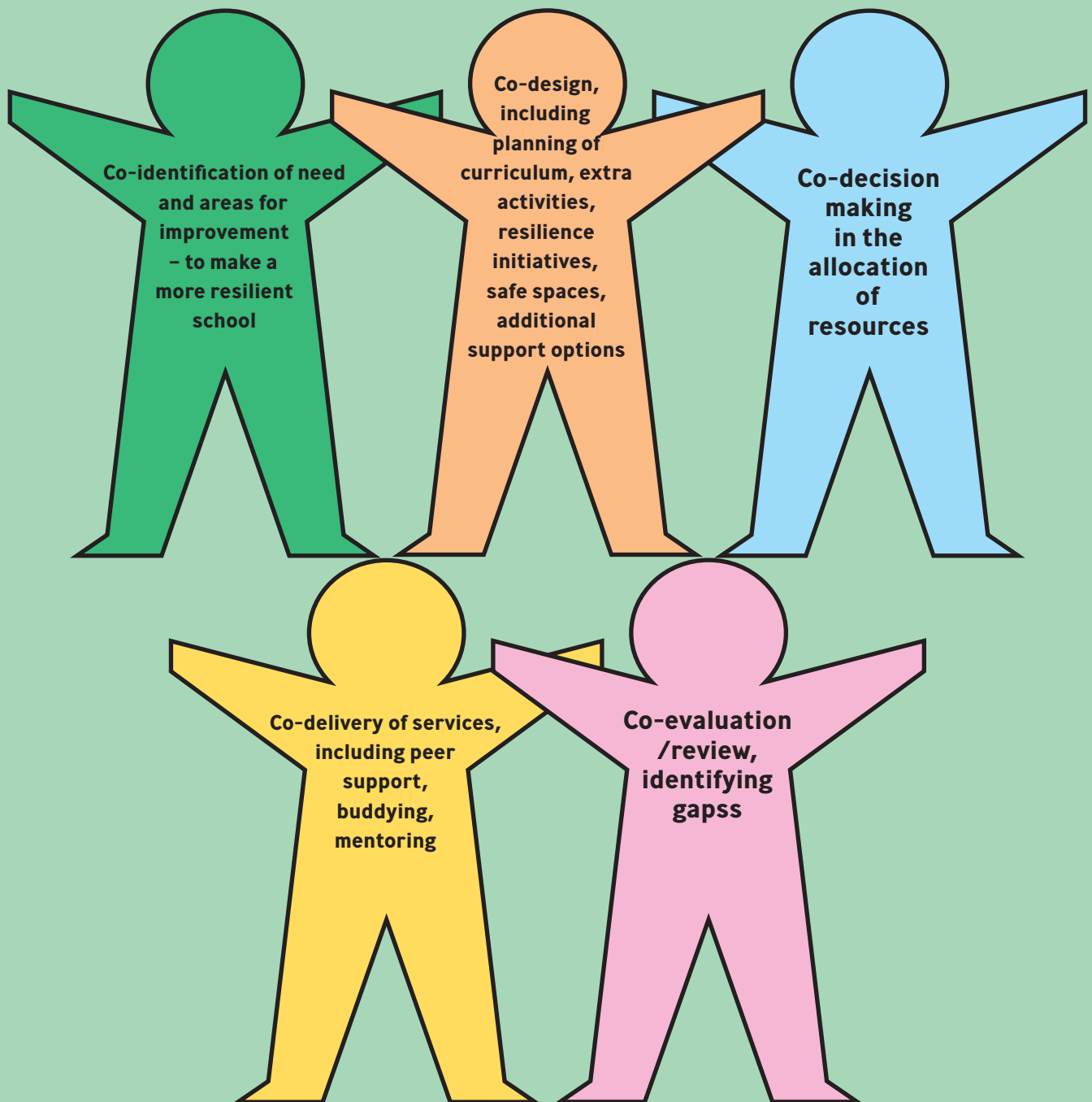
- Building confidence and capacity

- Promotion of deep learning and active engagement

- Producing new knowledge and more effective solutions to identified needs and areas of development

So far, co-production approaches have been less well embedded in formal education. However, there are many examples of good co-production in schools. School Councils are an example, providing they are done well and result in meaningful involvement and real impact (i.e. if the principles of co-production are adhered to – see above). Pupil Voice is a valuable process being implemented in East Sussex Schools, through the school health improvement grants, that can inform initiatives around resilience and mental health, as long as care is taken to ensure that representation is reflective of need across the school. A group set up specifically to explore resilience and mental health could also be valuable.

Co-production in schools can include:



“Remind pupils how common mental health issues are, you could co-create resources like posters or videos with young people that stress the similarities and links between physical and mental health, time to change have a bank of free, customizable materials on their site:
<https://timetochange.brandstencil.com/>”

It should also be very clear what children, young people and parents can get back from their contribution. Even if there is no direct benefit to children, young people or parents, but benefit through an improved school environment and better-tailored support, this should be transparently stated.

Co-production, by definition, means a sharing of power. For schools that are not used to sharing real power with children, young people and parents,

this may be a challenge. Before any co-productive process begins, school staff and managers should give appropriate thought to explore how much control they are open to being shared, how much risk, and exactly which risks they are prepared to work with. These considerations should shape the co-production and it is important that those in power in the school are transparent and open with children, young people and parents about the extent and limitations of what they can and cannot influence.

Recommended further reading on children and young people's engagement/co-production

Angie Hart, Claire Stubbs, Stefan Plexousakis, Maria Georgiadi & Elias Kourkoutas, (2015). *Aspirations of vulnerable young people in foster care*. STYLE WP 9.3. Brighton: CROME, University of Brighton.
<http://www.style-research.eu/publications/working-papers>. This explains how young people co-produced a resilience guide for foster carers and has useful tips on using the resilience framework in it, which have been developed by young people.

Edgar S Cahn (2000) *No more throwaway people: The co-production imperative*. Washington: Essential Books.

Lucie Stephens, Josh Ryan-Collins and David Boyle (2008) *Co-production: A manifesto for growing the core economy*. London: New Economics Foundation.

David Boyle, Anna Coote, Chris Sherwood and Julia Slay (2010) *Right here, right now: Taking co-production in to the mainstream*. London: NESTA.

Julia Slay and Ben Robinson (2011) *In this together: Building knowledge of co-production*. London: New Economics Foundation.

Mental Health Foundation (2009-2014) *Right Here Project*.
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/projects/right-here>

Lucie Stephens (2013) *Co-production in mental health - why everybody wins*. London: Mind.
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/co-production-in-mental-health-why-everybody-wins/#.WW0txOmQzIU>

Values-Based Child and Adolescent Mental Health System Commission (2016) *What really matters in children and young people's mental health*. London: Royal College of Psychiatrists.
<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/Values-based%20full%20report.pdf>