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DEVELOPMENT AND ENQUIRY PROGRAMMES
TEACHER RESEARCHERS

Students as Researchers

Jane McGregor

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other | learning with each other | learning on behalf of each other

'At its best and in the right circumstances, Students as Researchers is a 'boundary practice', a practice which encourages us to break out of pre-existing moulds and shape the world together in ways that affirm what we wish to become, rather than one that reminds us of what others wish us to remain.'

Fielding & Bragg, 2003, p 55

In a Guardian survey ('How I'd like schools to be') of 15,000 5 to18 year olds, the top five ideas included 'being listened to'. Young people have changed in their identities and roles as communicators, consumers and citizens (Burke & Grosvener, 2003). However, in what is for many a rapidly changing and often challenging world, schools are substantially the same and, while curricula come and go, the deep structures of schooling remain essentially unchanged.

If we are to create new knowledge about schools, schooling and education in the 21st century to inform and promote change, improvement and even transformation, then it is to research and enquiry that involves partnerships of practitioners, pupils and educationalists that we may have to look. McLaughlin (2004) suggests three major conceptions and traditions of practitioner research, for primarily personal, professional or political purposes. The first type is often individual and curriculum-focused action enquiry, while the second is more public. The last employs critical emancipatory approaches to explore and generate new power relations. While all of these forms of research and enquiry are important, it is collaborative enquiry as a dimension of pupil involvement in networked learning communities (NLCs) that this paper explores, articulating with the essentially emancipatory aim of the Networked Learning Communities programme.

Enquiry for the purposes of school improvement or transformation involves purposeful and informed engagement, within the context of the school, with a view to informing decisions and planning change. Action-enquiry is recognised by theorists and practitioners as fundamental to sustained school improvement through an enhanced capacity to deal with change proactively. Adult enquiry is a major dimension of learning in a network as it provides a focus for a range of other networked activities such as observation, mentoring, coaching and knowledge-sharing (Cordingley et al, 2004).

The characteristics of networked learning have been identified as collaborative, mutual and transformational. In networked learning communities this means 'making a difference' on behalf of others and working collaboratively to develop a participative culture which will facilitate positive change. Collaborative enquiry is complex but involves individuals choosing to come together to investigate and learn more about teaching and learning, and the life of the school as an educational community, in order to enhance the learning and experience of its members. They do this by engaging with current theory and research, gathering information, analysing and reflecting together on the data and identifying how this can inform change.

Collaborative enquiry has been shown to raise morale, efficacy and a sense of agency for teachers (which might be expected to be related to attainment) through the engagement and motivation of students. In their first year review a significant proportion of NLCs identified enquiry with pupils as a major achievement and 80 per cent planned more activities for year two. For some NLCs, pupil perception data have been the main generators of improved teaching and learning and decision-making in the network, for example where 'an audit of school culture' leads to action enquiry. For others, pupil participation demonstrates their commitment to collaboration, inclusion and democracy, and has a central role in creating the network. The involvement of pupils has been demonstrated to be a significant network-building activity in that it can quickly build momentum, bringing adults together with an obvious common purpose, embodied by the young people.

An artefact that was created collaboratively through the NLC Pupil Involvement development and enquiry group is available to provide a stimulus for identifying where networks are, in relation to the development of pupil involvement, and to assist in creating a vision of where they want to be in the future. The CD and pack can be obtained by emailing nlg@ncsl.org.uk

Background

The identification of pupil[1] involvement as a significant dimension of NLC development mirrors the currently considerable and growing interest in policy circles, nationally and internationally, around needs of young people in an increasingly complex society. In the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) articles 12, 13 and 23 recognise the right of children to be heard, to seek and to make known information. The Children and Young People's Unit have recently published 'Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People', and the DfES Consultation on 'Working together; giving young people a say' is complete. Ofsted now expects school inspectors to report on how far a school seeks, values and acts on pupils' views. A range of non-government organisations, such as the Citizenship Foundation, Carnegie Young People's Initiative, Save the Children and Schools Council UK, are all active in providing formal training and materials on aspects of what is commonly known as pupil voice.

There is also growing research literature on pupil voice and participation in education in England, to augment that from Australia (Johnson, 2000; Holdsworth, 2004; Thomson, 2001) in school evaluation (Macbeath, 2002), school improvement (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004) students as partners in learning and Students as Researchers (Raymond, 2001; Fielding, 2004). The Education and Science Research Council (ESRC) funded project, 'Consulting Pupils About Teaching and Learning', has produced a wealth of research grounded in schools and classrooms that has been used to create three important resources:

1. 'Consulting Pupils; A Toolkit for Teachers' (Macbeath et al, 2003)
2. 'Students as Researchers: Making a Difference' (Fielding & Bragg, 2003)
3. 'Consultation in the Classroom' (Arnot et al, 2004)

Since the year 2000 schools have been required to develop Citizenship Education as part of the National Curriculum for England. A recent systematic review on the impact of citizenship education on the provision of schooling strongly highlighted the importance of pupils learning about citizenship 'by experiencing it in action, through the ways in which they learn, ways in which they are taught and ways in which their (school) lives are organised'. The main findings from this review emphasise the criticality of dialogue and 'a facilitative, conversational pedagogy (which) may challenge existing power/authority structures (Citizenship Education Research Group, In press). Situated and practice-based learning theories which focus on participation and the effect of this on the construction of identities, suggest that citizenship cannot be learnt in isolation but is enacted as a community of practice.

Pupil participation, in its various forms, thus articulates with government and school improvement agendas as well as with programmes such as Assessment for Learning and Transforming Learning, together with projects for involving young people in the design of their learning environments like Schoolworks and Learning through Landscapes. Leadership and learning are increasingly explicitly linked together in relation to young people through contemporary developments in pedagogy such as learning to learn, the popularity of thinking skills and also strategies for lifelong learning. There are further significant links with progressive learning theories, in particular constructivist learning approaches, which form an important element in raising pupil achievement within the government's standards agenda.

Key resource one

Rudduck J & Flutter J, 2004, *How to Improve your School: Giving Pupils a Voice,* London, Continuum.

This provides a good overview of the area, combining high quality academic research with insights from those at the chalk face.

[1]While being sensitive to the importance of naming, it is the case that while the term 'student' is more common in secondary schools, in primary schools 'pupil' or 'child' still tends to be used. I will follow Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004) in using both terms when talking about 'young people'.

Pupil Involvement in NLCs

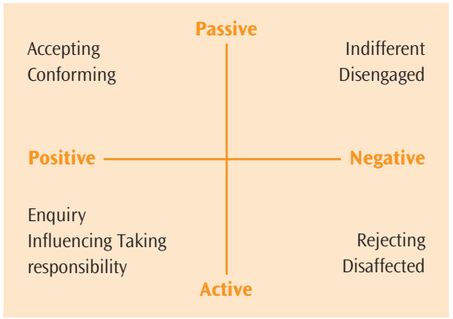
In its advance publicity material, and in many of the events following start up, the Networked Learning Group described pupil voice as having 'the potential to act as high leverage on transformational change on every level of learning'. Of the first cohort of NLCs 30 per cent identified pupil voice as a strong feature of their networked learning at the submission stage (Dudley et al, 2003). The first two years suggest that pupil involvement, variously defined, has spread throughout the programme and networks have indeed suggested the catalytic effect of collaborative work in this area.

Networks report use of pupil voice activity in a variety of ways, including:

- pupil perception questionnaires and feedback on teaching and learning
- conferences for young people
- developing communities of enquiry through Philosophy for Children
- pupil intervisitations and 'learning walks'
- pupils as co-researchers and Students as Researchers

As Jean Rudduck suggests, student voice approaches offer a practical agenda for change in education at a variety of levels. Students are 'experts in schooling' (although that expertise may be turned to avoidance of learning if not engaged productively) and have knowledge of the school that adults do not. They may also have quite different views on what is important. Although there may be considerable differences between school contexts, structures such as the classroom, timetable and division of labour are relatively static, with more similarities than differences, hence the particular need to make the (intensely) familiar unfamiliar in order to reflect on the conditions of learning as well as the quality of teaching.

How the voices of young people are encouraged, listened to and acted upon, says a great deal about what the school or network values. It creates a real test of the climate of trust and respect, which is necessary for genuine enquiry and supported risk-taking, as illustrated in the simple diagram below, which could be applied to analyse responses to a lesson as much as the ethos of a school.



'When members of a school come to value critical reflection as a way of learning (this) builds a climate of openness, trust and respect.'

Rudduck & Flutter, 2004

Numerous studies, including the recent Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) review (Citizenship Education Research Group, In press) emphasise the importance of active participation in a community. Cosmetically changing school structures or curricula is unlikely to lead to sustained improvements in student engagement, motivation and attainment until the way young people are perceived and the relationships between them and the adults in schools, particularly teachers, are reconfigured, for example around partnership. Recent research suggests that schools achieving more rapid progress are those actively seeking pupils' views and giving them more prominent roles in schools (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004).

Pause for thought…

1. Can you identify these dimensions in your classroom, school or network?
2. What strategies might you use to move to active positive engagement from the other quadrants?

Collaborative Enquiry

Of the networked learning processes such as collective planning or joint CPD, collaborative enquiry offers the greatest opportunity to open up new spaces for dialogue between adults and young people with the certainty of creating new, and hopefully valuable, knowledge.

Collaborative enquiry in NLCs, as described by Jackson et al (Forthcoming), is specifically designed to involve a group of school or network members collaborating and investigating together. It is intended to move beyond the people undertaking the enquiry to involve the wider community within and between schools. Collaborative enquiry contributes to adult learning in context, as Fullan (2002) describes it – specific, situational and social, making a difference to the school or network through inclusively involving members in a central role. Unlike more traditional or individual forms of research, the influence of collaborative enquiry more obviously takes place 'in real time' rather than at the end of the process, with the active engagement and learning of the group of researchers.

The characteristics of collaborative enquiry include:

- taking the current school context as the starting point
- problematising the day-to-day work (not making assumptions about what is going on, but questioning what is taken for granted)
- building out from what has gone before and what is already known
- engaging in a process of investigation that is rigorous and disciplined in relation to purpose
- ensuring that data gathering and analysis are understood by all involved to be an essential part of the process
- the process of knowledge creation
- representing findings in such a way that they can be accessed by other teachers.

(Jackson et al, Forthcoming)

The first NLC annual review suggests that working with pupil perspectives in a variety of ways has been particularly positive, both in engaging participation and subsequently in sustaining energy and motivation in the process of enquiry. In the NLC Transforming Learning project it is clear that participation in the enquiry process stimulated and energised NLCs. Networks have indicated that the most powerful learning for them has taken place in shared activities, between individuals and groups supported by a wide range of structures and processes. Collaborative enquiry with pupils from 5 to 18 has thus captured the imaginations of many individuals and groups in networks in addition to providing a practical agenda for improvement and perhaps transformation of schools as communities. The remainder of this paper explores some of the ways in which students may be involved in research.

Understandings about Students as Researchers

Students as Researchers (SaRs) is a radical approach where adults actively listen to student views and support student-led research (Naylor & Worrall, 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Raymond, 2001). Typical areas of investigation are the school environment and organisation, school and curriculum policy and teaching and learning. While structured support from adults, the school and often partner institutions such as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), is crucial, here student voice can be seen to be coming to the fore as a leadership process, where opportunities for influencing decisions are clearly articulated. This approach is characterised by an enquiry based overt commitment to learning with an intention to break out of pre-existing moulds where they represent a block on creative learning partnerships.

Key resource two

FORUM, Special Issue on Student Voice, Edited by Michael Fielding, Volume 42, No 2, Summer 2001

This provides many practical and international examples of this work and can be accessed through the website www.triangle.co.uk

Typology of pupil involvement in enquiry and research

Michael Fielding (2002) has developed a typology of pupil participation in enquiry and research in schools which can be usefully employed to differentiate between different orientations and, hence, to raise questions about the nature of the interaction. All of these forms are necessary and valuable as they reflect a focus on getting closer to pupil learning and experience, but they are qualitatively different in motivation, execution and effect. As with other typologies of student participation these should not be viewed as an hierarchy. The typology draws distinctions between the different roles available to teachers and students and the resulting relationship. In the tables below Fielding gives examples of how this may be enacted at different scales and the potential for shifting existing power relations explored. Although teachers are described in the tables, a significant number of networked learning communities have reported involving other adults and cited the inclusiveness of this collaborative enquiry as a major benefit and force for change in schools and networks.

1. Students as data source

Schools are 'data-rich' but it is the use and making of meaning of the numerous performance scores and indicators that demonstrates a commitment to improving teaching and learning. Data can be used for aspirational purposes and to stimulate better questions. Enquiry in this area tends to be more conventionally task and outcome-oriented in relation to the curriculum.

Teacher role	Acknowledge and use information about student performance
Student role	Receive a better informed pedagogy
Teacher engagement with students	Dissemination
Classroom	Data about student past performance
Team or department	Looking at samples of student work
School	Student attitude surveys, cohort exam and test scores
Network	Survey used to provide network level data from all schools

2. Students as active respondents

Teacher role	Hear what students say
Student role	Discuss their learning and approaches to teaching
Teacher engagement with students	Discussion
Classroom	Shared lesson objectives and explicit assessment criteria
Team or department	Students evaluate a unit of work
School	Traditional School Council / peer-led action groups
Network	Networked council of school council representatives

Through the NLC Transforming Learning development and enquiry project, a number of networks are using Hay-McBer online diagnostic software to generate new forms of data on pupil perceptions of classroom climate, and to develop a more collaborative and reflective approach across the network to speculate on the data and generate ideas for improvement, rather than private individual use of the feedback. The involvement of pupils in that process has been seen to be critical, not least as a significant test of the climate for taking supported risks. In this case, the teachers are demonstrating a willingness to move beyond pupil perceptions as a passive data source.

In the enquiry-oriented learning of teachers, whether students are a data source or active respondents, it is apparent that existing power relations are likely to remain much as ever, although recycled in different, more interesting and enjoyable forms. Where students work with adults as co-researchers, on issues that are agreed to be important, then more collaborative relationships result which have the potential to significantly alter the status quo.

Case Study: Partners in Learning

In Bedfordshire, where Students as Researchers (SaRs) now operates in all Upper Schools, a related project developed from this work, as described in the BSIP handbook extract below.

This innovative and exciting project has recently entered its fourth year. It arose out of the findings and recommendations of a student research project exploring trainee teachers and their school placements. The students effectively said that they wanted to be part of the process and helped to develop a process of involving students working very closely with trainee teachers and their mentors to provide feedback on lessons. Obviously there has to be training and discussion on sensitivities and boundaries, but all of those involved feel that they have benefited greatly. Schools operate the programme differently, with some focusing on trainee teachers, whilst others include newly qualified teachers within their programme. In one school students as partners in learning has been incorporated in to a whole-school programme, open to all staff interested in developing new ways of working with students and improving their classroom practice.

"I was really sceptical of the project in its early years, but now I am a convert. The personal benefit of having students observing my classroom techniques has been immense."

(Teacher of more than 20 years experience)

Pause for thought...

1. How are you already using data from pupils to support the development of teaching and learning in your own practice?
2. How regularly do you actively engage with pupil perceptions of the classroom?

3. Students as co-researchers

Teacher role	Listen in order to learn
Student role	Co-researcher with teacher on agreed issues
Teacher engagement with students	Dialogue (teacher-led)
Classroom	Focus groups conducted by student co-researchers
Team or department	Students assist in team or department action research
School	Investigating the use of space
Network	Transition between primary / secondary schools

In collaborative enquiry with students, knowledge creation is the effect of the combined social and intellectual capital of adults and young people comprising the school or network, where different perspectives and knowledge can be brought together. This indicates an increasing attentiveness to context but fundamentally research-based and theory-rich. The work is designed to generate new knowledge which will have an influence on the life of the school.

A significant number of networks are developing their own processes for generating learning from pupil perspectives. These include Networked Learning Walks, observations and intervisitations where pupils may provide insights that teachers do not have.

Following such visits, for example, one NLC has formed a network group of pupils to enquire, on its behalf, into how individual schools engage pupils in Assessment for Learning. This work will then become the focus for the next set of pupil intervisitations. Pupils here may be seen as co-researchers investigating matters of agreed importance. This engagement is obviously more exploratory and dialogic, although it is often still teacher-led.

Case Study: School Works

To test the hypothesis that changes to school design can have a positive impact on learning. A team of adults and students, who named themselves 'The Maverick Explorers' are involved in gathering and communicating information on a range of indicators throughout the project. The critical process of involving the whole school community in the redesign of the school involved using a range of inclusive approaches to gathering information and engaging in dialogue and discussion. These are outlined in the School Works Toolkit, which is free to all schools.

School Works is a school-design initiative, with the Architecture Foundation and Demos, which has been working in partnership with a large comprehensive in south London to redesign the building, timetable and learning spaces with DfES funding of over £7m.

Schoolworks, 2001, www.schoolworks.co.uk

Pause for thought…

Exploring the ways in which the school buildings and spatial arrangements are a form of 'hidden curriculum' may be a means whereby students and adults can together investigate and scrutinise together power relations that are implicit in the physical, organisational and social architecture.

Where and when are the spaces for dialogue around research and enquiry with pupils in your school and network?

4. Students as researchers

Teacher role	Listen in order to contribute
Student role	Initiator and director of research with teacher support
Teacher engagement with students	Dialogue (student-led)
Classroom	What makes a good lesson?
Team or department	Gender issues in technology subjects
School	Evaluation of PSHE system, radical school council
Network	Working on behalf of the network

Students as Researchers is different from the co-researching partnership previously described as it is students who decide the areas to research and who have control over decisions relating to the recruitment and composition of the group. This is where power relations (as the means to influence) begin to be reconfigured around partnership, suggesting the development of 'bottom-up' change.

The support of staff, and the school and network, continues to be fundamental to the success of the enterprise and the development, over time, of relationships where the differences between staff and student experiences and expectations can be explored and celebrated. As students move through the school, and as contexts differ, it is the processes and protocols, rather than content, which are likely to be transferable. Equally, sustainability must be considered at the outset through succession planning and embedding processes through the system. At one school, which has been working with SaRs for some years, the question 'How are the children involved?' is routinely asked of virtually every decision.

While SaRs work in England draws particularly on Australian perspectives on active citizenship and North American research there are important projects developing in 'the majority world' of Africa, South-East Asia and South America. Using approaches developed by non-governmental organisations for local community development, Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods are being used with children. This aims to encourage children's exploration of, reflection on and action in their environment, with the aim of strengthening their capacity for self-determination. PAR is participative research which focuses on small-scale, local experiments, such as the development of working children's co-operatives. This is clearly research with an emancipatory aim, recognising that oppression comes not only from material conditions but also in the means of knowledge production.

Key resource three

Fielding, M & Bragg, S, 2003, *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference*, Cambridge, Pearson Publishing.

Developed from the extensive Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP) research, this source book of strategies and ideas was designed for modification in schools.

Key resource four

Fraser, S, Lewis, V, Ding, S, Kellett & M, Robinson,C (Eds), 2004, *Doing Research with Children and Young People*, London, Sage

This edited collection covers a variety of areas including those beyond eduction.

Benefits of Students as Researchers

As identified in the case study below, students benefit from learning new and applicable skills through a meaningful context, where they can have some influence and be actively involved in the learning process. In this way, students are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning, and that of others, thereby genuinely becoming leaders in their own learning and life in school.

This naturally raises self-esteem and increases the motivation for further active involvement in learning and teaching. Through developing these different kinds of relationships with adults in school, research shows that students around the world have demonstrated a better understanding of the complexities of schools, with greater awareness of the challenges their teachers face (Macbeath et al, 2002). There is also the crucial opportunity to develop a shared language and understanding, thereby creating new knowledge together.

Case Study

Over a period of six years at an LEA all-girls 11 to 19 comprehensive in London, a Students as Researchers (SaRs) initiative was developed to enable the young people to investigate, analyse and present student perspectives on school life and learning, 150 students from Years 8 to 12 were given three days training as researchers, by an academic, in identifying research questions, research ethics and methods and the analysis of data and the presentation of findings. They were supported by a teacher researcher and the groups' write-ups of projects and outcomes were presented to the school council, selections of staff and governors and also education conferences. Their investigations covered a range of issues at different scales which included the following:

Inside the classroom

Student views on Key Stage 3 PHSE	Do pupils have good relationships with their teachers?
Wider school environment	Are students happy with the school environment?
Student welfare issues	How healthy is the food available in school? Do students find the system of rewarding achievement satisfactory?
	What opportunities are there for students to express their views and be listened to?

This extensive SaRs programme was evaluated by a Head of Year, who had mentored students as a Best Practice Research Scholarship enquiry, which involved 90 students from Year 8 to Year 12. The main question was, 'How does being a student researcher affect learning?' The majority of students experienced their selection and training to be positive and were overwhelmingly in favour of giving more of their peers the opportunity to undertake research, although they identified and expressed concern over methods and criteria for selection, suggesting that the researchers should be volunteers. 90 per cent of the respondents saw benefits from the programme in terms of their academic and social skills.

The top three influences on academic learning were identified as:

1. Managing time
2. Applying research skills to school subjects
3. Improved analytical skills

The influences on social learning were particularly:

- Working as a team
- Learning as a team
- Sharing ideas and tasks

The particular issues identified by the teacher researcher revolved around selection processes – whose voices are being listened to, the need to maintain momentum and pragmatically developed sustainability. In this case, extending the role of the school council and linking it to the network steering group was being considered(Naylor & Worrall, 2004).

'The specific appeal of SaRs may be that it enables young people from the dominant identity that they are offered in school - that of passive pupil who is the recipient of adult decisions in the classroom.'

Fielding & Bragg, Forthcoming

We know that practitioner research and enquiry contributes to teachers' continuing professional engagement and development, and the recent systematic review on collaborative CPD (Cordingley et al, 2004) emphasised the benefits of collective enquiry. The conditions for teaching and learning are developed when teachers collectively question routines and examine different possibilities at classroom or school level. Adults involved in collaborative enquiry with students, of whatever age, report surprise and pleasure at the young people's contribution. They consistently describe the reinvigorating experience of seeing and understanding teaching and learning from a student perspective - making the familiar unfamiliar. They enjoy working in a different way with groups of students they may not normally teach, and for many it serves as a reminder of why they entered teaching.

The benefits of engaging in SaRs work for schools and networks flow from the points made above. But apart from the 'virtuous circle' of motivation, enhanced self-esteem and responsible attitudes which may be seen to develop, SaRs is an important symbol of a school's commitment to active citizenship and democracy. These projects indicate the significant levels of trust and openness which are necessary to support such creative approaches to change.

What are the barriers?

A lack of confidence among both adults and young people may result from existing power relations where students are too often seen as passive recipients of transmission practices in school. Some of the greatest barriers to developing joint enquiry are adult perceptions of young people as being unable to take responsibility or to be ethically sensitive in their research. Teachers may be understandably anxious about opening their practise to scrutiny, for example if their experience of observation has previously been punitive. Likewise, students need time to develop the trust in relationships that allows risk-taking to happen, particularly where peer pressure may suggest that it is 'uncool' to contribute. Structures are of course critical and resources such as time and finance, need to be available. Where pressures to 'raise standards', for example through the literacy and numeracy hours, is particularly strong, such development may not be seen as a priority. Imposed factors such as SATS and Ofsted inspections (for maintained schools) will also influence the time and energy available in the system.

Practicalities

This section draws heavily on the work of Fielding and Bragg in their research into SaRs and the conditions that support such work. Educationalists involved agree that certain conditions and processes need to be in place if SaRs is to be effectively supported. In addition to the commitment of teachers and other adults championing the work, the endorsement of the Senior Management is critical, both symbolically and in providing resources. Access to clerical support is as important for Students as Researchers as for adults, and a budget for refreshments and travel is a demonstration of commitment. Embedding the work within the systems of the school, for example in relation to the induction of student or new teachers, is particularly desirable.

We all agree on the critical importance of support in research methods and skills. Typically, this has been provided by a higher education partner and has involved both students and adults. It is likely to comprise the exploration of ethical issues, facilitated discussion of topics and foci and training in methods which may be appropriate for different questions. The Toolkit for Teachers describes a variety of approaches which may be adapted to wean researchers away from reliance on the conventional questionnaire survey.

Protocols and lines of communication should be negotiated and set up in advance with continuing attention paid to the involvement of pupils as respondents in the process. A common problem for all researchers in schools is in gathering a huge amount of data, but with limited time set aside for analysis and making of meaning from it. The rhythms of the school year, including the pressures of examinations for students and the creation of development plans, means that the project planning and timing of different phases of the work is especially important. Fielding and Bragg (Forthcoming) suggest that the analysis stage may offer a particular opportunity for a wider constituency to discuss and collaboratively influence the research that may be most significant in supporting positive cultural change. Workshops at staff Inset days or as part of staff meetings are an example of where this might happen.

A major challenge is in sharing and providing feedback from the work so that content as well as processes will have an influence. While this should be planned for in advance, students often come up with imaginative ways of presenting their findings.

Demonstrating that the research has made a difference is fundamental to the credibility and continuation of such work and requires the commitment of active listening from a variety of people in the school or network hierarchy, including school governors. Students understand that not all recommendations can be implemented, but for most of them it is the possibility of having an influence that is important. Teachers often value the process most highly while for governors it may be the outcomes that matter.

The Children's Research Centre (CRC) is based at the Open University in Milton Keynes. Recognising that children are experts on their lives, its aim is to promote pupil voice by supporting children to carry out research on topics that are important to them, thus empowering them as active researchers .Topics in the pilot study included 'Gender Difference in the Computer Use of Year 5 Children' and the 'Social Nature of TV Viewing in 9 to 10 Year Old Children'. Diverse groups of children aged between 10 and 14 are offered a taught programme of two ten-week terms on all aspects of the research process, followed by one-to-one support to design and carry out a research project. Children are also helped to disseminate their research findings to other children, schools and relevant agencies.
http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk

Key resource five

Fielding, M & Bragg, S, Forthcoming, 'Its an equal thing…it's about achieving together: student voices and the possibility of a radical collegiality', chapter in *Improving Schools Through Collaborative Enquiry*, Jackson et al, London, Continuum

Issues

In exploring the significance of such encounters between adults and young people, Fielding (2004) notes the opportunities that collaborative 'dialogic research' provides – through collaborative agenda setting, debate about design and the production and analysis of collective research knowledge, generating a making of meaning which is greater than the sum of its parts. In surveying the benefits and limitations of students as a data source, as active respondents or co-researchers, he concludes that either students as co-researchers or Students as Researchers holds the greatest prospect for transforming relations in school. Evidence from the NLC programme thus far suggests that such activity not only liberates the enthusiasm of students and teachers but also that student reactions to changes in their learning have been consistently reported as a powerful influence for change.

If students are to be able to exercise greater leadership in and beyond schools then the opportunities to develop the kind of active engagement described in this paper is crucial. In the current excitement and 'fashionable pronouncements' coming from government about pupil voice or leadership the caveats of activists in this area must be heeded. Holdsworth advocates that, for active citizenship, negotiated classroom processes should be around the 'why' of learning as well as the 'how' and 'what' and must not devolve into 'trivial exercises in temporary engagement' (Holdsworth, 2004, p.7). He warns against tokenism, for example in the issues school councils are allowed to consider, and suggests that at times a focus on voice 'being heard' can be a safety valve, releasing the pressure for real change.

The TLRP and ESRC project Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning (Arnot et al, 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Macbeath et al, 2003), clearly identifies issues that those involved in this work need to continually address - that of creating new and different student elites, whose voices may be those who find it easiest to speak more coherently and those whom we find it easier to hear. Pupils are very different from each other and it is often those who are the poorest communicators (eg low achieving working class boys who are actually deeply dependent learners) whose need to be heard is greatest.

It is not just the power to speak and the right to be heard that are so critical in themselves, but also engaging with the purpose of the process. Student voice for what? The answer must be to make a difference - for those actively involved and also on behalf of others. Students, as well as teacher researchers, can simply recycle pre-received ideas. Studies internationally indicate, as emphasised by the systemmatic review on citizenship, that it is how we run our schools rather than what we teach that determines levels of active citizenship.

Key resource six

Holdsworth, R, 2000, 'Taking Young People Seriously Means Giving Them Serious Things To Do' in Mason, J & Wilkinson M, (Eds), *Taking Children Seriously*, University of Western Sydney, Bankstown

Pause for thought…

- Whose voices are being heard?
- Who listens?
- Do we listen to those who speak most articulately or with whom we identify?

Developing Students as Researchers is consuming of time and energy, and thus represents a significant commitment from the staff and students involved. A key issue lies in developing the capacity for involving other students and adults, perhaps beyond the school, in relationships with the wider community. Mentoring and training may be new roles that existing SaRs can take on, particularly in relation to younger children. Overt value placed on the work is obviously motivating. Together with presentations at assemblies, Inset days and conferences, the creation of artefacts such as leaflets and CDs help to celebrate the work in order to build on it and also act as important messages on the culture of the school to new members, whether students or teachers.

Conclusion

At a recent Teachers as Researchers conference held in a school I was asked, by the pupil who offered to guide me to the room, what the meeting was about. I explained that it involved teachers, classroom assistants and people from the University sharing ideas and findings from their enquiry in their schools, in order to understand and make things better in teaching and learning. “Cool,” he said. Collaborative enquiry and learning with such young people is not only rewarding, generating often profound insights and new knowledge created together, but also offers the possibility of reconfiguring relationships in schools and networks.

Fielding (2004) argues persuasively for the transformative potential of collaborative enquiry and Students as Researchers in building a ‘radical collegiality’ where dialogue between adults and young people in schools enables joint meaning to be made together. The ‘spaces’ for such encounters are hard won and challenging to all involved, but present very real opportunities to explore the ways in which schools, as communities of teachers and learners (who may either be students or professionals) can move from the straitjackets, which have historically bound their roles, to more open and inclusive relationships.

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Pause for thought…

- Are the students exploring the topics of importance to them rather than choosing from a menu of what is felt to be appropriate?
- Are the students volunteers or is there a danger of creating a new elite?
- Are the purposes of learning (the ‘why’) being investigated as well as the ‘what’ and ‘how’?

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Resources

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Fielding, M & Bragg, S, 2003, *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference.*
Macbeath, J, Demetriou, H, Rudduck, J & Myers, K, 2003, *Consulting Pupils: A toolkit for teachers,* Cambridge, Pearson Publishing. Resources developed from the TLRP project, with one purchased for every network.

Holdsworth, R, (ed), CONNECT. Magazine presenting challenging questions around active citizenship for students, with details of projects (www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/EPM/YRC/publications/connect.shtml)

Networked Learning Group, *Nexus,* Special Issue Volume 2 on Pupil Involvement in Networked Learning Communities

Websites with useful links

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www.consultingpupils.org.uk
www.cypu.gov.uk
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Reflective notes

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