

Focus on ... a cluster working with Project 6

Phil Freeman, is working with a group of schools in Liverpool on using role-play to help students overcome obstacles to learning. He writes here about the early stages of his on-going work.

You might think that four teachers stuck on a four hour train journey from Liverpool to Cambridge would get drunk and talk about *anything* but education. The fact that we didn't was partly because there was no bar - only a trolley that got off at Nuneaton and never returned - but also because we spent the time discussing educational research. Ridiculous but true. It was November 1 and we were about to attend the Network Conference on "Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning".

We had only been in existence as a group since September and this was the first time that we had all met, although I had already worked with staff and pupils in all the four schools involved. My brief had been to set up and run a "satellite" research group in Liverpool, as part of Project 6, whose particular interest would lie in discovering how role play could be used to enable pupils to identify, and find ways of dealing with, the obstacles to learning they encounter in the classroom. The idea was to aim to help teachers make their classroom management more effective through consultation with pupils and to focus on pupils' perspectives on classroom incidents. We were also hoping to give pupils opportunities to talk about learning and to develop a language for doing so whilst encouraging a sense of mutual responsibility for learning among teachers and pupils.

Choosing the schools with which to work was easy. First, I asked the Headteachers of the three schools in which I was already working. I then approached the Head of the other Comprehensive in the area and we

had a group of schools which were all situated in the same EAZ and had numerous existing links. I met teachers who were willing to

take part, discussed their involvement and ended up with four groups of pupils - a reception class, a Year 2 class and two Year 9 groups. The pupils were told about the project and letters sent to their parents giving them the opportunity to withdraw their children from the project if they wished and inviting them to ask for more information. Noone did either.

At this early stage it is difficult to say anything about our work that doesn't sound too superficial, but here are several observations that have already emerged:

- *the ease and enthusiasm with which the staff have taken to the role of teacher-researcher and the lift that this appears to have given to their teaching*
- *the enthusiasm with which the pupils have become involved: the idea to use role-play has proved to be successful as it allows pupils to explore issues in a relatively non-threatening way*
- *competence in the use of role-play and drama techniques is an invaluable strategy in research as well as in teaching and learning. In addition, pupils soon become used to the idea of having their work video-recorded. The competent use of a video camera is an easy skill to acquire and provides an excellent method of record-keeping. Written work is also useful, in the form of personal accounts, answers to specific questions, observations and impressions*
- *during the sessions, pupils develop transferable skills in areas such as creativity, communication, decision making, co-operative group work, working to aims and deadlines and coming to terms with feelings and emotions*

• *some "naughty" Y2 pupils, when asked to role-play "being naughty", didn't seem to know how to do so and their behaviour was near perfect. For one boy, the extreme of naughtiness was, in his own words, that he "moved around on the mat" he was sitting on*

• *one of the factors that is seen by pupils to cause the most disruption is name-calling and verbal bullying. Furthermore, insults to members of the family - and the mother in particular - are the taunts that are most likely to cause a serious incident*

We expect to continue for another term before stopping to analyse our data, but in the meantime we plan to hold a half-day conference for staff and pupils from the four schools, with the proceedings recorded on video, at which students can take turns to show and talk about what they have done. We also intend to have all our video data edited professionally with a soundtrack and music provided by the pupils.

In an unceasing quest for balance, it is also my duty to report on the difficulties we have found - for example, the class that waited expectantly to watch the playback of their work on television but were unable to sit still or keep quiet for more than five seconds. Ironically in a project intended to be liberating, I found myself shouting, "Right, if you don't sit down and shut up, not only will you not see the video, but I'll keep you all behind after the bell!" - or, something like that; I didn't really have time to record it accurately.

Still, here's looking forward to our next trip to Cambridge - though this time maybe with our own drinks trolley.

What's In It For Us?

Pupil Consultation and Participation

Jean Rudduck is co-ordinator of the ESRC Network Project. This article is adapted from her address at the November 1 conference and is the first in a series of articles planned as coverage of that event.

***'Educating students today is a far different and more complex proposition than it has been in the past.'* (Nieto, 1994)**

I would argue that it is a priority in education to consult young people about learning. They have a lot to tell us; they are observant, analytic, and on the whole their voices are constructive and not oppositional. Consultation enhances pupils' sense of self-respect and their sense of contribution to the school as a community. Moreover, consultation offers teachers a practical agenda for responding to the things that get in the way of young people's learning.

From an early age in school young people are capable of insightful and constructive analysis of social situations and if their insights are not harnessed in support of their own learning then they may use them strategically to avoid learning in school and conspire unwittingly in the process of their own under-achievement.

There are many reasons for taking seriously what pupils have to say about teaching, learning and schooling: most importantly our concern about pupils who disengage and our awareness that schools have changed less in the last twenty years or so than young people have changed and that the structures of schooling offer, on the whole, less responsibility and autonomy than many young people experience outside school.

The data on the three questions that follow (*What's in it for pupils? What's in it for teachers? What's in it for schools?*) come from various projects (national and local, longitudinal and short term, in primary and secondary schools, some recently completed and some current); all have had pupil consultation as a distinctive feature.

What's in it for pupils?

- *being heard and being taken seriously*

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- *a greater sense of membership so that they feel positive about school*
- *a stronger sense of respect and self worth so that they feel positive about themselves*
- *a stronger sense of agency so that they are ready to contribute to the improvement of learning*
- *adults understanding their experiences and taking action to help students establish and sustain a positive attitude to learning and to themselves as learners*

But we have to ask ourselves, in the acoustic of the school, whose voice is heard and whose voice goes unheard?

What's in it for teachers?

- *a practical agenda for improvement*
- *a sharper awareness of young people's capabilities and a revaluation of images of childhood*
- *a re-affirmation of the importance of the relationship between teachers, pupils and learning*

But it can be uncomfortable: teachers can feel anxious about the possibility of personal criticism and uncertain where, in a pressured timetable, they can find space for consulting pupils.

What's in it for schools?

- *an agenda for change that can make a difference*
- *a stronger sense of the school as a learning community*
- *a basis for self-evaluation*
- *a commitment to 'enacting' and not merely 'teaching about' citizenship*

But it can present challenges that not all schools are ready to confront.

Fashion - or foundation for 'a new order of experience'?

Does pupil consultation / pupil participation / pupil voice - all ways of signalling that pupils matter in school - represent merely a populist movement that will soon

fade, or is it underpinned by something important enough to survive the pressures of the time?

We know that it will take time and very careful preparation to build a climate in which both teachers and pupils feel comfortable working together on a constructive review of aspects of teaching, learning and schooling. A pre-condition is that teachers must see the students' perspectives as worth engaging with.

But the issue of sustaining development in the present climate is also challenging. Will the commitment to pupil participation survive? It depends in part on what mandatory tasks schools have to engage with. Tyack and Tobin (1990) remind us about the temptations of the project conveyor belt: 'Each is taken up in turn, ... elbowed out to make room for the next newcomer, and yet we are not saved'.

A lot of energies and forces have come together in support of pupil consultation and participation: work on the rights of the child; youth councils and parliaments; citizenship education. Another influence has been research in the social sciences which asks powerful questions about the impact on constructions of childhood of an ideology of immaturity. Young people, 'the most photographed and least listened to members of society', are constantly presented as in a state of 'becoming' rather than as 'being' actors in their own right. This view of young people as 'inadequately socialised' still retains a powerful hold on educational, economic and social planning.

But what motivates us in our support for student participation and student consultation? Are we 'using' student voice to serve the narrow ends of a grade-obsessed society, or empowering students by offering them greater agency in schools? What is the balance in our concern between school improvement and school empowerment?

Nieto, S. (1994) Lessons from students on creating a chance to dream, *Harvard Educational Review*, 64, 4, pp.392-246

Hart, R. (1992) Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship, *Innocenti Essays* No 4, Florence: UNICEF

Tyack, D. & Tobin, W. (1990) The grammar of schooling: why has it been so hard to change? *American Educational Research Journal*, 31,3,453.

Researching Student Perspectives

Conference at Cambridge - March 16, 2002

The conference - at the Faculty of Education - is one of a series of events organised by the Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project, funded by the ESRC as part of its Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Sessions will be led by teacher researchers, by advisers and by university researchers who are working closely with schools. In each of the four seminar sessions, there will be three or four seminars, at least one led by teacher researchers, and covering both primary and secondary interests. Each seminar will have either two short linked presentations plus discussion, or one longer presentation plus discussion. At least two seminars will focus on student voice and young people with learning difficulties.

Provisional programme:

10.00 - 10.30 arrival, coffee and tea

10.30 - 10.40 welcome

10.45 - 11.30 **Seminar session 1:**

Presentations will include:

- * Students talking and writing about 'learning to learn'
- * Students responding to visual material in picture books
- * Students talking about learning and the classroom environment
- * Different ways of consulting students
- * Developing the student role in decision making and the school council

11.30 - 12.15 **Seminar session 2:**

Presentations will include:

- * What we learn about engaging students in their learning - whole school approaches
- * What boys tell us about learning modern foreign languages
- * What students tell us about friendship and learning
- * What different groups of students tell us about the social conditions of learning
- * 'Shirkers to Workers' - the students' perspectives and school support strategies

12.15 - 12.45 **Plenary:**

*Alan Evans from Cardiff University will outline his work with pupils and the House of Commons: **Listening to Children: The Children's Parliament on the Environment.***

12.45 - 13.45 Lunch

13.45 - 14.30 **Seminar session 3:**

Presentations will include:

- * What gets in the way of learning? - using role play to understand students' behavioural problems
- * Students finding their own voice through new technology
- * The voices of students with special educational needs
- * New roles for students: students as researchers

14.30 - 15.15 **Seminar session 4:**

Presentations will include:

- * Students learning from visiting other schools
- * Student participation and the school council
- * Students talking about assessment: improving learning
- * Student perspectives on 'the year 3 dip'
- * How teachers make use of student comments on teaching and learning

15.15 - 15.30 Concluding event, followed by wine and fruit juice.

The conference is free for teacher researchers who are presenting their work in one of the seminars (and costs of their travel and, where necessary, their accommodation will be met). For participants not presenting, there will be a nominal cost of £10.00 towards the costs of refreshments, lunch and materials. Please phone Ann Curtis on 01223 507258, or email her at ac348@cam.ac.uk, if you wish to attend.

Are you on the Network's Database?

At the end of last year, we set up a database on the Network's website to enable members to make their own contacts and establish their own clusters and support groups. Below are two sample entries:

Name of Contact:

Phil Freeman

Contact details:

philfreeman@cableinet.co.uk

Level of experience in pupil consultation:

I have done a bit over the years.

Current areas of involvement in pupil consultation:

"Satellite" group of four schools in Liverpool investigating pupils' perspectives on classroom incidents using role play and using video recordings as data.

Also involved in Best Practice Research Scholarship investigating use of KS3 students to help KS2 students learning French.

Areas in which collaboration with others would be welcomed:

Any!

Name of Contact:

David Leat, TLF Regional Director

Contact details:

Eastern Cherryburn, Mickley Square, Stocksfield NE43 7DB

Level of experience in pupil consultation:

Reasonable experience personally - have interviewed many pupils using stimulated recall and helped many teachers use interviews, questionnaires and pupil learning logs.

Current areas of involvement in pupil consultation:

As TLF (KS3) Regional Director, I work with four pilot LEAs/Consultants, each with 10/12 pilot schools with two pilot departments. These departments are doing developmental projects mainly in areas of questioning, teaching thinking and AFL. As yet relatively few are using pupil consultation but it is a recommended strategy in pilot materials.

Areas in which collaboration with others would be welcomed:

1) Issues in interviewing; 2) connecting outcomes of consultation to pedagogy and teachers' planning and pedagogical knowledge; 3) accessing low achieving pupils' views/feelings.

The full database can be accessed at www.consultingpupils.co.uk and although designed as a self-help tool, we would, nevertheless, naturally be delighted to support any networks established through this database in any way we feasibly can.

If you have not sent in details and would like to be added, please fill in and return the enclosed form.

C

ontacts:

Project co-ordinator: Jean Rudduck

Network co-ordinator: Nick Brown

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