



# ***Listening to Learners***

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### ***Introduction***

As Hammersley (2002) argues, one of the fundamental challenges for educational research is making the journey from research to policy and practice. For too long the perspective of learners has been ignored in educational research: "...rarely are their voices taken seriously into account in policies devised to improve teaching, learning and achievement" (Wood, 2003:365-6), despite the fact that learners, as Pollard, Triggs, Broadfoot *et al* (2000) have noted, are expert commentators. Learner voice is coming of age and through research, practice is developing and understanding deepening.

This report is organised into two parts: the first part is a review of the literature on learner voice, which was used to inform our ongoing learner voice work as well as highlighting issues of common concern across all phases of education, primary, secondary and tertiary as well as identify gaps in the literature which could be discussed at the one day conference linked to this work.

The one day conference: *Listening to Learners: Partnerships in Action*, aimed to disseminate innovative work in progress as well as good practice from other projects and initiatives. There were key note presentations from a number of speakers: researchers, academics and practitioners who provided details of current research (Pippa Lord), theoretical underpinnings (Michael Fielding), good practice (Gill Mullis and Laurie Goodlad). However the most important contributions came from young people, secondary school pupils, who presented during the plenary session and also facilitated the workshops. Following the event a conference wiki (<http://listeningtolearners.pbworks.com>) was set up to enable delegates to continue discussions and conversations on learner voice as well as a repository for conference materials.

There have been a number of reviews of the literature on learner voice undertaken by individuals and organisations, which are reviewed and cited in our own work. Our review cannot claim to be comprehensive nor exhaustive but serves as a useful starting point in setting out the policy background and context to learner voice, the various typologies and theoretical frameworks that have been developed, as well as some of the methodological issues and ethical concerns associated with learner voice work.

The second part is a case study of a student voice project which UEL has been engaged in since 2007. This case study is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it examines some of the tensions and ambiguities that exist when students are asked to become independent researchers. Secondly, it considers the extent to which student voice represents joint responsibility in the developments taking place or just the minority voices within pupil and teacher communities of practice. Thirdly, it raises questions about societal values and the contrived distance between adults and children in different cultural contexts.

At a time when research reveals that British children represent some of the unhappiest within the industrialised world, recognising the pervasiveness of the "ideology of immaturity" (Ruddock and Fielding, 2006:225) that exists in many schools in England can reduce hope in an increasingly complex world. Often couched in terms of inevitability, such an ideology can drain energy and commitment of both learners and teachers. The case study illustrates how young people, if listened to, have the potential to transform school processes, purposes and

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procedures. The voices of the learners in the study and their concerns give rise to complex hope in exceedingly complex times.

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### ***Part 1: Learner Voice - A literature review***

#### ***1.0 Introduction***

The interest in 'learner voice' has been steadily increasing in the UK for more than a decade and has become embedded in both policy and practice in educational institutions and government departments as well as within agencies working with young people in their communities.

This review is organised into six sections. In the introductory section we set out a number of definitions of learner voice. In the second section we consider learner voice (role and participation) in the policy and legislative context, both national and international. The third section outlines the theoretical frameworks and typologies which have been adapted and developed. The fourth section on methodology lists some of the methods used to capture learner voice with a focus on the ethical issues and concerns. Following on from this the fifth section considers some of the challenges associated with learner voice. In the sixth and final section we provide details of other recent reviews on learner voice.

Fielding (2009) describes 'student voice' as 'a portmanteau term'. We adopted the term 'learner voice' as the title for this work since we endeavoured to encompass activity described as: 'pupil voice' and 'student voice'. However since these terms are often used synonymously in the literature we have done likewise in this review.

The term 'voice' also gives rise to concern. As Robinson and Taylor note not only are "monolingual assumptions illusory" (Robinson & Taylor, 2006: 6) but that 'voice' encompasses much more than the speech of the speaker. Voice then is used as 'strategic shorthand' by academics and practitioners who recognise its limitations (Robinson & Taylor, 2006: 6) and recognise that meaning is a composite notion.

Rudd maintains that learner voice is about: "Empowering learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests and needs in order to develop educational experiences better suited to those individuals" (2007 :8). Johnson et al (2001) suggest that: "Learner voice is about considering the perspectives and ideas of learners, respecting what everyone has to say, taking risks, sharing, listening, engaging and working together in partnership". Fielding refers to student voice as the practice of: "Listening purposefully and respectfully to young people in the context of formal schooling" (2008:2).

Integral to the idea of inclusive education is the process of increasing participation and involving students in planning and decision making. In learner voice activities the form, style, content and purpose of education is shared in this process. Many schools are now embedding learner voice practices in their institutions. Rudd (2007) argues for a radical approach to learner voice, one which becomes an empowering experience for learners and facilitates a change in institutional and cultural attitudes from formal and traditional methods of consultation, which in the past have excluded some students, to a new and progressive model wherein learners have ownership, responsibility and management powers. In this new approach alternative methods of listening to learners are embraced, schools will inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower their pupils. However as noted above learner voice is not a single voice, students do not all share the same opinions, and often will prioritise different issues when their views are asked for.

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Rudd, (2007) argues that the benefits of embedding learner voice are many, such as:

- a deeper engagement with learning
- improved meta-cognitive skills
- greater responsibility amongst learners
- better relationships between learners and staff
- making education for learners more democratic, empowering and engaging.

Flutter and Ruddock (2004) argue that although learner voice has been on the agenda since the early 1990s, learners are seldom consulted and remain largely unheard in the change process in many educational institutions. Learner voice can have a direct impact in changing the processes, mechanisms and ways students learn and therefore can have a direct influence on their education. Rudd (2007) argues that education should be reshaped around the needs of the learner, rather than the learner conforming to the system. However this requires significant changes in the culture of education and the relationships between schools, teachers, and learners (Rudd, 2007; Leadbeater, 2004).

Failure to engage with learners in the education process risks increasing disengagement and disillusion in their educational experiences. When students have a voice and an influence on decisions and outcomes they are more likely to participate and to learn through participation (Rudd *et al*, 2007; Smyth, 2006; Mitra, 2001).

Research by Fielding (2007) highlights that by eliciting learner voice, learners will feel that their views are taken more seriously, an increased sense of respect will in turn make them more inclined to reflect and discuss their learning, and can provide the tools to influence what, where and when they learn.

## **2.0 The Importance of Learner Voice**

### **2.1 Legal and Policy Frameworks**

By the end of the twentieth century the idea that young people should have a say about many local and national policies, services and issues was becoming widely accepted (Bragg, 2007). The idea that the voices of learners can influence educational policy and practice has been a more recent phenomenon. Student and pupil voices have been sought not just in relation to education but also concerning health, social services, the environment and the private sector where young people are seen as consumers in an important new market. However there is still debate as to the types of issues that young people including learners should be consulted on. There are also questions as to the methods used in eliciting their voices.

There are a number of drivers behind the renewed interest in learner voice - academic, legal, political and social, stemming from a broader motivation driven by legal models and frameworks, the primary instrument being the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted in 1989. In this framework children are seen as autonomous individuals, social actors with agency deserving respect and consideration but also: "In need of protection and provision (UNCRC 1989 Article 12). This document purports that as social actors the voices of children need to be heard, they should be encouraged to express their opinions freely and

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participate in decision making processes in school, university and colleges and in wider society. Many academics adopt this children's rights approach such as Hart (1992), John (2003), Kirby (2001) and Macbeath (2004).

There are also political and policy initiatives that call for the representation of young peoples voices, such as the Children's Act of 1989, which makes it a legal requirement that children and young people are consulted and involved in the process of decision making on matters that affect them.

In 2001 the Government created the Children and Young Peoples Unit (CYPU) and stated that children and young people should participate and influence government departments across the board including education.

In 2002 the DfES published an Action Plan entitled 'Listening to Learn'. This was followed in 2003 by the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' and then 'Youth Matters in 2005'. These policy documents made explicit the need for learners to have a say in policies that affected them in primary and secondary education and further and higher education. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) school inspection framework now requires inspectors and schools to 'systematically seek the views of pupils'. The Education Act 2002 similarly places a duty on schools and Local Authorities to consult students about decisions that affect them, in accordance with the Secretary of States guidance.

There are several justifications for listening to learners voices, the participation of students is said to lead to better outcomes in schools, improving institutions, services and programmes. As students become more engaged in school they are less likely to become disaffected and more likely to remain in education or further their education by progressing to sixth form, further education colleges or attend university. Listening to learner voices will also improve policy by helping policy makers understand the lives of young people in schools and colleges. Listening to student voices will enhance school improvement and lessen young people's resistance as they feel their views are respected and they are taken seriously (Bragg, 2007).

There are also other drivers that influence and shape educational policy. Ruddock highlights the fact that falling standards were a source of anxiety to policy makers as far back as 1944, when a study of illiteracy found that one out of every four school leavers could not spell 'pleasant' (1999:4). There was also concern about 'juvenile delinquency' now termed 'anti social behaviour' in contemporary Britain. In many cases listening to young people's voices can be used instrumentally, a means to an end rather than primarily for the right of the child (Bragg 2997).

### 2.2 Personalised Learning

In a recent report Rudduck, Brown and Hendy (2006) on personalised learning projects demonstrates how learner voice is at its heart and proved to be a crucial dimension in the teachers' developing understanding of personalising learning.

As Hargreaves argues: "Learner voice is the most powerful lever for personalising education" (2004:7). Leadbeater, a proponent of the concept, states that personalising education means putting the learner at the heart of the education system, he argues that learner voice is a fundamental aspect of personalisation (2004). In his model of 'Personalisation through Participation' as a means of reforming the education system, Leadbeater argues that there is a need for a new



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culture of learning in the UK. In 2004 he argued: "At the moment the individual is fitted to the system rather than being empowered to shape the services to meet their needs" (2004:2). Leadbeater's model is user centred, and requires participation in the design and delivery of the services users receive. It is holistic and provides a network of support with appropriate organisations getting better connected. The learner becomes an active informed participant in the process. Service innovation is a joint production combining producers and consumers. Some scholars may not be happy with the idea of learners as consumers and may reject the neo-liberal model.

For Leadbeater, personalisation is a way in which services potentially become more responsive with the aim of unlocking potential and giving users more choice about the services they use and more say in navigating their way through services, once they have access to them. In secondary education children could have more choice over their 'learning pathway' and the pace and style at which they learn. Leadbeater argues that this 'Learning to Learn agenda' enables students to be more involved in decision making, about the way in which they learn, in a manner that suits them best. Allowing students more choice in the curriculum and the ways they are assessed as well as over study options or modules which appeal to them, they can then construct their own curriculum from a range of choices both academic and vocational. Learners can also choose how they are assessed, produce their own revision booklet and design their own tests. Users take on the role of producers in the design and shaping of the education system, as to how and what it looks like. This new approach however could be problematic, it may not sit comfortably with all institutions and may be rejected by some Heads, teachers and support staff.

Leadbeater argues that the current Labour model is: "Voice through the notion of citizenship, conferred through formal participation on governing bodies or student councils" (2004:5), this is limited in his view. Instead he maintains that:

"People need a direct voice, in the way services are developed and delivered. There is a need for new ways of hearing the voice above and beyond formal democratic structures. Users become consumers, commissioners, co producers and co-designers, users are active participants in the shaping, development and delivery of education" (2004:5).

Leadbeater argues that personalised learning does not apply market thinking to education. It is not designed to turn children and parents into consumers of education. The aim is to promote personal development through self realisation, self enhancement, and self development. The child / learner is active, responsible, self motivated, a co-author determining how education is delivered. The government is pursuing personalised education as it believes that it will improve standards in schools (Leadbeater, 2004).

### 2.3 Improving schools

Ruddock and Flutter (2004) demonstrate that there is an element of institutional self interest behind consultation. They highlight how listening to learner voices is perceived as a key to improving teaching and learning. Their research in primary and secondary schools across England has demonstrated that pupils of all ages can show a remarkable capacity to discuss their learning in a considered and insightful way, although they may not always be able to articulate their ideas in the formal language of education. Resonating with this work, Jelly (2000) consulted pupils in a special needs school and found clear evidence that consulting young learners about

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their learning enhanced self esteem and confidence and promoted stronger engagement and motivation to learn and encouraged pupils to become more active members of the school community

Rather than supporting learning Flutter and Rudduck (2004) claim that the emphasis of the current government has focused on an 'achievement culture' that concentrates on performance, targets, outcomes and a schools positioning in the league tables a view shared by other such as Fielding (2004), and Smyth (2006).

It is widely recognised that pupils who are less confident in their abilities as learners are particularly vulnerable to loss of motivation when continually faced with poor results and negative feedback. Evidence gathered by Flutter and Ruddock (2004) in pupil consultation projects confirms the profound impact that frequent negative feedback can have on attitudes and self esteem. However, they also noted that confidence and engagement with learning could be restored, in some cases, if pupils were given opportunities to experience success in their learning and if they were supported in developing more positive self images.

Traditionally, the pupil's role within school has been a passive one, "with pupils regarded as consumers or products of educational provision rather than active participants" (Flutter and Ruddock 2004:14). Conferring opportunities for active agency can have a transforming effect on pupils and ultimately on schools themselves. It is interesting to note the reasons why schools initially decided to introduce pupil consultation and participation initiatives. Some schools began their work in response to specific concerns such as high levels of pupil disengagement with learning, particularly boys. While others took a broader interest in the notion of pupil voice and saw pupil consultation and pupil participation strategies as contributing to the development of a more positive learning and inclusive culture within the school.

Consulting pupils about teaching and learning presents risks and challenges as well as opportunities. Teachers may find that pupil consultation brings to light issues which are not simple and straightforward to address. The process itself can create or deepen tensions, either between staff members or between teachers and pupils. There may be reluctance among teachers and other members of staff to introduce change or to act upon pupil data, and there can be practical difficulties of finding the time and resources required. Pupils too may find consultation uncomfortable because they may be worried that it could affect their relationships with peers, they may be disappointed or frustrated when their views are sidelined and some may regard consultation with deep suspicion or a degree of anxiety because they are unaccustomed to having their views listened to by adults.

Hart (1997) argues that "Only through direct participation can children develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and a sense of their own competence and responsibility to participate" (Hart, 1997:3).

Flutter and Ruddock build on Hart's (1992) ladder of participation to demonstrate how the amount of consultation and decision making in a school can vary. The bottom rung of the ladder is zero consultation. There is no element of pupil participation or pupil consultation within the school. The first rung is 'listening to pupils' and shows that pupils are used only as a data source: teachers respond to data but pupils are not involved in the discussion of findings, there may be no feedback to pupils, teachers only act on the data gathered. The second rung of the ladder represents pupils as active participants. Teachers initiate enquiry and interpret the data but pupils are taking some role in decision making; there is likely to be some feedback to

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pupils on the findings drawn from the data. The third rung represents pupils as researchers, they are involved in enquiry and have an active role in decision making; there will be feedback and discussion with pupils regarding findings drawn from the data. Finally the top of the ladder is reached when pupils are fully active participants, when pupils and teachers jointly initiate enquiry; and pupils play an active role in decision making together with teachers they plan action in light of the data gathered and review the impact of the intervention.

### 2.4 The Personal Development Model

One of the most frequent debates about learner voice relates to the benefits that it will bring to young people personally. Commonly listed benefits include a greater self esteem, self respect, greater confidence and competence, more trust in adults, better relationships with peers and teachers, a greater sense of responsibility for taking increased control over aspects of their lives, social inclusion, better understanding of decision making processes, and finally a sense of fun and enjoyment. Students and pupils may also gain practical skills such as public speaking, time management and convening and running meetings. However it has been argued that these benefits may be confined to a small number of learners who take part thus excluding others further (Hadfield and Haw, 2000).

### 2.5 The Citizenship Agenda

The currency of citizenship as a political issue and statements by the government concerning stakeholder democracy have strengthened calls for the increased involvement of young people as members of schools and neighbourhoods. Citizenship education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) put the emphasis on young people developing skills of participation in their schools and wider communities, and may be helping to revitalise Youth Councils and other forums (Bragg, 2007). Osler (2000) argues that consulting young people and involving them in decision making, is not only about recognising their rights but also can help students develop skills of cooperation which are necessary to achieve a more democratic society. Through this process it is hoped that young people will be more likely to get involved in democratic institutions when they are older, being involved in political participation may lead to these young citizens taking their rights and responsibilities seriously. In this model children are viewed as citizens and not as consumers. Bragg (2007) suggests that in a more radical version consulting young people in sites such as schools will “Model a greater democracy than currently exists, and by prefiguring it, bring it into existence” (Bragg, 2007:15). This view is open to critique from scholars who interrogate the notion of ‘democracy’ applied to this context.

In a more pragmatic model participation is said to teach children the skills of compromise and coping with disappointment, the features of adult political life. Examples of these may include schools councils (Flutter and Ruddock 2004).

### **3.0 Theoretical frameworks**

The current fascination with learner voices and the wider rubric of consulting children and young people has been further enhanced by significant conceptual and theoretical developments, in particular in how children are viewed in the social sciences. The new social studies of childhood have challenged the tendency to consider children in relation to the family, school or nation, or as developing adults, new studies have argued for a view of children as individuals in their own right, whose present choices and views are important and worthy of being heard. However alongside these developments, children and young people are also viewed in society as a 'market' in their own right, they are seen as important influencers of choice on family purchases such as holidays, cars and computers. As a result marketers are spending vast amounts of money finding out about children's perspectives and interests in consumer culture (Bragg, 2007). These marketing models have been increasingly infiltrating public services and Bragg suggests that much can be learned from this area about contemporary society, young people and methods.

In a recent paper, Robinson and Taylor (2007), argue the case for a theoretical consideration of learner voice work. Firstly, they argue to challenge what they and Fielding (2004) see as the "danger" of performativity – learners being consulted to raise standards rather than for social or personal development. Secondly, to better understand the values which underpin learner voice work. They identify four core or underpinning values which are at the centre of student voice work:

1. A conception of communication as dialogue.
  2. The requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity.
  3. The recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic.
  4. The possibility for change and transformation.
- (Robinson and Taylor (2007:8),

Taking each value in turn they consider how these values might be theorised and the consequences both ethically and practically of adopting a particular stance.

### **3.1 Frameworks and Typologies in the Learner Voice Literature**

There is an extensive range of student voice activities, typologies and frameworks as well as a diverse range of research methods that have been used to elicit the views of learners. Key issues emerging in recent work have been the impact of visual methods and the more prominent role that students play in the design and process of learner voice work (Fielding, 2008). There is a wide range of both research and professional activity in consulting young people and listening to learner voices.

Under the broad heading of learner voice there are a number of diverse activities: These include buddying, coaching, mentoring and peer teaching. Students can also be prefects and sit on class or school councils. These activities can be seen to benefit individual learners both academically and socially. Moreover, there are activities in which students can work in partnership with their teachers and peers, these can fall under the rubric of students as researchers or co-researchers and student ambassadors. Thirdly there are a range of activities in which learners can express their opinions on matters, as observers, as informants in teacher consultation about effective teaching and learning, they can be present on staff appointment panels, and can play a role as student governors or school board

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members. Students can also partake in student focus groups and surveys as well as being involved in Ofsted inspections.

Hart (1997) tackles the thorny issue of power and participation when working in partnership with children by utilising the metaphor of a ladder of participation previously mentioned. Many scholars have drawn on this model which describes the lowest rung of the ladder as representing non participation or manipulation, the next rung is decoration, the third rung is tokenism, the fourth rung signifies consultation and the fifth participation, the sixth describes co-construction and the seventh 'child-initiated and directed' and finally the eight rung and the top of the ladder is 'child initiated, shared decisions' with adults.

A feminist critique of Hart's work is offered by John (1996) who problematises the ladder metaphor, arguing that it could be interpreted as reinforcing traditional notions of patriarchy in which "Rights are bestowed by the powerful on the less powerful" (1996:5). John argues instead for a rights based approach, that brings to the fore the politics of child participation which "also encompasses the construction of creative alliances with adults which forms the true basis of an emotional democracy on which children's participation must be based" (1996:19). John distinguishes between the three pillars of responsibility, unity and involvement to 'bridge' the gulf between adults and children in participatory approaches to voice.

Hadfield and Haw (2001) use a tripartite typology which distinguishes between three different kinds of learner voice. These are the authoritative, critical and therapeutic, "that enable us to understand the links, both possible and actual, between the construction of 'voice' and the practice of action" (2001:488).

Fielding, influenced by both Hart and John, proposes a multi pronged dynamic framework that begins with 'students a data source', moving to 'students as active participants' then to 'students as co-researchers and finally the equitable and powerful 'students as researchers' in their own right engaged in 'joint work' with academics and teachers (Fielding, 2008). Interrogating the assumptions behind much of the literature on learner voice, Fielding asks a series of powerful questions such as:

- Who is allowed to speak?
- To who?
- What are they allowed to speak about?
- What language is encouraged or allowed?
- Who decides the answers to these questions?
- How are those decisions made?
- How, when, where, to whom and how often are these decisions communicated?

Moreover in relation to listening he asks:

- Who is listening?
  - How and why?
- (Fielding, 2001:5).

Fielding asks these questions to address a concern that: "Student voice is turning out to be a dissembling device directed at purposes that have little to do with encouraging the agency and aspirations of young people (2001:1).

### **4.0 Methodological Issues**

#### **4.1 Methods of Eliciting Learner Voices**

There are a range of methods currently used in the consultation process by academics, teachers and researchers and by young people working with them. These include: Individual interviews, group interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observation, the use of forums and school councils, suggestion boxes, ideas booths, listening posts, graffiti walls. More recently more creative visual methods have become popular such as multi media approaches, collage, photography, drawing, and also audio-recording. Scrap books, logs, blogs, toys, drama and role play are also encouraged as well as the use of electronic methods such chatrooms, Wikis and Edublogs.

The notion of 'photo voice' is a new visual approach utilised in the research design process of a student as researcher (SAR) project by Thomson and Gunter (2007). They use a technique of photo-elicitation designed to stimulate a response in its viewers in ways that reduces shyness or reticence and provokes the production of community and local knowledge.

#### **4.2 Students as Researchers (SAR)**

In the mid 1990's students were used as co-researchers, teachers identified issues of concern and sought the active support of learners in carrying out the research, analysing the data and making recommendations for change. In the student as researcher (SAR) model the learners actually decide on the issues and topics of the research, the original enquiry and evaluation is student led. The students design and carry out the research perform the analysis and are responsible for making recommendations and disseminating the results. They also play a role in dialoguing with those in positions of power who can make the decisions to implement the changes that are required as a result of their research findings. In both models adults and students work in partnership but as co researchers the adults retain the power. The SAR model is far more empowering for the learners and can bring about the full range of benefits discussed earlier in the personal development model.

Fielding suggests that there is a new social, interpersonal and increasingly political zeitgeist that is reflected in the methodological approach of using students as researchers. Due to the changing constructions of childhood, children and young people are now seen as "legitimate contributors to as well as subjects of the conversations of society, and that the improvement of schooling and other services targeted at the young depends in significant part on the capacity of those services to attend to what young people have to say have a wide ranging currency" (2008:9).

There is a significant age range of learners involved in SAR activities from primary to secondary level and above. In Australia, Atweh, Burton and Bland have involved students on the boundaries between school / university (Bland, 2008)

There is a debate as to the degree to which SAR is used solely as a form of neo-liberal incorporation (Fielding 2008), rather than reaching its transformatory potential, Fielding argues that SAR is "a clear instantiation of 21st Century knowledge society working it's way through existing systems of schooling" (2008:10).

### 4.3 Ethical issues

There is also widespread concern about how to make consultation meaningful and effective, rather than short term and tokenistic and also how to evaluate its impact. Issues arising are:

- What happens to students' views once they have been gathered by whatever means?
- Who owns the data gathered?
- How will it be interpreted and disseminated and by whom?
- How is it ensured that the authentic voice is represented?
- What is realistically to be achieved?

Allred and Burman (2005) draw attention to the responsibility of researchers in interpreting and representing children's voices. Young people can quickly become disillusioned and the whole exercise can be counterproductive.

There is the important issue of informed consent. Consent is usually asked of parents but children also need to be helped to understand the purpose of consultation, their responsibility and role within it, how long it will take, its funding and the consequences and implications of expressing their views.

Another key issue is that of inclusiveness. Efforts should be made to include hard to access and marginalised groups, such as looked after children and children with disabilities.

Confidentiality and anonymity are critical when working with children / young people to engender trust. Privacy includes not revealing personal information in a way that is identifiable. Learners should be assured that sensitive information is safeguarded and not shared without consent. (The caveat to this is unless that information is about harm to the child).

There is also an issue concerning rewards for participation, tokens of appreciation, which often take the form of gift tokens, are valued by many respondents and may encourage further engagement.

Finally there is the difficulty of ensuring 'ownership', for example: Who has access to the data is particularly problematic in involving children as subjects rather than objects of research. Social responsibility is an important consideration. This involves not harming children through their involvement, as well as considering the contribution of the consultation to the children's well being. A key question needs to be addressed, 'Is it in the learner's interest'?

### 5.0 Contemporary Challenges

There are a number of issues and challenges facing contemporary student voice work. Firstly, there is not a singular learner voice but there are a plurality of voices, reflecting different priorities, concerns and desires. Students hail from very diverse ethnic, racial, class backgrounds and gender and disability are also important factors to be taken into consideration (Cruddas, 2001; Silva, 2001; Smyth, 2007, Mitra, 2001). There is also the debate about student voice as a means of neo-liberal incorporation or democratic renewal (Fielding 2008). There are also disagreements in the field about consultation and participation (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004; Bowl, 2000;

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Leadbeater, 2004; Kirby, 2001). Ruddock argues that participatory approaches are too prone to the emergence of elite minorities, this resonates with the work of Silva (2001) Riley and Docking (2004) Macbeath (2004) and Slack (2003) who argue that it is important to hear the voices of all learners and not just the privileged few.

This literature review has found a dearth of literature on issues of race, class and gender in particular relation to widening participation and the interface between school and further and higher education in England. The work of Mitra (2001) and Silva (2001) in the USA and Smyth (2007) in Australia and the USA demonstrate some cutting edge research on widening access and learner voice. There is a need for these studies to be replicated in the UK context.

Teachers' unions are also expressing concerns about the threats to professional integrity and the degree to which the student voice movement is being used for purposes other than the well-being and further learning of young people in schools. As young people are now free to express their views about their teachers and their schools via new information technologies such as blogs and websites, some teachers are concerned as to how this data may be used.

Along with the dilemma of how does one know if the voice of the learner is authentic, is the methodological problem about interpreting learner voices at the policy level without losing the authenticity and meaning of what the learner is trying to say. How do researchers and academics make the learner voices understood at the policy maker level so learner concerns can be adequately addressed?

Riley (2003) and Smyth (2007) demonstrate how learners have their own language codes and often there is miscommunication between teachers and students, there are the many different discourses of the different actors in the education arena and a key question is how these are made to harmonise in terms of concrete policy outcomes.

Fielding maintains that within the context of formal education, there is always likely to be a tension between those who regard the standpoints and perspectives of the young as, by virtue of their youth and experience, of limited value or legitimacy, and those who take a view that sees the characteristic and very different virtues and capacities of young people as a source of creativity. However he calls for a re-imagining and re-articulating of narrative space in the public realm, he contends that shared public space in schools is heavily managed by adults and there is little evidence of anything approaching reciprocity where multiple fluid and cross cutting identities can be played out. He claims that student voice work will become more rather than less important not just in the UK but across the world as some academics and activists seek to: "realise ideals of human flourishing that rest on quite different configurations of values than those presumed by global capitalism" (Fielding, 2008:15).



### **6.0 Further reading**

As noted in the general introduction there have been a number of literature reviews of learner voice undertaken within the last five years, the notable of which are listed below:

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### **Part 2: Student Voice - A case study**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This second part of the report focuses on an on-going case study in a secondary school in the London Borough of Havering and the collaboration of the school with a local university – the University of East London (UEL). The original focus of the case study was to look at students as informants / respondents and their journey to becoming student researchers within the context of student voice. We examine the data collected from follow-up interviews with nominated pupil-representatives from this student voice project as well as those pupils not directly involved. These interviews were carried out by researchers, academics from the university, who were involved with the initial project. The focus of these interviews has been to explore if these students felt that they had ‘joint responsibility’ (Huddleston, 2007) in the developments taking place within their school.

#### **2.0 Context**

Student (or ‘pupil’) voice has been the subject of considerable academic debate over the last twenty years (e.g. Giroux, 1986; Ashworth, 1995) and since the British government’s Every Child Matters policy initiative has attracted renewed attention in England from policy makers, examination boards, government ministers and journalists. Driving forces for this renewed attention include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UK Healthy Schools Initiative, Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and increasingly School Self-Evaluation (SEF). It is recognised that student voice is an important factor in the educational process and, as such, it is essential to listen to the voices of students at every level of education (Ashworth, 1995). Many studies have explored the role of student voice in educational change and reform (e.g. Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2001), while others have stressed the importance of not only listening to voices, but engaging in dialogue (e.g. Lodge, 2005). Over the last few years, dialogue and consultation have been major themes emerging from the student voice agenda (for example, Arnot *et al*, 2003; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). We have moved from the notions of dialogue, ‘shared responsibility’ and consultation (Huddleston, 2007), to students becoming researchers in their own right (cf. Fielding and Bragg, 2003), which is, according to Thomson and Gunter (2006: 839), potentially a more ‘transformative / disruptive process’. One of the major issues which has emerged recently, then, is the issue of ‘power’ and the transformative potential of student voice (Fielding, 2004; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006).

Halsey et al (2008) argue that there are considerable benefits to some educational stakeholders when the voices of young people are listened to including:

- Improvements in student services (e.g. changes in school dinners; improving toilet facilities etc).
- Improvements in decision making (e.g. giving learners more of a say in the financial decisions taken by schools).
- Greater democracy for learners (e.g. allowing pupils a say in which teachers are employed; how long lessons run for; influencing subjects offered).
- Fulfilling legal requirements within schools (e.g. in terms of ‘citizenship’ and Every Child Matters legislation).
- Enhancing children’s skills (e.g. allowing learners to run meetings with staff; including learners on interview panels).

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- Empowering child self-esteem (e.g. increasing self-confidence and status when learners are consulted by their peers and teachers).

Added to these advantages is the fact that many teachers, heads and administrators gain access to the specialist (and largely untapped) knowledge that learners have about their schools. This leads Fielding (2001) to argue that many student voice projects can act as a catalyst for change in schools including improvements in teaching, the curriculum and most importantly, student-teacher relationships. However, Fielding is also highly critical of some of the ways that Student Voice is articulated:

*Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation?...or are we presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control [Fielding, 2001:100]*

Three theoretical perspectives on Student Voice, highlighted by McMahon and Portelli (2004), throw light on the views expressed by the young people interviewed in this study:

1. Conservative – an unproblematised conception of Student Voice where engagement and consultation is seen as a means to improving learning.
2. Liberal – a more holistic view on the child that goes beyond the academic taking into consideration student-teacher relationships and the emotional well-being of children.
3. Critical/democratic – a view challenging the nature of, and status quo in, many schools in ways that the above two approaches ignore. Young people and adults are perceived as engaging together in ways that question the processes, purposes and procedures in schools and classrooms with empowerment for all as an ideal outcome.

It is our view that the students interviewed in this study display characteristics from all three perspectives in their critical evaluation of the Student Voice project in their school. However it is also our view that a marked difference exists in the voices of those included in the project and those who felt, for a variety of reasons that their voices were not listened to. It is by engaging with these silenced voices that we feel schools can move to a more critical, democratic and enlightened understanding of school processes, purposes and procedures.

### **3.0 Background**

The Student Voice project which this report explores was launched in January 2007 at a secondary school in the London Borough of Havering. The aim, from the school's point of view, was to provide a method of encouraging students to become actively involved in decisions about their own learning and empowering them with appropriate ways to do so. The school set out to:

- Ensure that all learners, irrespective of their class, gender, ethnicity, and ability, were involved in decisions about how, what and when they learn, with whom and the type of environment in which this occurs.

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- Ensure that students were involved in school improvement strategies and the co-construction of policy making with teachers.

Each form group from the school elected three student voice representatives making a total of 92 pupils directly involved in the Student Voice initiative. Each of the three students were chosen to represent the form on one of the following 'voices' instigated by the school's Senior Management Team:

**The "Blue Voice":** Focussing on teaching and learning.

**The "Red Voice":** Focussing on behaviour, independent learning and individual progress.

**The "Green Voice":** Focussing on the environment of the school.

Each "voice" had an executive group to represent them at meetings (pupil representatives in each form group and a member of teaching staff from the senior management team). The 92 students were voted onto the scheme by their peers with the intention that they represented the 840 diverse student population of the school. All 92 students received school and university based training designed to help them:

- Run a productive meeting
- Gain confidence in voicing an opinion
- Listen to one another's point of view
- Have a rudimentary understanding of research skills
- Have a rudimentary understanding of research ethics

Following this training the students returned to school where they carried out research on their focus group 'voice'. This culminated at the end of the year in the production of three charters the school was to use that reflected the concerns of the three 'voices'. Maintaining enthusiasm and momentum for a major school initiative is a challenge. As Fielding and Ruddock recommend, 'It is crucial for student perceptions and recommendations to be responded to, not merely treated as minor footnotes in an unaltered text' (Fielding and Ruddock. 2002). The Senior Management team involved in instigating Student Voice in the school were very keen that each year there should be a clear progression of the initiative with identifiable, tangible results.

The second year of the project involved reflection and dissemination of the work carried out. The success of the first year meant that some students were asked to talk at conferences and were invited to national and regional award ceremonies. This second year was crucial in moving forward the project and enabling different students to become involved. The second round of voting took place in school and each form had three new representatives, one for each voice. Further training took place at the University of East London to enable the 'new' representatives to understand their role as researchers and to recognise some of the issues in relation to respect and ethical working on such a project. Afternoon workshops enabled each 'voice' to reflect on the success of the first year and to identify themes to be developed back at school. Some of the issues that came from these workshops were related to monitoring the success of the initiative in terms measurable outcomes for the school. For example, to what extent would it be possible to measure engagement from exam results, attendance or improvement in behaviour in school? As part of this reflective and



evaluative process, researchers from the University went into the school to carry out focused group interviews.

### **4.0 Theoretical Framework**

Our work has been theoretically and methodologically framed by questions that relate student voice to identity construction at a societal, institutional and individual level. The methodological dilemma has been to adopt an analytical framework that acknowledges some of the 'macro' large scale structural processes that can influence student voice initiatives while simultaneously addressing the 'micro' small-scale individual actions and meanings of the respondents that are so important to us as qualitative researchers. Layder (1993; 1994; 1998) recognises the existence of a social reality, with social structures and currents which have an existence over and above the existence of individual actors. Yet he also recognises the significance of human agency in the formation of those structures. In so doing he praises interpretive approaches to sociological research with a focus on identities allowing us to resolve this methodological dilemma. We draw on, amongst others, Thomson and Gunter (2005) who identify Student Voice as having three distinct levels or approaches. The first is one of consultation, where pupils are consulted on a matter and it may or may not have an impact or an outcome. The second, is when pupils are engaged in the school self evaluation process. Finally, the third level is for students to become researchers in their own right. The students are empowered to carry out research into their schooling and this research can lead to recommendations or actual change within the institution (Fielding and Bragg, 2003).

### **5.0 Methodology**

It was anticipated that students directly involved in the study would feel positive about the experience but the interest for us, as researchers, was to discover if all students felt this way including those who had little or no input into the project. For this reason, it was essential that the study focussed on three groups of students:

- Group A: Those that were involved in the student voice initiative at the school.
- Group B: Those that were not involved in any way.
- Group C: Those students who were not involved but had expressed interest in the project.

In order to research the opinions of the students, the research method adopted was focus group interviews with eight students in each group. The advantage of using this method was that it enabled dialogue between the researcher and those being interviewed, as well as generating sufficient rapport for the students to talk amongst themselves. This was of particular significance because of the varying ages of students involved in the project. Their responses were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed at a later date.

### 6.0 Data

We turn first to examine some of the interview extracts from those in Group A, i.e. those involved in Student Voice at the school.

#### 6.1 Focus Group A – Those involved in the Student Voice initiative

There was a strong sense conveyed by those interviewed in this group of the initiative's democratic nature. This was conveyed in a number of different ways. For example:

Pupil I X (2007):                      Because all the forms have their representative voice, people who want to express their view know who to go to, so if they want to express something about their environment, they go 'green'.

Pupil I Y(2007):                      The form vote, so, your form knows how responsible you are, how sensible, how good you are at leading so they vote you in.

The students in this particular sample were, perhaps unsurprisingly, enthusiastic and supportive of the initiative. When asked if they felt that Student Voice at the school was inclusive respondents acknowledged that some students might not necessarily take up the opportunities that Student Voice offered them:

Pupil 2 B (2007):                      Not everyone, there will always be a minority that just don't want to get involved or they're too shy, or they just don't want to do it because it's not cool enough or something like that.

The fact that some students might not wish to take part in the initiative was never problematised by respondents in this sample group and was justified in the belief that the initiative offered an opportunity for all to share their views:

Pupil 2 A (2007)                      We get, obviously, more of a say than people who don't voice their opinion, but the way it's structured, everyone will have their say, they can. Because in form times, we get questions to ask the form and they get taken to the meetings and get passed onto the executives. It works both ways, everyone like, everyone can have their say. Obviously, the minority will choose not to.

However it was also clear that while respondents in this sample felt that there was potential for all voices to be 'heard' and that they represented the majority of the school there was also a sense that the overall direction that Student Voice took was determined by the school's senior management team:

Pupil 2 B (2007):                      We just got told, like "this is how it works" and like I think we elected representatives...did we go to like a meeting where we were told what it was going to be about?

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Pupil 2 C (2007): Yeah, and then we went back to our forms and told them and then they'd understand what was going on in the school.

Interviewer: Were you given a say in what sort of areas you wanted to study [research]?

Pupil 1 C (2007): Told weren't we?

Pupil 1 D(2007): Yeah – they decided on the three groups

Hart (1997) argues that there is often a hierarchical ladder of participation in many Student Voice characterised by manipulation, decoration and tokenism on the part of school leadership in their interactions with young people. While it would be wrong to assert that these three rungs characterised the project as a whole, these elements exist in the quotations above. Despite the best intentions of the school and clear support by those involved in school initiative, the structurally hierarchical elements embedded within the project have the potential to marginalise, silence and eliminate voices that might unsettle or disturb.

### 6.2 Focus Group B: Those not involved in the Student Voice Initiative

It is by turning to those young people not involved in the project that we get a clearer sense of the complexities, ambiguities and tensions involved in this Student Voice initiative. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) identify one key issue related to Student Voice is that it important to know who is talking, who is listening and indeed, if the listening is authentic. A common theme that emerged in the coding of these interview extracts was a sense of exclusion from the dialogue process:

Interviewer: Do you think the people that were chosen were more or less popular with teachers?

Pupil 1 Z (2008) Most people usually vote for their friends than who would be more appropriate for that position so it depends really – who is popular and for what reason.

The almost meritocratic nature of the project, as conveyed by those in focus Group A, was challenged by these young people who were not involved:

Pupil 1 U (2008): Student Voice doesn't talk to the other kids. If they want the best for the students and the teachers they need to go around and talk to different kids in the play ground...they are only speaking to one side of the kids which is probably their friends. I don't think the Student Voice asks around – like the other class of kids – like the bad kids and the good kids. I'm not sure if they are afraid of them – or they don't want to hear what they have to say

Particularly noticeable with this focus group was the way many positioned themselves as 'others' as a strategy to strengthen their own emerging identities (Maguire, 2008)

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Pupil 1 V (2008): I agree with him, cos the 'good' students don't really like to interact with kids that are not really as good as them – so they need some one like them to represent them.

The process of displacing and 'othering' (Nias, 1989) pupils can build up group identity and solidarity at a time when the identities of these young people are susceptible and fragile to the scrutiny of others (e.g. parents, teachers and their peers). When asked why, if they were so critical of Student Voice, they did not participate in it many felt there was little point:

Interviewer: Is that because you don't see the value of it?

Pupil 1 U (2008): Yeah (hesitant) or just because you just don't think you are going to get voted.

Pupil 2 X (2008): Yeah, people like nominated themselves, and then the rest of the form decided who they wanted.

The consultative nature of the Student Voice project was also challenged by those not involved in it often leading to the belief that there was little or no point in taking part:

Pupil 1 W (2008): There's no point...they just had the majority of the class...Someone will have a really good idea but only three or four people will agree with it so it will get outvoted. I think re the good kids – only sort of – say what should be done – they usually agree with what the teacher wants – they say what the teacher wants them to say.

So far we have implied that there are many structural features inherent within the implementation of this Student Voice initiative that restrict certain views from being expressed. However this implication is too simplistic. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) point out that there are many silent voices, i.e. students who don't feel able to comment without some sort of framework of security to protect them from school hierarchies be they from within the staffing of the school or the many types of pupil-subcultures. What is also powerfully conveyed in these interviews is the role that agency plays by those students who deem the involvement in Student Voice as futile.

### **6.3 Focus Group C: Those not involved in the Student Voice Initiative but would like to be.**

In contrast to Group B most pupils in this group were more accepting of the dialogue process simultaneously acknowledging that there needed to be a 'them and us' hierarchy to make decisions and to get the project started:

Interviewer: Were you told about this in an assembly or did your form teacher tell you about it?

Pupil 1 P (2008): Our Form Teacher told us.

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Interviewer: Do you think the people that were chosen were more or less popular with teachers?

Pupil 2 Q (2008): More because they were better students, worked harder and that...Volunteering to do extra things – they deserved to be on it [Student Voice].

Many felt that as a form “gets to pick” someone, the voting system is not unfair and is the best way to select a representative. Personal qualities tended to be the main focus when choosing suitable candidates:

Pupil 1 Q (2008): You need someone who gets respect from teachers and us and its better they can talk, can stand up and tell it as it is and not get phased.

Most agreed that student voice representatives tended to be more popular with the teachers and possibly better students who would work hard and would be prepared to do more for the school. There was broad agreement that everyone in the school, if asked, would state Student Voice as a school initiative, had improved the school and the environment. For this group it was the environment that had the most tangible impact i.e. there was visible evidence that student voice was making a difference:

Pupil 3 Y (2008): Like outside in the bins, and there’s more recycling bins as well.

Interviewer: You can’t just see this as a sort of school wish list and say we want this and we want that?

Pupil 4 Q (2008): No, it’s not like that. The Bursar is involved in everything and the Green Voice rep goes to a meeting with her and she talks about the budget and what can be spent and when.

Most students in this group felt that the environment had been significantly improved as a result of student voice lending support to Goodson (in Watson and Fullan 1992), who stated that ‘it was no good just to give a voice, there needs to be transformation or an interruption to the ordinary life of school. Quality Student Voice requires coherent institutional commitment and a new perspective on relationships.’ While consultation was acknowledged to have existed prior to the Student Voice initiative with the existence of a School Council this was criticised for producing a ‘wish list’ of unrealistic items to be purchased. This particular group acknowledge that the current student voice initiative was an improvement on previous attempts by the school to address democratic student participation. That said, some did question whether everyone had been able to state what they thought needed to be improved or whether it was just the ‘better kids’ who had their wishes met.

### 7.0 Discussion

Insights gained from examining interviews from young people in a secondary school reflecting the market-led approach to education adopted in England provides a context and setting for a fruitful exploration of some of the dynamics underpinning student voice. Student Voice is inevitably nuanced not only by politics, culture and practice but by a variety of educational values. Such values are:

*...like currents in the stream, words and acts distinguishable in a certain place and at a certain time perhaps with patterns that can be traced but not separable from a historical discourse embodied in culturally established ways of thinking, speaking and acting on educational issues [Phelan and McLaughlin, 1995: page 166].*

Lodge (2008) notes that there has been a shift in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century 'children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard' perceptions of childhood compared to more child-centred discourses that exist in many private and public spheres. That said, in many schools, expectations about children are still shaped by an 'ideology of immaturity' (Ruddock and Flutter, 2004) that characterised both centuries. This ideology is based upon an outdated view of childhood in which school exclusion of young people from the processes of dialogue and decision making fails to acknowledge young learners' capacity for resourcefulness, ingenuity, enterprise and an ability to reflect on issues affecting their education. Tensions exist between this ideology and more marketized, consumer based ideologies in schools in which the student voice agenda should fit cosily. Although schools have successfully moved from blackboard to whiteboard to smart-board they have been largely unsuccessful in recognising societal expectations that young people mature at an increasingly younger age. The danger of not recognising this mismatch in expectations has been picked up by Ruddock (2002):

*Schools in their deep structures and patterns of relationship have changed less in the last fifteen years or so than young people have changed...we know that from an early age 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 underachievement (Ruddock, 2002:123-124)*

The question remains, how do we listen to every voice and improve the learning experience of every child? Despite the best intentions of the school in which this case study is based on, there are varying degrees of success in which 'voice' has been articulated. In some cases, opinions have been used to endorse policies the school had planned to put into place in the first case (e.g. the provision of a new electronic attendance system etc). There is a strong sense conveyed in these interviews between those that have been brought into the consultation process and those who feel excluded. The mechanisms for that exclusion process are complex, fluid and dynamic involving both structural features embedded within the project and varying degrees of agency expressed by the young people interviewed. The school's clarity in vision regarding how Student Voice was to be introduced (e.g. the setting up of three 'voices'; the processes by which students were chosen to be voted onto the executive etc) reflect to some degree these structural features as well as the competitive nature of the school leadership team. This latter point is

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significant in that the school has won a number of awards for various initiatives including the Student Voice project that this case study addresses.

Within the context of a marketised competitive educational environment, Fielding and Ruddock (2002) question whether the Student Voice movement is 'a passing fashion or a foundation for a new order of experience'. As researchers we were concerned that this project could just be about an enthusiastic school culture 'ticking the right boxes'. However most students interviewed did not feel their input was tokenistic and they did feel the listening was authentic. Some pupils felt more involved than others but most seem to recognise change has been brought on by the initiative and can see a future for the project. The senior management at the school are committed to the project and are certainly tokenistic in their approach to Student Voice. We have seen, for example, how the Bursar is engaged in most of the decisions made by the students. She has made it her role to consider every spending request from the students and to sit down with the representatives to discuss the possibilities of spending from the budget. These students have a good understanding of the financial implications of their wishes and as a result are taking their negotiating role very seriously.

What was perhaps surprising was the limitation on the degree to which these young people felt that Student Voice should permeate all areas of the school. Most students interviewed clearly identified 'comfort zones' (McLaughlin and Waterhouse, 2008) in which they felt that Student Voice had a role to play. For example there was on the one hand, enthusiasm expressed for taking more responsibility in the running of the school. Many are open to learning from their peers and would like to develop opportunities to learn from each other in lessons in a more structured and planned way. However many felt the curriculum planning should be exclusively left to the teachers as 'they know best' and they would not have the necessary skills or knowledge to plan the school curriculum. While students were happy to engage with issues around flexibility in the classroom e.g. having smaller teaching groups and opportunities to move up or down a set depending on grades and attitude, they did *not* want to get involved in assessment believing this to be down to the responsibility and expertise of the teacher.

The question still remains, how can schools become more able to embrace the student voice and work towards a better future for all? The key seems, from these interviews, to be in the feeling of being valued – both by staff and fellow students. In order to combat a reluctance by many to break out of their comfort zone, schools should move forward to look at the work inspired by Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, in particular Barton and Trussing's (2005) review of the language and discourse that different communities engage in, the power and conflict that is embedded within those communities and the broader social context in which the community is placed. In essence then, for Student Voice to be effective, the community of practice or social space (Gee, 2000) needs to be one of trust, where language used is non-threatening, and where people feel valued and comfortable to change, experiment and take risks.

### **8.0 Conclusions**

This case study is significant for three reasons. It has provided an opportunity to examine some of the tensions and ambiguities that exist when students are asked to become independent researchers within a state secondary school. It has considered to what extent student voice represents joint responsibility in the developments taking place or just the minority voices within pupil and teacher 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Finally it has raised questions about societal values and the 'contrived distance' (Stephens, 2004) between adults and children in different cultural contexts. At a time when it has been acknowledged that British Children represent some of the unhappiest within the industrialised world, recognising the pervasiveness of the 'ideology of immaturity' (Ruddock and Fielding, 2006:225) that exists in many schools in England can reduce hope in an increasingly complex world. Often couched in terms of inevitability, such an ideology can drain energy and commitment from both learners and teachers. This case study illustrates how young people, if listened to, have the potential to transform school processes, purposes and procedures. The voices of the learners in this study and their concerns give rise to complex hope in exceedingly complex times.



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### ***Appendix 2 – Focus Group Topic Guide***

1. Tell us what student voice means to you?
2. Tell us about how student voice was launched in the school?  
(Probe: How were you selected to be involved?)
3. What parts of the project did you enjoy?  
(Probe: Day at university/school).
4. Do you feel that your voices have been heard?  
(Prompt: Can you give us some examples of how?)
5. Which areas of the school do you think you should have more influence?  
(E.g. lesson planning/curriculum choice/teaching methods/out of school learning/assessment)
6. Would you have liked more contact with the university?  
(Probe: how/video link)
7. How has Student Voice helped YOU to learn?  
(Probe: behaviour/individual learning/teacher strategies).
8. Do you think this project will have a real impact on learning/school?
9. Do you feel this project has really been YOUR voice?  
(E.g. who are the drivers: you? Teachers? Management? Government?)
10. If you were to take charge of this project and do this again how might you change this?
11. Would you be willing to be involved in similar research in a primary school (as an active researcher?) YES/NO