

4 It's an equal thing ... It's about achieving together: student voices and the possibility of a radical collegiality

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Collaborative enquiry can be a democratizing process in a school. It involves sharing and distributing leadership and encouraging all members of the school to be active 'enquirers' into the life and work of the school. This includes students. Without the involvement of the students it is not possible to enquire effectively either into the learning and teaching processes or into the school itself.

Sara Bragg and Michael Fielding build from the work that they have been doing in the field of Students as Researchers to make the case for students to have a central role in the enquiry process in school. The rationale for this, given in this chapter, is based upon a different set of assumptions about the nature of education and the role of 'schooling' in the twenty-first century and a different and developing understanding of what it means to be a teacher or a student.

The chapter seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1 Why involve young people in collaborative enquiry?
- 2 What are the different types of student engagement as researchers?
- 3 What examples are there of student enquiry in action?
- 4 What are the benefits of student enquiry?
- 5 How do you start and sustain student enquiry?
- 6 What dilemmas and issues are posed by the development of Students as Researchers?

1. Why involve young people in collaborative enquiry?

This section outlines the reasons for including students in collaborative enquiry. It includes a discussion of:

- a shift to working with students collegially rather than collaboratively;

- discussion of issues of agency and autonomy of students;
- changes in the boundaries between students and teachers.

Elsewhere in this book, contributors argue that enquiry has many benefits for teachers and schools. Here, we argue that students should be involved in collaborative enquiry too. This is a different argument because it presumes a different logic and set of assumptions about the nature of education and the place of formal schooling within it. It is a stronger argument because it suggests we need to re-examine both what it means to be a teacher and what it means to be a student. In other words we hold that student involvement in enquiry with teachers, not merely 'collaboratively', but sometimes 'collegially', holds out the possibility of a bridge to quite different forms of schooling in the new millennium.

One familiar rationale for student involvement in enquiry was captured by one of our student researcher interviewees who suggested that 'education is for students and therefore students should have a say in it'. This is an argument about agency and autonomy - students being able to change or influence what goes on in schools - that is central to what is meant by education. It stands in stark contrast to recent research which suggests that in practice schools still provide disappointingly few opportunities for students to contribute meaningfully to shaping school life (Alderson and Arnold 1999; Wyse 2001).

Arguments about agency and autonomy are also strengthened by concerns about social justice. In recent years young people in schools have come under increasing pressure, including a more persistent burden of testing and heavy scrutiny of their performance. To deny them any voice in debating the wisdom or effectiveness of such arrangements would seem to undermine the deeper rationale of the testing itself, namely to produce a more alert and capable workforce and a more engaged and responsible citizenry. Certainly, there is evidence that current education policy is moving towards greater student consultation and involvement. For instance, the 2002 Education Act now requires schools to consult with pupils, whilst Ofsted expects inspectors to report on how far a school 'seeks, values and acts on pupils' views'.

More broadly, we hold that the old certainties about the boundaries between teacher and student are starting to change. In the light of these changes, involving students in the processes of collaborative enquiry is more desirable and more promising for all parties than it has been for a considerable time.

Of course, this is not universally the case and there are many interesting and important examples of imaginative and committed practice that are much more cautious and prescribed in their feel and intentions.

This chapter explores how teachers and young people have worked together on collaborative enquiry in schools, taking one approach - Students as Researchers - that has developed in the UK in the last ten years (Crane 2001; Fielding 1998, 1999, 2001a,b,c; Fielding and Bragg 2003; Fielding and Pneto 2000; Harding 2001; Kirby 1999, 2001; Prieto 2001; Raymond 2001; Wethenll 1998; Worrall *et al.* 1999) and has many companion projects operating across the world (Holdsworth 2000a and b; Levin 1998, 2000a and b; Lincoln 1995; Mitra 2001; Oldfather 1995; Silva 2001; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1998).

2. What the different types of student engagement as researchers?

Student involvement ranges along a continuum. This sections distinguishes the different modes of students as researchers. These include:

- students as data source;
- students as active respondents;
- students as co-researchers;
- students as researchers.

Students as Data Source

<i>Teacher role</i>	Acknowledge + use information about student performance
<i>Student role</i>	Receive a better-informed pedagogy
<i>Teacher engagement with students</i>	Dissemination
<i>Classroom e.g.</i>	Data about student past performance
<i>Team/Dept e.g.</i>	Looking at samples of students' work
<i>School e.g.</i>	Student attitude surveys, cohort-based exam + test scores

With 'Students as Data Source' there is a real teacher commitment to pay attention to the student voice speaking through the practical realities of work done and targets agreed. It acknowledges that for teaching and learning to improve there is a need to take more explicit account of relevant data about individual students and group or class performance. Students are thus recipients of a better informed pedagogy. Teachers are helped to understand more about students through the effective dissemination of information about their performance or attitudes. At classroom

level 'Students as Data Source' expresses itself through things like data about student past performance. At team or department level it might involve looking at samples of students' work, whilst at whole school level it might take the form of student attitude surveys and cohort-based exam and test results.

Students as Active Respondents

<i>Teacher role</i>	Hear what students say
<i>Student role</i>	Discuss their learning + approaches to teaching
<i>Teacher engagement with students</i>	Discussion
<i>Classroom e.g.</i>	Shared lesson objectives/explicit assessment criteria
<i>Team/Dept e.g.</i>	Students evaluate a unit of work
<i>School e.g.</i>	Traditional school council/peer-led action groups

With 'Students as Active Respondents' there is a teacher willingness to move beyond the accumulation of passive data and a desire to hear what students have to say about their own experience in lessons and in school. Students are thus discussants rather than recipients of current approaches to teaching and learning. Dissemination of existing information is supplemented and transcended through the teacher's commitment to make meaning out of that data through active discussion with his/her students.

At the classroom level this might express itself through the negotiation of lesson objectives or learning intentions and the nuanced and attentive exchanges typical of good assessment for learning practices. At the team or department level this might involve students in the evaluation of units or schemes of work. At whole-school level it might express itself through traditional school councils that respond to existing systems and arrangements within the school or by the establishment of peer-led action groups on issues such as drugs, sexuality and counselling.

Students as Co-researchers

<i>Teacher role</i>	Listen in order to learn
<i>Student role</i>	Co-researcher with teacher on agreed issues
<i>Teacher engagement with students</i>	Dialogue (teacher-led)
<i>Classroom e.g.</i>	Focus groups conducted by student co-researchers
<i>Team/Dept e.g.</i>	Students assist in team/dept action research
<i>School e.g.</i>	Transition between primary/secondary school

'Students as Co-researchers' sees an increase in both student and teacher involvement, and more partnership than the two previous types. Whilst student and teacher roles are not equal, they are moving more strongly in an egalitarian direction. Students move from being discussants to being co-researchers into matters of agreed significance and importance. Whilst the boundaries of action and exploration are fixed by the teacher, and whilst he/she typically identifies (again usually through negotiation) what it is that is to be investigated, explored and better understood, the commitment and agreement of students is essential. This change in relationship is matched by a change in the form and manner of teacher engagement with students: hearing is supplemented by the more attentive listening. Since there is a much richer and more overt interdependence in the 'Student as Co-researcher' mode, discussion is replaced by teacher-led dialogue. Teacher and students are in a much more exploratory mode.

At the classroom level this might express itself through the teachers' desire to extend their pedagogy and begin to take more risks even though, or perhaps especially because, the class is proving difficult and unresponsive. Student-led focus groups are one example of this co-researcher approach which produced substantial improvements for the teacher and students of a Year 9 Modern Foreign Language class. At the team or department level 'Student as Co-researchers' work might involve students helping teachers to design and carry out research into why Year 9 girls seemed disenchanted with some aspects of the subject, or, in a primary-school context, how greater independence in learning might be encouraged at KS1. At whole-school level it might express itself through joint research into issues of transition between primary and secondary school or between different Key Stages within a school.

Students as Researchers

<i>Teacher role</i>	Listen in order to contribute
<i>Student role</i>	Initiator and director of research with teacher support
<i>Teacher engagement with students</i>	Dialogue (student-led)
<i>Classroom e.g.</i>	What makes a good lesson?
<i>Team/Dept e.g.</i>	Gender issues in technology subjects
<i>School e.g.</i>	Evaluation of e.g. PSHE system, radical school council

Our fourth type - 'Students as Researchers' - (Fielding 1998, 2001b) deepens and extends the egalitarian thrust we noted with 'Students as Co-researchers'. Partnership remains the dominant working motif, but here it is the voice of the student that comes to the fore and in a leadership or initiating, not just a responsive, role. It is students who identify issues to be researched and who undertake the research with the support of teachers. They have responsibility for making sense of the data, writing a report or presenting their findings; and it is students to whom the class teacher, team, department or school community are bound to respond in ways which are respectful, attentive and committed to positive change. Dialogue is at the heart of this mode of working. The dialogue is student led rather than teacher led and, potentially at any rate, the exploratory impetus of 'Students as Co-researchers' is further enhanced by the pivotal place of student perceptions and perspectives in the conduct of the research.

At the classroom level 'Students as Researchers' have typically engaged with topics such as 'What makes a good lesson?', the possible link between classroom seating arrangements and student behaviour and factors that help and hinder learning. At the team or department level Student as Researcher work has investigated matters like the apparent gender divide in technology subjects, the effectiveness of homework and the tutorial programme. At whole-school level students have researched the effectiveness or otherwise of rewards systems, bullying and harassment, ITT arrangements, an entire PSHE system and the development of new playground facilities.

How has your thinking been stimulated by these models of student involvement?

3. What examples are there of student enquiry in action?

Students as Researchers believes that young people and adults often have quite different views of what is significant or important in their experience of and hopes for learning, and that even when they identify similar issues as important, they can understand quite different things by them. The starting point is students' questions (as well as, or even instead of, teachers' questions) and, if students are given support to enable them to pursue their enquiries, we often find that new knowledge emerges about learning, about teaching and about ourselves as teachers and learners. For this process to be productive and engaging, we need to create conditions of dialogue in which we listen to and learn from each other in new ways for new purposes.

Students as Researchers promotes partnerships in which students work alongside teachers to mobilize their knowledge of school and become 'change agents' of its culture and norms. It seeks to develop amongst students and teachers a sense of shared responsibility for the quality and conditions of teaching and learning, both within particular classrooms and more generally within the school as a learning community. In the projects described below, specific groups of students identify and investigate issues related to their schools and their learning that they see as significant. The projects aim to enable students to work with teachers in bringing about change, or even to take the lead, with teachers supporting and facilitating the process. Students as Researchers seeks to involve, not merely to use, young people, viewing them not just as recipients or targets, but as resources and producers of knowledge.

This section provides examples of student enquiry in action. This includes:

- individual teachers working with students;
- several enquiry groups;
- researching teaching and learning;
- the work of the School Council;
- changing school structures and processes.

Individual teachers working with students

As our earlier typology of student-voice work suggested, Students as Researchers can be approached at the level of the individual teacher, the team or department or the whole school or college. For instance, an individual teacher might wish to develop greater participation within his/her own practice. This may be a way to test the climate and build confidence before developing more widespread initiatives, and it can happen

whether or not the school culture supports it. In such cases, a Students as Researchers project might involve a short-term or one-off enquiry, a series of groups recruited one after another or one teacher sustaining one student enquiry group over a longer period, gradually enabling it to take on a wider range of tasks.

Several enquiry groups

Student enquiry projects might also involve several teachers and several groups - for instance, team/department members can consult students about how their joint work might be better developed, in terms of the content, the teaching approach or assessment processes. A commitment to student voice and to accessing students' views through student-led research might also be built into school policy. Here Students as Researchers might involve a number of student research groups, some of whom are experienced and some newer, various teachers, some older students supporting each group and an overall coordinator. In both the latter cases, a greater degree of senior staff involvement and support is necessary.

The number of Students as Researchers groups running at any one time need not necessarily be limited. One school, for instance, worked with 30 students from each of Years 7, 8 and 9, each organized into smaller sub-groups of about six students. Appointing an overall coordinator can help to make links between the teams, liaise between staff and students, enable groups to learn from each other and ensure that they are aware of what is happening in other groups.

Researching teaching and learning

In the schools with whom we have worked, students have researched issues to do with teaching and learning such as: what makes a good teacher?; what makes a good lesson?; what helps and hinders learning?; and drop-out in particular subjects. They have explored school and curriculum policy on issues such as: pastoral programmes and PSHE; careers awareness and guidance; profiling and assessment; GCSE or post-16 choices; induction into the sixth form; bullying policies and truanting. They have investigated school organization and environment such as: playground layout and design; use of footpaths in the playground; dining-room arrangements such as queuing; 'safe and unsafe places' within the school grounds; refurbishing toilets and social areas.

In one secondary school, for example, teachers selected as researchers eighteen students (nine boys and nine girls) from Year 8, which the school had identified as a 'lost' year that sometimes failed to reach its full

potential. A presentation at a year assembly showed their commitment and hard work on behalf of others and seemed to help overcome the resentment that some other students had initially felt at not being included. The students produced three reports and Powerpoint presentations. The research into 'What makes a good lesson', for example, emphasized teachers' and students' shared perspectives, and students' role in successful learning. Teachers recognized that they had underestimated Year 8 - that 'students as the 'receivers' of our teaching are an underused resource', as the deputy head put it. They became more receptive to student input into curriculum planning. The KS3 coordinator observed a positive impact, particularly on the learning of other Year 8 boys. She commented that the student researchers 'take the skills they've learned back into their lessons. It rubs off on other students, and it rubs out the "boff" thing, so it takes the lid off to allow the development of the whole year'.

The work of the School Council

In a primary school, members of the school's active and popular School Council investigated children's perceptions of the effectiveness of the school's buddy system. The research began in February and the final report was completed in June. Children chose to conduct playground observations (contrasting days when buddies were present and when they were not), to run focus groups, to email other schools to find out how their buddy system worked and if it was a success and to write a questionnaire. Groups of five to six children each took responsibility for one of these areas and results were discussed in subsequent School Council meetings. The report itself revealed interesting divergences of opinion: for instance, whilst younger children in the school were supportive of the system, older boys in particular seemed to have negative attitudes towards it. The School Council discussed why this might be and what might be done about it. The researchers were also highly reflective about the advantages and disadvantages of each of the approaches they had chosen, and had clearly learnt a great deal about enquiry methods (for further details, see Hannam, forthcoming).

Changing school structures and processes

Students' input, based on their own research evidence, can make a significant contribution to changing school structures and processes. One example is a research project into the use of trainee (ITT) teachers within the school. Students from Years 10-12 carried out focus group discussions and individual interviews with other students and wrote a

report noting inconsistencies in the use of trainee teachers across different departments. They proposed a means by which students could work with trainee teachers to establish dialogues about teaching and learning. Eventually teacher-training practices were significantly reorganized as a result of the recommendations and the initiative became an accepted, and voluntary, part of trainee teachers' experience in the school. One trainee teacher stated that student feedback 'has often been the most helpful professional training I have had in my first year of teaching'. Students noted that their participation gave them new insights into teaching. Moreover, permanent teachers became interested and started to include student feedback as part of their normal way of working.

Finally, a school identified teaching and learning in the sixth form as one of its priority areas for school improvement, noting particular problems to do with the transition from GCSE to post-16 study. One member of staff was given a responsibility point to recruit and support a group of twelve students whose brief was to help the school understand student perspectives on the issue. The process lasted from November to the summer term. Students met weekly at lunchtimes. They carried out lesson observations, then designed a questionnaire for students, asking them about their preferred teaching approaches, areas where they felt they lacked skills, the characteristics of good teachers and good students and students' use of time. The data collected emphasized students' responsibilities in contributing to successful learning and teaching. Through the enquiry, students were able to communicate their need for help, for instance with organizing files and folders, or their preferences - such as for having homework set in the middle rather than at the end of lessons. The researchers used their findings to design postcards. One side of each postcard contained a written finding; on the other side was a witty cartoon (drawn by students) that made the same point. The postcards provided a talking point amongst teachers and students and teachers often referred to them in lessons. Students commented that they felt that teachers were indeed listening to their concerns, and this had helped improve staff-student relationships.

Which of the examples given has most relevance for your school's current stage of development?

What benefits could you see accruing in your own school by the development of Students as Researchers?

4. What are the benefits of student enquiry?

Our evidence suggests that Students as Researchers projects can have a positive impact on students, teachers, and their schools. This section discusses:

- the benefit for students, in particular increased motivation and creativity as well as generic skill development;
- the benefits for teachers, in particular the development of more positive and productive relationships with students and the improvement of learning and teaching;
- the benefits for schools, in particular the impact on school culture and school improvement.

Benefits for students

The development of motivation and creativity

Student researchers described the pleasures of participating in purposeful activities addressing issues that they define as important, that are challenging and have an impact or consequence which extends beyond the participants. They often realize that they are capable of more than they thought and that they can develop a perspective and point of view (for instance, through writing recommendations for action). Knowing that students' views are having an impact on how things are done in the school and classroom gives satisfaction and pride. At the same time, however, the research reports are not formally assessed, and (in most cases) a sympathetic member of staff supports students in their work. This combination of factors means that students can be exploratory and take risks. It might explain the creativity and commitment students bring to the process, which has been particularly evident in their determination to develop approaches that will involve a wider range of students and to communicate their research to others, often in striking and attention-grabbing ways.

In Students as Researchers projects, students experience a more flexible learning structure and environment than is typical of most school lessons - one in which they have considerable control over what they do. This often generates excitement and commitment. Students repeatedly comment on how much they enjoy self-motivated activity, where they have greater choice over the pace and style of approach and opportunities for planning, acting and reflecting.

Supporting generic skill development

In the process of planning and doing the research, student researchers learn useful new skills - in a context where they are relevant and meaningful.

different age groups. They are often surprised and delighted by young people's maturity, insight and capabilities.

Teachers also come to understand students' perspectives. They 'learn about learning' from the student's standpoint and this can help new teaching approaches emerge as teachers take back to the classroom the approaches they have seen working in the context of a Students as Researchers project.

More broadly, Students as Researchers can contribute to a changing climate of staff-student relationships as teachers come to rethink their attitudes to students' capabilities. They realize that young people are 'wise' to them, that they have insight into the processes of teaching and learning and that they care about their education. They often develop greater trust, more positive attitudes and higher expectations of what groups of students can do.

These projects can help create a climate conducive to improving the conditions for teaching and learning. One example of 'how' Students as Researchers has helped raise achievement is where it leads teachers to reassess student capabilities and set them more challenging work - something that is particularly important in Years 8-9 or Year 5, where excitement about learning can flag.

The enquiry itself can contribute to teachers' continuing professional development. Some argue that the students' research can act as a valuable reminder of what they already know to be good practice. For example, as one subject teacher commented: 'It's just bringing it all back together again, reminding you of the things you actually learned during your PGCE.' Teachers comment on how powerful it can be hearing this from students. Some, however, argue that students can give valuable feedback to teachers which can help them move forward in their practice. One secondary deputy head, for example, explained how one member of staff had been at the school for twenty-five years and was 'impervious' to a lot of professional development. When Ofsted or fellow colleagues had observed him, they had acclaimed his teaching uncritically. When students observed him, they said, 'You always question to the right. And you walk up and down the aisles and the students have told us that they find that really intimidating'. The teacher later told staff that the experience of being observed by students (at his own request) and being part of the ensuing dialogue about the data collected was the most profound professional development activity he had ever experienced.

Benefits for schools

The impact on school culture and school improvement For schools, Students as Researchers projects bring many of the benefits that have been associated with higher levels of student involvement generally. Research has suggested that student participation sets up a 'benign cycle', generating motivation, a sense of ownership, confidence and responsible attitudes and commitment, which may in turn be associated with greater engagement with learning and higher attainment (Ashworth 1995; Hannam 2003). Students as Researchers can also make specific contributions to school improvement. For instance, student enquiry can play a powerful symbolic role in the school's vision of a learning community. As one deputy head argued, 'It makes a statement about our belief that we can learn from students as much as they can learn from us'. Students as Researchers exemplifies a school's commitment to developing active, questioning students with a sense of responsibility and an enthusiasm for learning - qualities young people will require when they leave school.

To include students as part of the process of school improvement is an indication of organizational maturity and confidence, demonstrating the school's readiness to extend the boundaries of its own understanding. Student enquiry projects, especially when they are set within a broader culture of teacher enquiry, help schools become 'learning organizations' whose members can identify their own issues and priorities and therefore become self-evaluating.

Moreover, students are likely to be attracted to a school community where their views are valued: as a teacher observed, 'there is a ripple effect as word gets round that the school is one that listens to students'. Students as Researchers projects indicate a commitment to *enacting* and not merely teaching about citizenship. Finally, they often involve partnerships with outside institutions (such as universities) that can help the school be both forward- and outward-looking.

Does the case presented here for the benefit of Students as Researchers projects resonate with your own experience and beliefs?

5. How do you start and sustain student enquiry?

The development of Students as Researchers and student enquiry requires careful planning and discussion, so that all those involved are clear about what is expected.

This section discusses:

- ensuring effective communication systems;
- how to involve students;
- choosing topics to research;
- establishing staff roles;
- matching enquiry strategies to the topic;
- resourcing and facilitating student enquiry;
- the importance of building trust;
- guiding the process;
- analysing and sharing the process and findings;
- building and developing student enquiry traditions.

Effective communication systems

Before Students as Researchers work has even begun, it is essential to develop shared understandings about lines of communication and responsibility, and about the aims, process and likely outcomes of the project. The following points need to be considered.

- Students must be assured that the research they are undertaking is real and not a cosmetic exercise, and that others will not hijack the project.
- If the enquiry extends beyond a single classroom, it is helpful if a senior manager expresses active support for the work from the beginning.
- Good systems not just for informing staff and other students, but also for involving them in the process should be established at the outset.
- It is important to consider how the research reports might relate to other student-led activities, such as the Student Council, and to relevant teacher groups such as teacher research or curriculum development groups.
- It is essential to be clear about who will act on the research outcomes.
- The relevant senior manager(s) should give a considered response to any recommendations arising from the research, except where the research-project is confined to an individual classroom teacher. Students will understand if their desired course of action is not possible, provided that the reasons are clearly explained. However, failure to take the recommendations or findings of the project seriously will undermine students' trust in future Students as Researchers activities.

How to involve students

A crucial issue concerns how students come to be involved. This depends in part on the aims of the project, on the context in which teachers are working (for instance, across school structures or in a single classroom), on the kind of topics to be researched and also on the existing school culture and relationships.

Selection of students by staff

This can be a 'safe' option, especially at the start of such work, and allows the groups to be shaped as teachers would like (e.g. in terms of gender balance). However, lack of transparency about selection can make the project seem elitist, creating resentment and undermining support from other students. Staff could overlook the needs and potential contribution of the most excluded groups of students - whose views may be particularly crucial for school development.

Open recruitment

Situations where students volunteer can give the undertaking credibility and the process itself raises awareness of the initiative. However, the risk here is that those who are confident enough to volunteer may not be representative of the whole student body, and groups may not be balanced (e.g. in terms of gender).

As projects develop, staff may feel more confident about working with a wider range of students, and staff and students can work together to recruit more mixed groups. It is important to remember that involving a wide range of students in discussing school issues is not an invariably harmonious experience. However, conflicts can be a sign of democratic strength rather than weakness, representing those who have not been heard finally finding a voice and demanding recognition; as such, they are often creative and generate new insights.

If student enquiry is a cross-school initiative, questions about how the groups are to be constructed should be considered, particularly in relation to age and friendships. Older students, for instance, require less training - in secondary schools, they are likely to have some research skills already. However, they will soon leave school and won't be around to pass on their skills. Younger students often astound staff and other students by their abilities, and help ensure the project lasts, as they can continue, perhaps taking on different roles; yet they may require more training and support at particular stages. Mixed age groups can offer very positive experiences of collaboration across years and are often the only chance students have to work in this way. However, it is important

to help them bond so that younger students are not intimidated, and to strike a balance between supporting younger students but still challenging older ones - for instance, by asking older students to act as mentors to younger ones.

Too many students in a research group may mean it becomes less focused and organized, unless those involved are used to working with each other - as in a case where a teacher works with a whole class. Too few may create too heavy a workload for those involved. An average of six to eight students per team has enabled successful collaboration in research projects. However, each team could be part of a larger enterprise, provided each can be resourced and supported properly.

Choosing topics to research

Students as Researchers groups may be brought together to discuss existing issues that the school, or an individual teacher working within their classroom, has decided to address through student research. Alternatively, students may join a research group out of a general interest in investigation, deciding the precise topics later.

A key debate here concerns who decides what to research. Will the boundaries be set in advance? Where is there a real chance of change? Equally, is there a culture of silence in the school that results in students censoring themselves about important issues? What are the limits, and are these clear to all parties? Where staff decide on the issues for enquiry (for instance, according to the school development agenda or a teacher's particular interest), information is likely to be useful and so lead to change. However, students may lack involvement and commitment; and it cuts off the possibility that students may raise important but overlooked issues. Where student researchers themselves choose the topics, they are likely to be motivated to see it through. However, it is important that staff understand and support the topics, and that other students feel that they represent their own views and concerns. Selection of topics through a system of voting by all relevant students can help develop commitment to the initiative and give student researchers a clear responsibility to act on behalf of others - although it may also mean that populist options win out.

In practice, there is often consensus between all parties over what issues are important and a combination approach (drawing on elements of all three methods of choosing topics) can work well. If students' concerns prove to be out of step with teacher or management priorities, this itself gives valuable information about the school community.

Establishing staff roles

Teachers should be available to support the Students as Researchers group - their contribution is often crucial to the success and smooth running of the process. However, their role may be quite different to the role they play in formal class teaching, and both sides need to be clear about this and adjust to it. The kinds of role staff may play include: helping to organize, encourage, prompt or coordinate; administrating; acting as advocates and go-betweens with other staff and other adults; helping with the sequencing and structure of the work; promoting good group dynamics; and sharing wider knowledge about the school to put things into perspective. And, importantly, it also involves teachers learning to step back and allow students to get on with the work. Increasingly, administrative staff and other support staff are working alongside students, especially younger ones, to support them in this process.

It is important to keep support and administrative staff fully informed about the work, especially if they are likely to be asked to help with booking rooms, arranging photocopying or passing on messages about meetings.

Access to external support in the form of mentoring, critical friends, sharing ideas at conferences and workshops or visiting other schools can help teachers maintain energy. Many teachers have begun Students as Researchers work whilst studying for an MA or educational diploma.

Matching enquiry strategies to the topic

When research topics have been identified, students and teachers need to find appropriate ways of finding answers. Students tend to assume that conventional research instruments such as surveys and questionnaires are the best approach, rather than using more in-depth or creative qualitative approaches. Students may therefore need to be introduced to alternatives. A useful way of thinking about the work might be to consider what insights student research might provide that professional forms of enquiry miss. Students as Researchers work may be seen as a way of making the 'unofficial' knowledge about teaching and learning that circulates between students more widely available and understood. Accessing such knowledge may require innovative approaches. For instance, one research project invited Year 7 students to make collages about their feelings about being new to the school, which they then talked about in discussions. Another accessible way of getting data is through photographs; for example, students have taken photos around the school of places where they feel safe or unsafe (MacBeath *et al.* 2003).

One dilemma concerns what happens if the quality of students' work

seems weak - for instance, if questionnaires or surveys are badly worded or poorly thought out. Teachers not involved might dismiss the research as having little value because they feel it is based on inadequate instruments. On the other hand, if the teachers supporting the Students as Researchers group correct and improve the work too much, the researchers may feel that the project is no longer 'theirs'. If the process appears to be a highly specialized and 'academic' activity, it may alienate some young people within the school and make them less willing to contribute, either as respondents or as researchers. Solutions to such dilemmas include the careful piloting of research instruments and good communication about the nature of the work to those who may be asked to respond to it.

Resourcing and facilitating student enquiry

Finding time to carry out the enquiry is always a difficult issue. Meeting at lunchtime is a common option, although it means that students' enthusiasm is crucial. In some schools, student enquiry is a timetabled extra-curricular option, or part of Citizenship Education. Students are often willing to come in during staff INSET or CPD days in order to present their findings or work-in-progress and tackle more substantial aspects of the research. Inductions for new student researchers in secondary schools can take place after the exams in the summer term when there is often more flexibility in the timetable. If students are to be involved in observing teaching and learning outside their own classroom or interviewing young people in other classes or schools, they will need to be allowed to do so during lesson time - which in turn means that other staff need to be aware and supportive of the projects, as do the parents of those involved.

Time is also a common concern for teachers, and schools' responsiveness and sensitivity to this issue is crucial. For example, one secondary school that was committed to supporting and developing student voice work built into its timetable one shared non-contact period a fortnight for the three participating staff.

Students as Researchers projects are not expensive to run, but they cannot be done for nothing. Support and understanding from senior managers and governors is therefore important. Possible requirements include meeting space; providing food and drink during meetings (to treat students as other adults would be treated in a similar situation); cover for teachers to accompany students to conferences; travel; stationery and access to photocopying and clerical support, for instance, in notifying students of meetings. More substantial costs might be incurred if, for instance, a teacher is given a responsibility point to coordinate the work,

or for training. Giving students a budget that is under their control is a powerful indicator of how far the school genuinely desires to share responsibility and power in decision-making.

The importance of building trust

Students as Researchers projects also need to create a space in which students and staff can come together in a different way and work together in a partnership. Early gatherings of the student researchers and the teacher or teachers working with them are important in establishing the parameters of the research and modelling new ways of working. Some starting points that have been found useful have included considering what different people (students, teachers, senior managers, outsiders) might each contribute to the process; sharing hopes, fears and expectations of the research; and working out ground rules that will guide the conduct of the research. For instance, in one school, students and teachers came up with the acronym 'SHORT' to describe their values: S, sensitive; H, honest; O, open; R, respect; T, trust.

Guiding the process

Student researchers need to be given the chance to acquire research skills and the social skills of listening, responding and negotiating that will enable them to contribute to - and ultimately take charge of - the research. Some schools draw on internal expertise to help with research methods, such as social science teachers or colleagues with research experience. In other cases, schools have been able to involve external figures who arrange or offer training and provide ongoing support for the student groups. Trainers can reinforce the work of teachers in supporting students but in addition, they may offer encouragement by setting the students' work in a wider context. They may help extend students' understanding of the subtleties of research and offer training in more participatory research techniques - such as drawing, role-play, photography, mapping/timelines, group work - rather than, or as well as, the established ones such as surveys, questionnaires and interviews, to which students often turn initially. Finally, they may act as a first 'audience' for the findings - someone to whom students can present what they have done, who acts as a sounding board for their thinking. Students are often motivated by developing relationships with an outsider whose opinion they respect and value. Whilst outside trainers can involve costs, some schools have formed consortia to supply training at less cost to individual schools.

In some cases, students who already possess certain key skills, knowledge and experience may consistently put themselves forward (or

be put forward by other group members) to take on leadership positions. Although they may have good intentions, such practices may ultimately undermine other students' confidence, perpetuate familiar hierarchies in terms of who takes on what roles and mean that the group fails to be representative of the wider student body. Time and care can be given early on to considering what skills the group collectively possesses and how these might be passed on - for instance, by less confident students shadowing others for a limited period of time and then taking over those roles.

Analysing and sharing the process and findings

Although data gathering - running discussion groups, observing lessons or interviewing - often seems the most exciting and motivating part of the research, sufficient time must be left for making sense of it. A large quantity of data is often gathered, even from a few interviews. Analysing data might follow a number of steps:

- keeping a record of what information was gathered and how;
- noting hitches experienced along the way;
- breaking it down to analyse it;
- drawing conclusions and checking back to see if the data support them;
- producing a report or record of the work;
- deciding how formal the report will be depending on the context of the work and its likely audience, such as other students, parents, staff or governors.

Communicating before, during and after the process is crucial and involves both informing and the process of dialogue. Informing involves letting people know what is planned and explaining to those who may be involved in or affected by the research why their time is needed and what the outcome of the research might be. Dialogue, on the other hand, involves providing opportunities for others to discuss the research and to influence it, helping others feel they have a stake in what is being done and sharing work in progress. Whilst information is important, dialogue may be more significant in bringing about widespread positive outcomes and significant 'cultural' change.

Everyone involved in the research should receive clear feedback. This serves to value what the student researchers have done as well as what others may have contributed. Students often find imaginative means of sharing findings. For instance, one group of sixth formers put selected quotations from their research report on the college Screensaver

to encourage people to read the whole report that was on the college intranet. Other students have used the school's radio or television broadcasting facilities to reach a wide audience. Word of mouth is also very powerful - many teachers become interested by seeing what the students have been achieving through their involvement and in hearing from them.

Students work extremely hard at their research and it is often the possibility of affecting practice that motivates them. It is essential that the relevant staff provide a thoughtful response to it, as we noted above. This does not, of course, always mean that recommendations are able to be implemented; it does always mean that student enquiry work is appropriately honoured. Staff should recognize and celebrate what has been achieved, for instance through individual letters to those involved, public congratulations at events such as parents' and awards evenings or credit for youth awards schemes. Where action is taken as a consequence of the research, it is worth highlighting this to students.

Dialogue also means recognizing that the results are open to interpretation and are not definitive. Teachers may disagree with students' views as expressed in their reports, although they offer valuable insight into students' concerns that need to be addressed. In some schools, staff training time has been given over to discussing the students' reports. This has worked particularly well when students are present to explain their research questions and methods and to respond in more detail to teachers' queries.

Engaging with others might also go beyond the individual school. Learning with and from other schools, both locally and nationally (even internationally), is increasingly recognized as important for school improvement.

There may be divergences of opinion over whether it is the actual outcomes of the report - the recommendations - that matter, or the process that led to it. On the one hand, students may have high expectations of the impact of the actual report and seek definite responses to it. Parents or governors may query the value of the work unless they can see concrete outcomes. For many teachers, however, it may be the process that matters most. Teachers are often very impressed to see students conducting themselves responsibly and becoming more active in their approach to learning and school improvement. They are often pleased and surprised at the amount of common ground between them. This 'culture change' in relationships and perceptions might seem more important than the research findings or, indeed, may not be adequately captured by a report. Thus, it is important to bear in mind the less

immediately obvious marks of change in the culture of the school. These might include, for instance, teachers within individual classrooms feeling more confident about handing over responsibility to students, and more open to students suggesting alternative ways of approaching their learning.

There is no doubt that senior staff and heads have to include amongst their number one or more 'champions' of the work. Some staff and parents may be concerned that participation projects distract students from their assessed schoolwork. In these cases it is vital that senior staff are prepared to defend the personal and academic value of such work and present evidence of its positive outcomes. They need also to act as champions of students. They should believe not only that young people are capable of working in these ways, but also that it is a good thing to encourage them to do so, and they should be able to recognize and respect what they achieve.

Building and developing student enquiry traditions

As time goes by, it is worth considering how to build capacity and help Students as Researchers projects become a more established feature of how the school operates. Existing student researchers may want to repeat the experience or take on new roles - such as monitoring changes as a result of previous research recommendations, helping to involve and train new students or acting as 'consultants' or advisors to new groups. Make sure that information about the projects is part of the induction of incoming staff so that they become aware of the research traditions of the school as far as possible, and enthuse other staff.

Are there any further queries and questions that remain having read the advice given here about how to develop the practice of Students as Researchers activities?

6. What dilemmas and issues are posed by the development of Students as Researchers activities?

The development of Students as Researchers activities represents a significant shift of practice for many practitioners, and it is important to think through the concerns that they may have. It is important as well to be aware of the limitations of student enquiry. This section includes:

- practitioner concerns: whose voices, whose purposes?
- the limitations of student enquiry and the possible pitfalls.

Practitioner concerns: whose voices, whose purposes?

When encouraging student enquiry, particularly into issues of teaching and learning, it is important to be sensitive to the genuine anxiety felt by teachers who have not experienced this way of working before. Teachers may be sceptical about young people's knowledge, intentions or capabilities. They may feel that children are not competent to offer comments on their work, that they may not keep confidentiality or that it gives a platform to the 'wrong' students. Some teachers have felt that students do not fully understand the complexities of the context or the system in which they operate. However negative outcomes are less likely where students are supported in their work and enabled to understand the broader context of their activities, and where issues of values and ethics are addressed early on and returned to throughout the process.

Student enquiry is unlikely to succeed unless teachers too are continuing learners - involved in seeking new ideas, analysing results, being reflective, trying out new practices and working with others. The opportunities that a school provides for staff to get involved in action research and other forms of professional enquiry are therefore crucial - as has been discussed elsewhere in this book.

The limitations of student enquiry and the possible pitfalls

It is important to be reflective and self-aware about the limitations of student enquiry. For instance, we should recognize that consultation and participation tend to require particular skills or dispositions, such as being able to articulate viewpoints in an 'acceptable' form, and a conciliatory or positive attitude towards school and teachers. Issues of social class within our society are as germane to student enquiry as any other aspect of schooling (Arnot *et al.* 2001). As Elena Silva so eloquently urges: 'We must recognize that the school's embossed invitation to participate looks unfamiliar, unattractive, or out of reach to many students, especially those in most need of serious changes in their school' (Silva 2001, p. 98). Whilst most schools recognize the risks of creating new elites within the student body they are often less aware of the very real danger of missing out on the voices of those who are quiet, silenced or even angry (see, for example, Bragg 2001; Cruddas 2001; Mitra 2001; Silva 2001) - yet whose viewpoints are nonetheless crucial for genuine school improvement. So much is demanded of teachers and students we find it difficult to create the space and nurture the dispositions to be open and attentive over time and in time:

The pressures of needing rapid results may lead us to listen most readily to voices that make immediate sense. ... (We need) to take our time with the anomalous (and) allow what doesn't fit or produces unexpected reactions in us to disrupt our assumptions and habitual ways of working (since) it is from these that we may, in the end, learn most.

(Bragg 2001, p. 72)

We should be thoughtful about the nature of the student 'voice' and the claims we make about its authenticity. We also need to ask sharp questions about whose purposes are being served by the recent upsurge of interest in and commitment to consulting young people. Both Ofsted and the DfES now have substantial sophisticated arrangements for listening to the views of students and we now have a Children's Commissioner for Wales who is taking very seriously the importance of listening and responding to young people in his country. The world is seldom all for or all against developments such as those we have been advocating in this chapter and it may well be we need more sophisticated analyses of these different perspectives (Bragg 2003; Fielding 2001c). Nonetheless, we need to scrutinize honestly the evidence of emerging work in the field for the claimed creativity and beneficence that the difference in standpoint between young people and adults is supposed to produce. Are students simply ventriloquizing predictable teacher-approved ideas, or are they bringing insights that are genuinely fresh and even challenging to those who are listening?

At the very practical day-to-day level, a number of teachers have found our framework for 'Evaluating the conditions for student voice' (Fielding 2001a and c) helpful, not only for evaluating student voice practices within their own schools, but also for prompting thought about how things might be developed in sustainable and creative ways.

Within your own context would there be any other issues posed by the development of Students as Researchers? If there are, how might you go about addressing them?

Evaluating the conditions for student voice

Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Who</u> is allowed to speak? • <u>To whom</u> are they allowed to speak? • <u>What</u> are they allowed to speak about?
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Who</u> is listening? • <u>Why</u> are they listening? • <u>How</u> are they listening?
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the skills of dialogue <u>encouraged and supported</u> through training or other appropriate means? • Are those skills understood, developed and practiced within the <u>context of democratic values and dispositions</u>?
Attitudes & dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do those involved <u>regard each other</u>? • To what degree are the <u>principle of equal value</u> and the <u>dispositions of care</u> felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>How often</u> does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur? • How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or <u>relate to other organizational arrangements</u> (particularly those involving adults)?
Organizational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the <u>cultural norms and values</u> of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? • Do the <u>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</u> demonstrate values supportive of student voice?
Spaces & the making of meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Where</u> are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place? • Who <u>controls</u> them? • What <u>values</u> shape their being and their use?
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What <u>action</u> is taken? • Who feels <u>responsible</u>? • <u>What happens</u> if aspirations and good intentions are not realized?
The future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need <u>new structures</u>? • Do we need <u>new ways of relating to each other</u>?

Endpiece

The student enquiry projects discussed here have proved to be a rewarding and positive experience both for young people and for teachers and other school staff. For students, the research projects offer the chance to explore new and different identities as researchers. They represent a

bridge between school and the adult or external world, in terms of the activities they involve and the dispositions and skills they develop - such as working independently and in teams, across hierarchies of age and status. Our evidence shows how motivating students find this - one student described it as 'that extra niche that I needed in order to keep me interested in my studies and motivate me to come to school'. In the process, young people acquire attitudes and skills that help them become lifelong learners, or as one deputy head put it, they become 'people who can control their own learning and can direct it because they can understand it'.

In addition, Students as Researchers activities enable students to contribute to the development of the whole school. Students have conducted relevant enquiries that have yielded important insights into teaching and learning from a student perspective - or have provided, as one head described it, 'the consumer insight, which we don't normally get'. Talk of 'consumer rights' within education often refers only to parents, not to the young people who have most experience of contemporary schooling. Students as Researchers represents a significant shift in how students are perceived. They are invited to form constructive partnerships with staff, where they play an active role in reflecting on the purposes and workings of school and in formulating ideas for improvement. Thus students comment that, 'It was an equal thing ... It wasn't like the teacher was telling us what to do', and teachers say, 'It's not about students picking holes in teachers, it's about achieving together'.

The process has led to improved relationships between staff and students. Teachers come to revalue students' capabilities in the process; as one teacher commented, 'it puts me back in touch with the inspirational side of [teaching], because their insights into their lives in school always exceed my expectations'.

It allows schools as institutions to reflect on teaching and learning processes. As one head argued, 'When you want to actually start making a difference closer to the classroom then the students' perception of what's going on becomes quite important'. As traditions of student enquiry grow and develop, new kinds of structures and spaces are emerging in schools, which belong neither to staff only (e.g. staff meetings) nor to students (student council meetings), but to both as co-facilitators of change. Already, instances where students run workshops on INSET days or join with teachers as equal members of an enquiry team or an evaluation group looking at new curriculum provision, have the capacity to shift school cultures and structures in ways that redefine the boundaries of traditional roles of 'teachers' and 'students'. At its best and in the right

circumstances, *Students as Researchers* is a 'boundary practice', where not only the tasks and conditions of learning have changed, but where the traditional roles and relations between teachers and students become more fluid and open to renegotiation. This is not about collaboration; rather it is about collegiality, a 'radical collegiality' (Fielding 1999) in which it is, on occasions, possible for teachers to learn from students, for students to teach teachers, and for both to understand in their hearts and in their actions that learning is at once joyful and terrifying, unpredictable and demanding of our patience and trust in each other. Above all, significant learning is not possible unless it is connected to a deeper narrative in which we struggle to understand who we are and who we wish to become together. This requires not only that we change our understanding of what it is to be a teacher, what it is to be a student. It also requires that schools transcend the belligerent and deeply corrosive imperatives of schools as high-performance learning organizations and instead become person-centred learning communities (Fielding 2000a and b). There are some grounds for thinking that, under certain conditions and with the inspiration of particular teachers and particular schools, initiatives like *Students as Researchers* might contribute towards the beginnings of such a process. It is long overdue. More depends on it than we think: it deserves our support.

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