

## Context

*The Students-as-Researchers projects that I refer to in this paper have taken place within a Post -16 College that was ostensibly a Sixth-Form College but which has, in the past year, become part of a wider College, Central Sussex College, Sixth Form Haywards Heath. The first student project was set up in 2002 and this paper refers to the five projects that have been carried out since 2002. Included here are student responses as they recall their experiences of the student action research they engaged with; descriptions and evidence of how the projects came about and a discussion of the effects such student-led work has had in terms of student and teacher experience, college structures, processes and culture. This paper addresses the benefits of doing such work as part of any educational process, the problems faced by teachers and students involved in such work and the future potential of such work. This paper promotes the need for this kind of student involvement in education in a way that is concerned with engaging students and teachers together, to openly research into teaching and learning, in all sorts of ways in order to make education relevant and alive.*

As a teacher, one of the most refreshing experiences I have had was participating in a student-led staff inset. This inset opportunity arose from a 'Student Voice' group, as it was then known, which had been evolving during the academic year. The group began early in the autumn term, when I met up with students to talk about Equal Opportunities. There had been a fairly active Equal Opportunities Committee at college but what had been missing in this group was the active involvement of students. At the point that I took over as Equal Opportunities Coordinator I wanted to find ways to make 'Equal Opportunities' meaningful, I wanted to try to redefine it and move it away from the alienating space it can tend to inhabit. I wanted to identify equality issues and central to this, in my view, was equality of participation and access: just how democratic were we?

As a starting point, I had a lively discussion with about 15 students (16/17year olds) who turned up to a lunchtime meeting to talk about student involvement in Equal Opportunities issues at College. To spark the discussion I waved exam results at

them, highlighting gender differences in achievement in some curriculum areas.

I went on to ask why they felt students 'under-achieved' – why some students did better than others and if they felt anything could be done about this. Big questions. They had a lot to say. This was a pivotal moment. I was reminded how much can be learned from students not just in the classroom but outside, beyond the prescribed curriculum areas. But when do we actually hear what the students have to say in a genuine public forum? When are students heard in a way that is not prescribed and limited by mechanistic practices such as those involved in the Quality Assurance tick-box regime? Where is it that student ideas are informing decision making processes, college ethos, the way we teach and so on..? As Fielding states, '*on occasions, and in particular contexts and circumstances, students might also teach their teachers*'. (Fielding, 2005 (a))

In further discussions it transpired that what helps students to want to engage in teaching and learning processes (unsurprisingly) includes:

- *A friendly supportive atmosphere in the class room, with teachers being addressed by their first names*
- *Approachable teachers so that students feel able to ask questions when they do not understand*
- *Tutor group meetings that are time-tabled in rooms where students can see each other and the teachers easily (rather than being blocked/hidden by equipment)*
- *A friendly, sociable atmosphere around college generally*
- *Student involvement in decision-making processes where they can see the results of their input*
- *Greater opportunities for students to talk one-to-one with tutors and teachers*
- *Tutorial sessions that are time-tabled in slots that make better sense for students*

Such responses served to remind me of the student perspective in quite a stark way.

I realised that actually students are to an extent as 'expert' as teachers. They are

perhaps more immersed than teachers in a wide range of experiences of teaching and learning that are both recent and diverse. I realised that what was missing in my college, in a public/institutional way, was genuine student consultation, student dialogue with teachers about teaching and learning and the involvement of students in decision-making processes across college in a way which actually informed the running of the college. This was in 2002.

Since then a lot has happened and our college now enjoys a much greater student involvement in a range of areas. The influence of the student initiative emanating from the Student Equal Opportunities group in 2001/2 has had a significant part to play in this greater student involvement. Furthermore, student involvement has led to: the restructuring of the tutorial system; changes to the student induction process; increased opportunities for student involvement (formally and informally) in college structures and processes (including teaching and learning) as well as increased student participation in any changes that are made to the College environment. All of this has been informed by the work of students-as-researchers / 'Student Voice' groups over the past 4 years.

From this initial discussion with the fifteen or so students, a group was formed which became known as the 'Student Voice Group'. It is this group which, under my auspices, has been meeting over the past four years. It is this Student Action Research project that I discuss in this paper.

From the very beginning formal procedures and structures were put in place for the running of the project. Such procedures and structures added 'weight' and some clear organisation to the group's purpose. A chair was elected, minutes were taken of every meeting held and the chair became a link person between this Student Voice Group and the college's Equal Opportunities Committee. This student group over the years has held on to calling itself the 'Student Voice Group'. (More

recently it has also been known as 'Student Researchers' .)The use of 'Voice' rather than 'Voices' has been discussed and the ways in which its singularity is problematic have been raised. I think it is worth noting here that my experience in the last four years has led me to conclude that we should move away from the notion of an almost mythical, monolithic 'Student Voice' and think more in terms of *engaged voices*. The way forward should be conceptualised less in terms of a *student voice (or voices)* and more through the idea of '*engaged voices*' of students and teachers, who together are making and negotiating shared social meanings (Leora Cruddas, 2006).

The students' weekly meetings were provided with refreshments. This was important as students were often working through their lunchtimes. We have been fortunate to have a very supportive Principal who agreed to fund the refreshments and who also created the role of Student Voice Coordinator, signalling how valuable he felt such work was.

I now want to turn to outline the student-led staff inset which happened in 2002. This was the first significant event that grew out of the Student Voice Group.

#### **Students leading Staff Student Voice Staff Inset Summer 2002**

*'I learned a lot...and feel that I can take back what they said to improve my own teaching approaches. This was the most relevant and challenging inset I have ever attended.'*

*'From where can we find realistic amount of time for student dialogue? As subject staff, not as pastoral tutor? In the planned timetable? Without restructuring further the breadth and depth of our teaching? We used to be able to do this and much regret that currently we cannot.'* (Teacher responses in evaluation)

Michael Fielding guided the students in devising the Inset. Students had previously attended training sessions in research methodology at Sussex University and had then carried out research in to student opinions of teaching and learning.

They devised questions, carried out impromptu interviews with students around College, recording student opinion. After analysis of the student responses they created role-play scenarios to convey the research findings. They also produced flyers headed *The 'Dream' Teacher* (see below) that listed ideal qualities of teachers as identified by students.

### The 'Dream' Teacher

- Promotes a real **interest** in their subject
- Injects **enthusiasm** into every lesson
- Promotes a constant Teacher-Student **interactivity**
- Provokes lively **discussions** or disputes through provocative statements.
- Creates an atmosphere that makes teachers **approachable**.
- Allows for **flexibility** in lesson structure to allow wider debate on associated issues while at the same time maintaining the rigidity needed to cover the syllabus.
- **Knows** whether or not their students are likely to respond better to dictation or group discussion. Some students find that too much dictation leads to a passive response to learning and prefer a more discursive atmosphere. Others benefit from dictation and find discussion unproductive and likely to lapse into idle conversation.
- Uses visual aids and activities that complement the main issues of the lessons and make it more **active**, without distracting from the main theme.
- Gives **examples** that the students can relate to. This helps to make the lesson material more accessible.
- Does not set too many tasks that involve taking notes from books during lessons. Students feel this is better done at home, with class time reserved for discussion.
- Finds out from their students what they find useful with regards to teaching methods.

The structure of the inset was as follows:

1. Teachers were put in groups, by the students, to respond to the following specific questions concerning teaching and learning:
  - What can we learn from students?
  - What do students bring to the teaching and learning process?
  - What do staff bring to the teaching and learning process?

2. Students presented their research findings in role play scenarios as well as delivering presentations that explained the Student Voice project's work and intentions.
3. Teachers were then put in groups(with students from the Student Voice research group) and asked to respond to the following issues of concern identified by the students:
  - The tutorial system/process (effectiveness of dialogue between student and teacher, sense of 'group identity');
  - Teaching and learning process (methods that work, peer lesson observation? Cross-college peer lesson observation?);
  - College structure (opportunities for student involvement/ spaces for student/staff dialogue?).
4. These groups were also asked to rank areas of concern in priority order. Responses were put on to flip chart paper that was then stuck on the walls around the room.
5. Finally, a plenary discussion took place which included reference to the Flip chart responses.

The table on pages 8 and 9 summarises the responses from the discussions that took place. The responses highlight how closely linked and interactive teachers and students are in their working relationships. This awareness is critical when devising effective education that is based on an understanding of the importance of the need to create opportunities, spaces and places, for all to contribute to the teaching and learning process. The awareness that we can, and do, learn from each other is important. It is not a one-way process and it is the process that matters as much as, if not more than, the 'end product'. The work that has been

developing over the years at our College recognises the value of our students' creative energies and of the partnerships that can (and do) exist between students and staff. As ever, there are external forces that work against this ethos. The imposed prescriptive regime of continual testing ever builds against, and traps, creativity.

What do students bring to the teaching and learning process?	What do teachers bring to the teaching and learning process?
Potential	More life experience/past experience of education Opinions/ frustrations/ cynicism/boredom
Humour and a sense of fun	Attention to individual needs balanced with needs of whole group
A huge range of experience	Knowledge/advice/guidance/support
Insight/expertise/knowledge/ignorance	Enthusiasm/ love of the subject
Enquiring minds/ideas about what they want	Sense of caring and responsibility for students
A positive questioning and critical approach – keeps you on your toes!	Good and bad attitudes/moods
Commitment–turning up regularly, producing work	Variety of approaches/teaching style
Habits of learning feedback / responses/ opinions	Nagging and discipline
Naivety/youth/adolescence	Conservatism/control
Experience of different teaching methods/creativity	Adaptability
External pressures/Parental expectations/ peer pressure	Compassion
Increasing responsibility for self in all aspects of life	Targets/ Extra-curricular activities/ interpretation of material into an accessible form
Enthusiasm /lethargy/ lack of motivation/motivation	Setting of a framework/structure – we make judgements as to the most successful /appropriate way of delivering the material
Disruption/Resistance	Expectations/challenges/aspirations
Personality – sometimes they can be moody/really lively: ‘period 5 on a Friday..’	Tolerance/patience/intolerance/impatience
Prejudices/problems/hopes and fears for the future	Stress/feeling pressurised and passing it on –from management/exams/family
Money for the college – this is a driving force making good retention necessary	Reassurance/Motivation/ Security and continuity
Personal and emotional needs/ Expectations of success and/or failure	Stereotyping/prejudice/preconceived ideas
Their cultures/preconceived ideas	Personality/foibles/fallibility/inconsistency
Different abilities/enthusiasms/inspiration/ideas	Monitoring of progress/feedback/encouragement
A thirst to learn	
Support and advice –to each other/role model	

What can we learn from students?	What can we learn from teachers?
We can learn a lot if we ask them	Academic skills/resources
How students learn –variety of ways	Expertise/wit and wisdom/ specialisms
What their concerns are/What interests them	Love for the subject
Facts and information/What they already know	Different perspectives
Their needs and aspirations	How to rise to challenges
How they think they are doing: strengths/weaknesses/progress	New experiences/ideas
We (as a group) learn from each other's experience	Mutual respect
Understanding of each other's viewpoints/different perspectives	Sense of progress/strengths/weaknesses
Their interpretations of subject/topics	Knowledge and opinions
How they approach life individually	Role models
How to improve personal and professional skills	Sense of purpose
What is most useful in terms of pace of study/how they work best when they are under pressure	Realism
New knowledge/ideas we hadn't thought of	Preconceived ideas/prejudices
We can learn a lot if we ask them	Demystification of exams/how to pass them
Re-learning your subject	How to fulfil assessment criteria
Strengths and weaknesses as a teacher	
Our own prejudices/we learn about ourselves	
What they find easy/difficult/enjoyable	
What their priorities are	
Whether we are boring them/holding their attention	
Popular culture/changing culture/different backgrounds	
They are able to surprise us	
The value put on exams and education	

The Inset experience was perhaps most importantly about the *process* of dialogue.

It provided a space and opportunity within the academic year whereby we could all stop, think and learn together about what we were all doing at college. There were some difficult moments, particularly in the plenary. Power dynamics were challenged in the role reversal experience. Students were formally the controllers of

this event. Quite mind blowing actually and it generated a blast of vitality and democracy.

External forces, which can understandably feel beyond our control, dictate that time for such an exercise as this Inset is not formally scheduled as part of the academic experience. The pressures of a heavy curriculum and exam driven schedules seem to work relentlessly against institutions creating such opportunities as this Inset provided. As Fielding states *'Schools are currently awash with data, most of which is externally driven and much of which is tangential to the core purposes of schools as educational institutions.'*(Fielding, 2001)

The same is true in the post-16 sector. If this Inset experience were to be a regular event, part of the academic calendar, it would create a more vibrant and democratic approach to the educational experience in any educational institution. As Fielding, and the notable work of other practitioners (for example, Arnot et al. 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Harding, 2001; Raymond, 2001) suggests:

*'...we have to develop spaces and practices within and between our organisations that nurture dialogue, not as exotic or special features of otherwise quite different institutions, but as integral practices of human learning and daily encounter.... We need to create shared practices where we can be attentive and open with one another in ways which encourage our mutual responsibility for the quality of our lives together...It is about ensuring student voices and teacher voices are also the voices of persons in relation to one another in the quest for a deeper and more fulfilling humanity.'* (Fielding, 2004)

Having outlined the event of the staff inset I now want to offer, in the spirit of Student Voices, some student reflections on their work. I offer this space to the students because there is no better way of encapsulating the value and effectiveness of the project.

### **Student voices: some student reflections on their work**

**Chris's response to the Inset (a 1<sup>st</sup> year AS student when he first got involved; 2002-3):**

*'...The Student Voice Group were certainly concerned about how productive the day was going to be. No student in the Student Voice Group (SV) was ever under the impression that teachers were 'the enemy' and we took great care to make sure that the SV did not become an 'enemy' of the teachers. Both were usually thinking on the same lines. For many, we were preaching to the converted. But that was rather helpful – if the teachers realised more accurately what students were concerned about, we realised more accurately the practical constraints on any changes in the teaching and learning process.*

*'...the INSET was important. It confirmed to the staff that the Student Voice Group was serious about what it was doing and that it was not the aim of the project to send each teacher a report card with 'Must do better' inscribed upon it. This was not a name and shame exercise. Just as importantly, the Student Voice Group itself discovered by making suggestions on specific problems (e.g. with the timetable) that it could make a difference and that the whole process might be worth the effort. Even when our final report was presented to the teaching body, when the response was initially a lot more critical, it was accepted as a good representation of the student voice. It would be... accurate to describe Student Voice as allowing the student voice to be heard, giving the College an extra, important, thing to factor in.*

*'That conclusion is important, because it highlights how the Student Voice Group ...must, continue to report and present the views of the student body to the College*

*and the teaching body. Where it can make specific recommendations on specific issues and problems identified it should do so, because it is on those points that one can identify a direct change. However, in the more general sense the Student Voice Group performs a further function. It serves as a reminder. If the opportunity is given to the Student Voice Group every two years or so to run an INSET, as we did, it will perform a valuable reminding function, even if the actual responses and concerns of the students do not particularly change over time. A strong and constant voice can only keep driving the message home.*

*'From a personal point of view, I was privileged to chair the first Student Voice Group and to help shape the direction that our group and future groups, approached the expression of the student voice. Were we successful? In terms of identifiable results –in my time rarely. In terms of helping to create a culture change – undoubtedly.'*  
(Chris Knight :2002-4)

**Lizzie's perspective (a 1st year AS level student when she first got involved, 2003-5):**

*'I found that students had a voice within the college, on all areas of change, from social spaces to actual teaching methods. Student Voice was what we made it, a significant and worthwhile project, spearheading change. Yes it is hard to get students involved, but once a part of the project, having a voice within your own education, being involved in an active dialogue with teachers, initiating change, is an amazing experience. No longer the passive student. I have a voice.*

*'Having a voice, a way of being heard, was a novelty. Throughout secondary school it was just a matter of accept what comes, the ongoing battles concerning cafeteria food got no where and although people heard what the students had to say, nothing seemed to become of it. We learnt to accept it. The level of student participation at sixth form came as a culture shock, here were teachers who, as well as listening to the students, were hearing them. A different thing entirely. This student involvement was a life changing thing, affecting students further down the line and, on a personal*

*level, me. Being a part of this 'student voice' project turned me from a quiet, accepting, studious student, to a confident, involved, spirited, articulate member of the college. Still studious, of course*

*'The students-as-researchers project can have a major impact on college or achieve very little, it all depends on what happens with the results. There are major benefits for the students involved in the project however, in my experience I don't think the results had an immediate impact on the student population. They only really feel the effects once resulting policies and initiatives are set in motion.*

*'In my year we studied the various teaching methods that were employed within college and, hopefully, the results had a positive impact on teachers and how they taught. This may not mean changing the way they taught, but just affirming that what they were doing was appreciated. With a topic such as ours, the impact on teachers really depended on how much they took to heart. Some sceptical teachers may not have been influenced by our results at all however, with others our research may have to lead to a complete overhaul of their way of thinking. Student Voice shouldn't be student vs. teacher but more of an active discussion between the two. With teaching methods being rather a sensitive topic, the issue of power relations between staff and students did arise however, apart from the initial uncertainty about students observing teachers, the resulting discussions weren't affected by the power differences between the two because, as students, we just held a different kind of power.*

*'For students the benefits are... Students gain or improve upon personal skills such as public speaking, organisation, learning to lead, peer discussions, researching and so on. The benefits derived from the research itself depends on the topic being researched. Knowledge is a key benefit, if teaching methods are the topic of choice then students are led to understand more about the education system, if canteen food is the interest then this can help students learn more about nutrition and so on. For the teachers it allows an insight into the minds of students, what they think, their*

*views and opinions on a whole range of (or specific) topics. Teacher/student relationships can sometimes only exist within the walls of the classroom however, the results of the student research allows teachers another way of engaging students in an active dialogue, rather than just through things like a college council which is made up of a select number of students.'* (Lizzie Quill, Student Researcher 2003-5)

**Sarah's perspective (a 1st year AS level student, 16 years old when she got involved):**

*'...the Student Voice project...appealed because it wasn't primarily concerned with results but rather the way in which students, in discussion with each other and teachers, negotiated problems and ideas. It was a constant work in progress that stimulated and promoted communication between various different members of the college community...*

*'Suddenly, I found myself in a rousing position as I realised that the Student Voice project had evolved into one massive wake up call for the college with regards to student participation. The project enabled the accepted power relations between teaching staff and students to be questioned, as it was now (following the success of the INSET day) thought informative and appropriate for students to communicate their findings with reference to what students craved for during their college day.*

*'I joined the Student Voice group at an exciting time, as it had gained a great deal of confidence from the positive feedback from the INSET day. Consequently, our meetings revolved around exploring the impact we were having on the college, and we proceeded to discuss ways in which the student voice could make a greater impression, without making the teaching staff feel threatened. It was these discussions about the student voice and who that embodies that will remain with me for as long as I have to work with large numbers of people. Looking around the Student Voice group it was clear that we were not representative of the student population, not by a long shot! Thus, conversations with Jo Thorp at Sussex University started to express concerns as to how representative our findings were. How could we call ourselves a Student Voice group, when those in the group were not indicative of the dynamic crowds of people within the college? ... in 2004 we worked even harder to penetrate groups of people that didn't have a desire to participate in the pastoral side of college.*

*'Ultimately, as a group our aim was to project the voices of those students that didn't necessarily want to be at college, those that found the educational system alienating, a struggle, perhaps even a bore...we started to target specific groups of students who we didn't feel were substantially represented, for example International Students. Encouraged by Jo Thorp to be as original as possible when thinking up new ways to gather information, we stuck blank sheets on the back of toilet doors around the college, with one simple question on the top of each. Our aim was to stimulate students to personally respond to us, in their own time when there wasn't an interviewer or questionnaire present.*

*'...For the first time reports and findings were communicating the concerns of students who often don't willingly express their feelings and opinions. The group's work made teachers want to listen and hear what we had found, as they acknowledged the way in which we had taken time, outside of the classroom, to simply listen to students.*

*'...I became sensitive to the way in which our findings were making the student / teacher dichotomy more and more stimulatingly complex. It was no longer a case of the teacher teaching the student absorbing information, and more about what the two separate bodies had to offer one another. If I have learnt anything, it's that teachers and students bring two very different, but equally valuable, sets of experiences to the classroom and college environment, and when each is aware of the other both can benefit hugely.'* (Sarah Handley, Student Voice Group 2002-4)

**Amy's perspective (2nd year A2 student, 17 years old when she first got involved):**

*...I was particularly interested... because I hadn't previously heard of a research project like this, one that was directed purely by students. I knew that there were things about the college that I would like to see improved and wondered whether more people felt the same way as me.*

*'As a student project I had not expected that we would have as much freedom as we did, not only to design our own research, but also to arrange with tutors to speak to their students during college hours and record potentially sensitive material...*

*I did become deeply involved in both the research and the analysis of the results. I have a sense now that at the time I didn't fully realise how empowering our involvement in this project was for us. I realise now that this was as much an aim of*

*the project as was the improvement of college for the student body in general...this project gave us the opportunity to put our findings to members of staff face-to-face. This was a great opportunity for us, but also a challenge that I certainly had never encountered before. To have to justify our findings and our suggestions to a group of people who had always held more power than us, and who the results would directly effect, was a great responsibility. For me this gave enormous weight to the project and made me conscious that not only our results, but also our methods, would have to live up to this.*

*'It really gave us a chance to see what we could achieve largely by ourselves, and the learning experience, including the excellent help we were given by members of Sussex University, was invaluable and has continued to benefit me into the future.'*

Before I turn to discussing Student Voice work at Central Sussex College, Sixth Form Haywards Heath in a wider educational context I want to offer a quick outline of areas of research that the Student Voice Groups/Students-as-Researchers have undertaken at our college.

Areas of College life that the Student Voice Group have undertaken research into include:

- College atmosphere, social aspects, spaces
- Lesson structure
- Teaching methods and student learning
- Teacher/student relation
- College induction/enrolment process
- Transition from school to college
- Student eating habits/college food options./ student awareness of links between diet and ability to learn

Research methods used in this research have included:

- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Interviews – one-to-one
- Small group discussions
- Invitation to graffiti in response to ideas on posters put on toilet doors
- Responses to visual images
- Lesson observations

Student researchers were aware of sampling issues. They used various sampling techniques depending on the specific research in progress. Some research involved stratified random sampling to enable a reasonable representation from all year groups, course levels and subject areas. Other research used quota sampling deliberately targeting minority students.

After student analysis of data the research is written up into a Report and findings presented to staff and students in a variety of ways:

- Role play activities
- Student presentations at meetings
- Posters put up around College
- College intranet/screensavers
- Film /DVD shown to groups and at meetings
- Word of mouth
- Hard copy of Report distributed to staff, students and available in College Library

I have outlined evidence of significant changes that have directly stemmed from this student research earlier ( see page 3).

**What is education anyway?**  
**Placing Student Voice work at Central Sussex College, Sixth Form**  
**Haywards Heath in a wider educational context**

The student led inset, students' research work and the many consequences of this work (including the student reflections in this paper) have all been positive experiences. They at once promote and reflect a conceptualisation of what education should be about. As Cruddas and others argue '*there is not a strong tradition of teaching and learning as 'pedagogic practice' in England*' (Cruddas 2005:25)

Students-as-Researchers, in my view, demonstrate learning as social practice. The research process involves students in actively creating more equal structures within educational institutions by their participation in the processes beyond exams and tests. There is a moral case for such initiatives as Students-as-Researchers to be an integral part of pedagogic practice, creating practice which would inevitably increase the possibility of realising greater equality of opportunity for all. It is a process that contributes to the possibility of breaking down some of the more negative barriers that exist between students and between students and teachers. It is important to be aware of the different voices, and of the hierarchy of voices, in education. The participation in such a process and its outcome will be significantly informed by a range of social and economic factors. To achieve active participation from the potential that is out there in educational processes, in terms of the multiplicity of dialogic 'voices', is clearly the ultimate aim. This aim is informed by an understanding that such processes of engagement and articulation are contextual and relational, complicated and challenging (cf Leora Cruddas who develops this thinking: 2006).

The key problems that I as a teacher face in this kind of work are: the instrumental culture that seems all pervasive in education; the lack of time, staffing and money to support such initiatives; how to engage those students who *may* positively choose to

remain on the edges of things in education. We need to provide as many ways as we can to hear what different and diverse students have to say and to engage them in conversation about pedagogic practices. We need to increase opportunities to engage with and respond to student (and teacher ) diversity.

### **It's all very well but...**

Having outlined the benefits of having Student Voice / Student Action Research/ Students-as-Researchers groups active within a college I would like to add that I am only too aware of the reasons why such practice does not happen I am staggered, when I stop to think about it, at how little children's and students' views are genuinely taken into account and how student consultation processes can often run aground. (This reality has been reflected by students earlier on in this paper.) I will outline in brief what I see as the main barriers that exist to this kind of work 'flourishing' (Fielding,2005 (b)),why this vital work can get sidelined.

1. Teachers can feel threatened but only, in my view, through a misunderstanding of what Students-as-Researchers is about. What has been demonstrated to me, and what needs to be emphasised, is that the ethos that underpins this kind of work is one that goes against the culture of '*hey, teachers, leave those kids alone!*' We are not engaging with notions of an 'us and them' culture, of teachers as the 'baddies', but rather the notion of education as a participatory experience. Such an experience involves students, teachers and staff as a whole, in any educational institution, working together.
2. Most "student consultation", "student evaluation" exercises are, superficial and largely tokenistic. They are very much part of the "students as customers/clients" model which has infected much of education since the 1980's. They are not authentic attempts to involve students in a genuine process of participation and dialogue. This misappropriation and corruption of the spirit behind projects such as "student voice"

undermines any genuine attempt to involve students in education in ways such as those outlined in this paper.

3. The idea that it is only confident middle-class students whose voice will be heard. This charge of elitism is used in every area of life as a way of dismissing valuable contributions. Perhaps another way to engage the disengaged is by students themselves initiating engagement. If, as some argue, this adds privilege to those who already have privilege, then part of this very process must be about engaging with this fact and raising awareness about the difficulties this presents, exploring how such privilege can be challenged and greater democracy achieved. A critical edge always needs to be intervening.
4. There are already democratic student representative bodies, such as the NUS and some may question why we need student research groups. I think this paper clearly demonstrates that student groups like the Student Voice groups discussed perform an entirely different function to any other student group in the educational process.
5. In an exam saturated, curriculum driven educational system many would argue that there is no room for such initiatives. Exam pressure and 'results' shape our every day lives in education these days. This is another reason for not supporting such student-led work. But perhaps there may well be more place for such initiatives in educational processes as those who work in education, including 'leaders', are increasingly balking at the prohibitive amount of quality assurance systems that now exist.

'Teachers as co-adventurers' (Fielding, at a recent conference at Nottingham University, 2006) is an idea that seems to me to capture the best spirit of education, a spirit that seems to be fading. We need to revitalise that spirit, the engaged voices of students and teachers working together on such initiatives as Students-as-Researchers is a positive way forward.

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