

ESRC Research Conference
Pupil Voice & Participation: pleasures, pitfalls & promises
Discussion and dialogue session 22/5/06 (JMc & NW)

What do we see as the pleasures (strengths) of what is going on in pupil voice in research & schools?

What are the pitfalls (challenges)?

What are the promises (directions for the future)

Pleasures

- New approaches to research eg re images
- Using pupil perspectives
- Creation of new spaces-out of the box
- Students excited about possibilities and having a good time.
- The variety of what is happening (though can also be a pitfall)
- Importance of networks & networking (eg NLCs where pupil voice activity a great source of motivation- also inclusion)

M.Arnot argued for a 4th 'p'- of *politics*- noting that the concept of student voice is galvanising, reviving the humanistic approach which is about (the purposes of) education rather than a performance culture. It can provide an umbrella for concerned people to retrieve their democratic voice, with the potential to interest many – and bring back teacher voice.

R Holdsworth talked of the uncertainty, open-endedness and delight of mutual challenge and exploration. Opening up respect and mutuality with the willingness to puzzle over language and to argue and learn from each other.

Pitfalls

- Diversity of activity too great?
- Thinking we have the answers
- Uncertainty for school staff just starting out (eg feeling criticised for 'first steps' such as engaging with middle class girls only in the school council)
- But student voice presently serves those who least need it- this should not go unchallenged.
- Finding spaces and places to engage in dialogue- the challenge of time eg to think
- Practical issues, such as finding physical spaces
- Continuity
- Too many toolkits
- Tokenism- danger of promising the world and delivering nothing
- Can end up reinventing the wheel
- Don't give up too early on citizenship education
- Professional voice of teachers has in many ways been silenced
- Biggest pitfall is the relationship of student voice to power. (cf LynnDavis- why is England so far behind? eg on school boards)

Promises

- The next goal should be to embrace more of a variety of different voices
- Get the challenges operating in a productive way
- Work with governors and parents as well as students
- What role does education play in developing communities?
- Input into Building Schools for the Future programme-
- Find out more about what is happening internationally
- Values education- what are the common threads linking this up?
- Harnessing what is happening but at the same time being critical 'harnessing an uncertain truth'.
- Need to get into ITT, the Unions, GTC, CPD - retrieve the professional voice of teachers- mobilise teacher networks and lobby.

Politics

- What is all this for?
- Equality, diversity, inclusion
- How do we galvanise/reclaim democracy?
- Our (English) approach to education is heavily class-based
- What kind of citizens do we want?-Young people are citizens but do not have full access to their rights
- New Labour/government have co-opted the discourse of consultation/participation
- Good work goes on but there is not the force behind it.
- Change is happening incrementally- there is no one place to start
- Need a strong political voice from the profession (eg to influence BSF)- mobilise teacher networks in different localities/regions
- Link with English Schools Childrens commissioner
- Use outcomes of conference to build a series of regional networks