Teacher Leadership

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Editorial

David Frost
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

Welcome to this, the second issue of *Teacher Leadership*, a journal dedicated to publishing accounts of teacher-led development work.

A new direction?

Following the successful launch of the journal last year we have been delighted to receive messages of support and appreciation from readers both in the UK and overseas. It seems that there is a keen hunger for authentic accounts of teacher-led development work. *Teacher Leadership* was originally conceived as a way to publish the work of members of a particular network – the HertsCam Network – to help to build knowledge about teaching and learning. However, the response we have received from all over the world indicates that the journal is unlikely to remain exclusively tied to this particular network. Teachers not only want to read about other teachers' development work; they also want to contribute their own stories.

There is much to be gained from comparison and debate across national and cultural boundaries so we would like to extend the scope of the journal to include articles and stories from elsewhere. However, in doing this, we face a dilemma. Our current editorial policy is to avoid the sort of selection procedures which often involve a long delay while referees' comments are sought and can result in disappointment for those whose papers are rejected. Instead all the articles and stories in *Teacher Leadership* are based on masters theses or portfolios of evidence that have already been scrutinised and examined by the University. We also play a very direct, hands-on role in helping to shape these accounts. These procedures enable us to maintain the focus on the particular values we are seeking to promote within our network. This has been successful so far because of the good relationship between the teacher-authors and the journal editors, involving as it does high levels of trust and flexibility.

So the question is: how can we expand the scope of the journal without losing its coherence and integrity, or having to adopt time

consuming editorial procedures that could lead to disappointment for teachers submitting material deemed to be unsuitable? As a tentative move forward we decided, for this second issue, to include an article from another network. The article is mediated and edited by the network facilitator who is known to us and who shares our aims. So far this experiment has been very encouraging in that we have been able to include an article from elsewhere in which we have complete confidence.

Core values

In the light of the proposal to expand the scope of the journal it is perhaps timely to clarify and articulate our core values. They are of course provisional and open to debate. I set them out below and illustrate with reference to the articles and stories published in this issue of the journal. The core values of *Teacher Leadership* can be represented as having four dimensions: shared leadership, teachers' leadership of development work, teachers' knowledge building, and teachers' voice.

Shared leadership

The title of the journal signals that we seek to promote teacher leadership but this is just one important dimension of a perspective in which schools are learning communities where senior leadership teams support and orchestrate the leadership of **all** members of the school community whether they have formal roles and responsibilities or not. Susan Thomas' article about using drama to support children's writing exemplifies how teachers can develop their leadership capacity by initiating change and working with their colleagues to support that change across the school. The story of Tom Murphy's development work is distinctive in that it celebrates how a newly qualified teacher was able to take the lead and influence colleagues across the school in spite of having no formal position and very little experience as a teacher. Tom's story is also interesting in that the focus of the development work was student leadership in the classroom. Tom's work is supported by the culture of shared leadership described by Jo Mylles in the last issue of *Teacher Leadership*. This can also be seen to be working to support Tom's colleague, Liz Brown, who has done some very interesting work in which she has cast students in roles of responsibility with regard to peer-supported independent study. Nicky Bourne's article also deals with student leadership although in her case the project began as a whole school initiative.

Teachers' leadership of development work

The journal sets out to portray and exemplify the concept of 'development work' which is about acting strategically to bring about improvement in the practice of teaching and learning. This involves taking the initiative and managing a project in which teachers consult and collaborate in order to influence colleagues and improve practice throughout the school. Inquiry is an important element here, but rather than being an end in itself, it is used to fuel the process of review, evaluation, planning and so on. In Scott Martin's and Amanda Roberts' article we have an account of a students' workshop and follow-up interviews that generated evidence used to fuel a school-wide dialogue about teaching and learning. In the story of Wendy Wilson's development work we see the use of peer observation within a subject department to focus on the development of strategies for improving students' oracy. Wendy planned a professional development event for the whole school – a characteristic of many of the projects showcased in the journal. Portrayals of Sonia Turner's development of strategies to combat boys' underachievement were shared with all her colleagues at a staff meeting which led to the establishment of a system of Boys' Achievement Action Plans. These are just a few examples of accounts that demonstrate how teachers can build collaborative processes that lead to change. I have put forward detailed arguments for teacher-led development work in a number of publications that can be accessed through our website: www.teacherleadership.org.uk.

Teachers' knowledge building

The journal also seeks to promote the idea that teachers have a major role to play in building professional knowledge. This is not to deny the importance of the knowledge that may be generated through professional research, but hypotheses or proposals from that source need to be tested in practice so that professional knowledge is grounded and illuminated by portrayals of action in different institutional contexts. In addition, evidence from networks such as HertsCam indicate that teachers are constantly innovating and breaking new ground, but their ideas and experience stand in need of synthesis and dissemination. The themes addressed are not just of local relevance. Tony Delany's article for example, has something very important to contribute to the current national debate about 'personalising learning' and the Sam Murray story puts forward a very interesting proposal regarding the teaching of older students and the use of teaching approaches disseminated under the Key Stage 3 National Strategy.

Often the knowledge shared is about the process of development itself rather than about a particular aspect of teaching and learning practice. The story about Lesley Hetherington's development work is, on the face of it, about a teacher experimenting with assessment for learning strategies which are quite well known, but the power of the story is in the way it illuminates how a single teacher with no positional power can initiate a process that leads to whole-school review of practice. Similarly, when we look at the Lee Wells' story about the use of writing frames we can derive inspiration from an account of a process of development led by a newly qualified teacher.

The knowledge generated by teachers is often lost, perhaps because it is not embedded in the fabric of the institution and not disseminated. Sometimes accounts of teachers' breakthrough practice are dismissed as 'vanity publishing'. This is why it is important that such knowledge is built within critical communities such as the HertsCam Network, where claims made can be subject to scrutiny not just by the university academics but by other Network members, and, through the journal, by other professionals throughout the world. Such communities also draw on the work of 'semi-detached teachers' (Biott, 1991) such as local authority advisers or consultants who may be supporting groups of teachers, engaging in collaborative inquiry and helping to shape the agenda for change and improvement. Shelagh Mackenzie's article for example showcases a project where the adviser, Shelagh, has evaluated Control ICT strategies for building problem-solving capacity by working with a number of teachers and schools to give support and test out ideas in different kinds of classrooms.

Another important characteristic of teachers' knowledge building is its cumulative nature. Within networks it is possible to rise above the traditional competitive approach to knowledge acquisition and instead build on the knowledge generated by peers and fellow network members. In the Tony Delany article for example, we see how he was able to use strategies developed in a project that was showcased in the last issue of *Teacher Leadership* (see Jackie Johnson's article in Issue 1) and use them to further his 'personalising learning' agenda.

Teachers' voice

It is perhaps self-evident that the journal aims to promote the teachers' voice – that is, to articulate and amplify teachers' views about educational issues. This is linked to a more general aim to

enhance teachers' agency – their capacity to experience that natural human desire to be self-directed and to pursue their own goals and purposes (Frost, 2006). The journal is part of a general movement in the UK at least, towards models of professional learning that draw deeply on teachers' practical experience through direct participation. Networking and coaching for example are elements of this approach to the development of professional knowledge. The teachers who are published in *Teacher Leadership* are also called upon to lead workshops at Network Events and to act as consultants to schools who are interested in their development work. For example, Tom Murphy's work has been the subject of a presentation at a National Union of Teachers conference, Tony Delany's work has been presented at an ICSEI conference in Slovenia and Sonia Turner has made a keynote presentation at a HertsCam Network Event. At a similar event, Liz Brown has made a virtual presentation through the medium of a DVD shot in her classroom.

We hope that the journal lends weight to the teacher's voice by publishing accounts which are high in quality and relevance.

Conclusion

In the future the editors of *Teacher Leadership* will seek to widen the scope of the journal to include accounts of teacher-led development work from a range of networks in the UK and in other parts of the world. We will seek to build relationships with other facilitators of networks in which our values are shared so that they might act as mediators and co-editors. In so doing we hope to be able to maintain the journal's integrity and its focus on the core values set out above.

In presenting these accounts I want to congratulate the teachers whose names appear on the Contents page of this issue of *Teacher Leadership*, and the countless other teachers engaged in similar work, who have done so much to improve the life chances of young people through their relentless pursuit of quality in learning and pedagogic innovation.

References

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Portrait of an art class: redistributing power in the classroom

Tony Delany
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Abstract

Tony Delany was one of eight teachers at Barnwell School who are now graduates of the Herts. MEd in Teaching and Learning. His project built on previous work by Jackie Johnson but was distinctive in that it tackled fundamental questions of choice and control in the classroom. It was also distinctive in that it drew on Tony's background as an artist and used metaphors and analogies from the world of the visual arts as analytical tools. The article provides a glimpse of this work.

I began with some trepidation, aware of my need to develop the skills of the researcher in order to invest my project with validity and meaning. I familiarised myself with the tools and terminology of action research and planned accordingly. However, when I began to write, I felt uncomfortable, as though I was writing in a language other than my own. In my search for a more authentic voice, I found *The Art and Science of Portraiture (*Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann-Davis, 1997) which opened my eyes to an approach more in keeping with my intentions.

> … 'portraiture,' the term I use for a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences. With it, I seek to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor.
>
> (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997: 3)

As an artist and teacher of art, I found that I could use the idea of portraiture as an instrument of research and development focused on my own classroom practice. I began by producing initial sketches to try to capture the essence of what teaching and learning looks like in my classroom. I then worked on these to develop a set of more detailed drawings focusing on the central themes of flexibility, diversity and choice; these informed the composition of the big picture, the vision, what teaching and learning could look like. But my sketches, drawings, colour trials and swatches were not resolved

into a finished painting: they form a multi-layered, mixed media assemblage; a collage which can only be the starting point for another portrait, reflecting the ever changing face of education.

Portraits are often representations of power and wealth. In the long tradition of portrait painting, it is almost exclusively representations of the rich and powerful, furnished with heavily moulded, gilded frames, which adorn the walls of museums, galleries and palaces. Holbein's painting, *The Ambassadors*, is perhaps the archetypal expression of power, reinforced by the symbols of wealth, education, religious and political importance. In examining my classroom practice, I wanted to bring the distribution of power into focus and see it effectively used, held and distributed.

Initial sketches

Peep through any classroom window, anywhere. You are likely to see a picture familiar to most of us. At some time, in some place, someone has decided what classrooms should look like; an ideal has been formulated and that model mindlessly reproduced throughout the world of education. My concern as a teacher is not so much with what they look like, but with what takes place within. Physical appearance may have far reaching effects, but the classroom itself is actually no more than a frame.

My own classroom is much like any other art room in any other school. Big enough for thirty students; wooden tables, plastic chairs stained with paint and plaster of Paris; displays of students' work on the walls. A collection of sick house plants look their worst beneath a warm fluorescent glow; plastic trays and cardboard boxes contain animal skulls, sea shells and bits of a Hillman Imp for observational drawing. A drying rack holds the day's curling, unfinished still-life paintings and a metal shelving system supports a hundred tiny clay sculptures, like a surreal city, waiting their turn for the kiln. A padlocked cupboard houses stocks of poster paint, pastels, knives and a confiscated phone. A small printing press sits on a plans chest containing stocks of drawing paper, students' work and the odd crisp packet. A spineless copy of The Art Book sits on top of a wonky bookshelf next to my desk which is a bombsight of paperwork, pieces of charcoal and stray homework assignments. I could go on, but you get the picture.

More telling is the positioning of furniture and equipment – the composition. Tables are arranged in groups rather than rows; my

desk is at the front of the room facing the student body. Though I don't very often sit there, it symbolises the balance of power in the classroom. It is bigger than students' desks and separate from them. However democratic in appearance, however visible the allusion, a hierarchical system is evidently in place. Changing the layout of the room would not install a democratic system nor create a 'learning community' (Watkins, 2005:5) any more than reframing a painting would transform it into a masterpiece. Recalling some typical classroom activities helped to identify more specifically the issues I wanted to address. The following analogies helped to identify what I wanted to change.

As a war artist, Stanley Spencer produced a series of friezes recording the process of building tramp steamers in a Clydeside shipyard: *Burners, Welders* and *Furnaces.* The figures of Glasgow's wartime shipbuilders are immortalised on a massive scale: cloth capped and tweed jacketed, each is engrossed in his particular stage of the process; each illuminated by the orange glow of a welding torch or the sparks from a furnace; stooping, laying, kneeling, contorted into tight spaces. The paintings are choreographed rather than composed into a tight-knit, entwined community of workers, each dancing to the same tune but moving in different ways. They have a common aim, but each has his personal contribution to make; each, his own unique value. In contrast, a photograph of Henry Ford's first production line shows regimented rows of automaton-like men bolting assemblies onto engine parts, passing them on to the next row for the next stage of the process. An automaton in a suit leans over shoulders, checking and correcting, passing and rejecting. I found characteristics of each of these scenarios in many of my lessons.

A typical lower school lesson tends to display more of the production line image than the industrious harmony of the shipyard. Students will be working on the same project, which may be the manufacture of a ceramic pot or the design and production of a movie poster. They will each be at a similar stage in the process: coiling, smoothing, lettering, painting. My mode of communication with them would often be an over-the-shoulder instruction, correction or affirmation. My students appear to enjoy most of their lessons, having opportunities to engage with a variety of processes on a broad range of topics, but the visual analogy of the production line is a little too close for comfort.

Older students, having opted for GCSE, are encouraged to develop according to individual strengths, personal interests and aptitudes. Differences are celebrated: one student might be in the process of silk screen printing, another making a collage; yet another analysing and writing a critical response to a Giger illustration. I might sit with individuals during lessons, spending time discussing their work with them, suggesting alternative solutions and ways of developing their investigations; artists and their work are discussed; we visit galleries and occasionally listen to Pink Floyd.

Neither scenario is exactly as I would want it to be: a polarity exists between what presents as behaviourist, control centred teaching in the lower school and social constructivism in the upper. I wanted to close the distance between the two by bringing a greater level of diversity, flexibility and choice into Key Stage 3 teaching by constructing a 'learning community' where learning is made meaningful and enhanced through community and reflection; through learning about learning – meta-learning – where students are aware of how they learn, and develop the capacity to transfer learning, to extend the generation of knowledge beyond the physical confines of the classroom (Watkins, 2005). It seemed to me that classrooms are in danger of operating as insular dictatorships within societies posing as democracies. I wanted my students to be 'empowered to make decisions and policies concerning themselves and their society' (MacBeath, 2004: 19). I recognised the opportunity to move towards these ideals through a recent Government initiative on Personalised Learning.

Personalised learning

Introduced by the Prime Minister in 2003, the Government encouraged schools to 'provide tailored programmes of learning to meet individual needs and aspirations' (Education and Skills Committee, 2002-2003). The report called for an imaginative approach in the way the National Curriculum is delivered and seemed to sow the seeds of the idea of personalised learning. David Miliband, Minister of State at the Department for Education and Skills, listed five key components: assessment for learning; a wide range of teaching techniques; curriculum choice – particularly at age 14 plus; organisation of the school; and links to agencies and services beyond the school (Miliband, 2004). My particular interest was captured by the idea of using a wider range of teaching techniques and by building choice into the curriculum. These factors

could be encapsulated into the terms: diversity, flexibility and choice.

Another growing concern was that my students tended to display a poor sense of themselves as learners. Historically, students in the school had low aspirations and I felt that this was due, in part at least, to two factors: the practice of ability grouping and the general belief that intelligence is a fixed entity. I felt that these were both barriers to learning which compounded the problems caused by over-prescriptive, formulaic approaches to teaching. I took inspiration from two projects: one was the *Learning Without Limits* project in which researchers and practitioners had collaborated to overcome the negative effects of ability labelling on self-perception and self-esteem that resulted in the disaffection of children in schools (Hart *et al.,* 2004). The other was one led by a colleague at Barnwell: Jackie Johnson had developed the use of Learning Preference Profiling to enable teachers to respond to the different ways in which students prefer to learn (Johnson, 2006).

I wanted to raise student's aspirations and reduce their level of dependency. I wanted to see if my students could develop a greater level of responsibility and ownership of their learning by allowing them to choose and plan what they studied. Perhaps their learning could be transformed through a more democratic process in the classroom.

I designed an intervention for a Year 9 class which allowed students to choose their own topic, based either on suggested starting points or their own ideas. They would work in self-selected groups consisting of a complementary mix of learning preferences. Groups would pool their various strengths and plan the project themselves within the framework of National Curriculum guidelines. I would keep a journal – my sketchbook – conduct some interviews with students and ask a colleague to carry out a video observation.

From working drawing to moving picture

When I reported on the project in my MEd thesis (Delany, 2006), I drew on my journal entries (my sketchbook), interviews and conversations with participating students, and video footage taken on the last day of the project. My report was in two parts: first, *the working drawing,* told in narrative form, and second, *the moving picture,* a dramatisation based on what was filmed during the final lesson. I now present a condensed version of that report.

The working drawing

Friday morning, period two, 9SP arrive in fragmented droves. They are taught in ability based bands and sets for other subjects and therefore come from different parts of the school at slightly different times. Synchronising this transition from one lesson to the next is a science not yet mastered. Five or six arrive before I have dismissed my Year 8 class: Wayne and Rob, Terry, Jane and Laura, form a bunch at the open door of the classroom. Wayne outstretches arms and legs between doorposts to ensure his place at the front of the queue. Holding others back he calls in to me *"Oy sir. Are we early or are you late"?* I look at my watch and check the time on the computer. *"You're early Wayne. Stand aside now. Don't block the doorway."* Two Year 8 students are fighting at the sink. I catch sight of another hiding his palette under clean ones. I deal with them and field another barracking from Wayne. *"Come on Sir. I wanna get on with me green man. You 'aven't lost it 'ave ya?"*

I dismiss Year 8 by which time half of 9SP are at the classroom door. Due to the staggered arrival of the class it is not my practice to line them up outside. *"Right, in you come. You need planners and books. Wayne, can you give the masks out? You know where they are don't you?"* Wayne would find it impossible to come into a lesson, sit down, take out books and pens and wait to be told what to do. Identified as having both kinaesthetic and interpersonal learning preferences, he needs to move around, he needs to be relating to people. Without this information he is misunderstood. He presents as undisciplined, uncooperative and at times, rude. The art room therefore offers some kind of respite for him, though at times I find his attitude challenging. Others turn up in twos and threes. *"Come on folks. Glue, paint, brushes. Rob, you've got enough there to paint the school hall. Kelly, you're not using that brush for glue are you."* Gradually, they settle. As they become quiet I draw their attention to a few points and start to call a register. I am interrupted by Steven. Invariably the last to arrive, his noisy, animated entrance, half way through my introduction to the lesson irritates me. He seems genuinely puzzled that I should challenge his behaviour. I feel myself being drawn into a childish and pointless argument over where he should sit and why. *"Alright Steven. That's enough. Outside. Once I've got the lesson started, you can come back and we'll sort this problem out."* His jaw drops. Throwing open his arms in despair, he leaves the room backwards at an obstructively slow pace asking why? And what had he done? And why was it always him? And why was I (me) so stressed? *"Put your gum in the bin as you go past."* A handful of easily led students are amused but

most have had their lessons interrupted by Steven too often. They show their disapproval. I feel a sense of failure at resorting to removing Steven from the room so early in the lesson but nevertheless continue with the register. I note that Richard is back after an extended absence. I am glad. He is a stabilising influence on his small peer group. Some of the girls sit shivering in scarves and coats and tell me that it is always cold in my room. Jane and Laura have forgotten their books, again. They insist that I have lost them, again. I give them paper rather than enter into a protracted argument. I spend a few minutes with Steven discussing his behaviour and my expectations. He comes back into the class with a more appropriate attitude – for a time.

The moving picture

A live performance featuring the students of 9SP and their teachers

THE CAST

CLAYVILLE	Amy, Gary, Chloe, Danielle and Sophie
PERSONALITY SHOP	Alice and Jo
HEDGEHOGS	Tara, Kelly, Emma, Rob and Wayne
RENAISSANCE MEN	Richard, Malcolm, Neil and Luke
DRAGONS	Stewart, Will, James, Alex, Terry and Steven
SELF IMAGE	Laura and Jane
INTERVIEWER I	Jackie Johnson (JJ)
INTERVIEWER II	Tony Delany (TD)

It is the final lesson in the project. My colleague, Jackie Johnson, is due to observe. Having pioneered the use of learning preferences in the school. She has agreed to act as critical friend. I hadn't told the class they were to be filmed. I wanted the production to be as raw as possible.

(I have adopted the convention of using italics for dialogue and Roman type for the commentary).

Wayne (From the landing) *Can we come in yet Sir?*

The players arrive, as usual in staggered droves, but quietly and orderly. There is an eagerness to begin work. Everyone knows exactly what they should be doing and where everything is. All six groups have reached varying levels of independence, responsibility, ownership. They have become self-directed, like the players in a well-rehearsed production. Students move around the room at will, some to get equipment needed for their work, some to discuss projects with other groups. There is an atmosphere of purpose, enjoyment and accomplishment. I am able to move from group to group and spend time in much the same way I would with key stage four students – my function in the room is much more that of teacher and facilitator than controller and taskmaster.

TD *Won't be a minute Wayne – you're early again. Let me get*
rid of this lot.

Wayne *Gotta finish our penguins today init Sir.*

He's swinging from the door frame. Year 8 leave before the landing becomes too congested. Wayne doesn't wait to be invited in. He knows where his work is and is eager to get on with it. He puts an apron on, over his coat – it is a non-uniform day. Others follow and move straight to their tables.

(Jackie has set up camera and started to film the Dragons).

JJ *So how did you decide what you were doing then?*

Stewart (Not looking up – continues to work on his dragon painting).
We just came up with the idea.

JJ *So what, you could just do anything you liked?*

Stewart *Well yeah. We wanted to do dragons so we came up with this. But we had a few ideas go wrong first.*

JJ *Who's we? How did you decide who would work with you.*
(Wayne has joined the group – he is hovering just off camera).

Wayne *It's based on our learning preferences.*

(Camera pans to Wayne who is not a member of this group)

We all had to have different learning preferences like.

Stewart *Yeah. So we could all use our strengths. Like I'm Visual.*

Wayne *Yeah. And I'm Interpersonal. I like working in groups.*

(His voice is drowned by laughter).

Camera pans to renaissance men. They have loaded photographs from digital camera to computer and projected them on to interactive whiteboard. An almost life-size image of Neil posing as St. Thomas has created an amusing diversion. A group of boys take on a similar pose and make irreverent speculations on the meaning of the upward pointing index finger. Laughter subsides without intervention. Students return to their work.

JJ *So Neil. Tell me about your project. What gave you the idea for this?*

Neil (Still flushed and smirking – the image is still on screen). *Well it was Richard's idea. He's interested in the history of art and computers.*

JJ *What about you? Are you interested in computers and art history?*

Neil. *Yeah. But we don't know as much as Richard. But he hasn't been here so we've had to find out for ourselves anyway.*

JJ *In what sense have you had to find out for yourselves?*

Malcolm *Richard knows a lot about computers, especially graphics packages and stuff. And we didn't really know what Renaissance was and who the artists were. So we had to do some research. Sir helped. But we had to do most of it ourselves.*

JJ *So what do you think you've learned by working in this way?*

Neil *We learned about photography and perceptive.*

TD *Perspective*

Neil *Yeah. That word. How to get things the same size and stuff.*

TD *Scale. Proportion.*

Neil *I knew that.*

Malcolm *We would have just tried to take one big photo but we couldn't get it all in.*

Neil *We couldn't get back far enough and people on the edge were distorted. We wanted to do it like Da Vinci would do it if he was alive.*

JJ *So do you think you did?*

Malcolm *Well, we think he would have used modern technology, but without Richard, we couldn't use the computer to put it all together. So we cut each figure out with scissors.*

JJ *So what about using your learning preferences – Neil, you're Intrapersonal aren't you? How did you use that in a group situation?*

Neil *Don't know really. I just think about stuff. Like it was my idea to cut the figures out by hand. And Malcolm's. He's logical.*

JJ *So have you achieved what you set out to?*

Malcolm (Slightly hesitant).
Yeah. We haven't finished. But that's because we didn't plan it properly to start with. It was quite a while before we really got started. And Richard wasn't here so we had to improvise.

JJ *So if you did it again what would you do different?*

Malcolm *Spend more time planning.*

(Looks at Neil. They both laugh).

The lesson was due to end in twenty minutes. I had suggested at the start of the lesson that we display each group's work on one table towards the end of the lesson. We could discuss the project as a whole and review progress. Paints, glue and clay tools are cleared away. Several tables have been pushed together to form a large work surface onto which students arrange their work. There is much interest in what other students and groups have been doing. Students seem quite proud of their own work and keen to show what they have done. The tables are arranged in front of an interactive whiteboard. Wayne has prepared a Power Point presentation of his group's outcomes. He eagerly waits for an invitation to present to the whole group.

(Camera focuses on clay sculpture).

JJ *Whose work is this then?*

Sophie *That's ours. Clayville. It's a building, but kind of an abstract.*

(Wayne slides into frame)

JJ *Who's idea was this? Who are you working with?*

Sophie *There's five of us altogether.* (She points to each in turn) *Gary, Amy, Danielle and, where is she? Chloe.*

JJ *Tell us a bit more about it then.*

TD *Wayne. We'll come to you in a minute.*

(Wayne points at the interactive whiteboard, then, with both thumbs, at himself).

Sophie *We all wanted to make something with clay so we thought we could do a street. Our street. But we didn't get it finished.*

JJ *Why was that?*

Sophie *Well we couldn't just make it. We had to research it. Sir said we had to.*

Gary *We looked at architects and designed our own buildings but it started going wrong.*

JJ *So what went wrong and how did you put it right?*

Gary *Well it was all just collapsing like. But once Sir showed us how to do it, it went alright. I think it's much better now.*

(The group agree but there is an air of reservation in their voices).

Chloe *It's not exactly what we wanted to do. We wanted to do a street. But we had to do this research stuff.*

(Wayne can no longer contain himself).

Wayne *Well. If you look at the board, you'll see a polar bear and* (click) *a penguin. And that's our project.*

TD *How did you get from hedgehogs to polar bears?*

Emma *We started with hedgehogs but we couldn't do the spikes. So we made it into a polar bear.*

Wayne *And a penguin.*

JJ *How did you use your learning preferences on this project? What's your learning preference?*

Emma *Logical.*

JJ *And what did that mean for you and your group?*

Emma *I did the step by step drawings – how we were going to make it.*

Tara *Yeah but I'm musical. I don't know how that fits in.*

Wayne (Waddling). *It's a singing penguin.*

FADE

Reflections on learning capacity, power and agency

The picture I saw when I looked at the video recording, read my journal and discussed the changes I had made with my colleagues was more satisfying than I could have hoped for. I want now to give an impression of what I learnt and what we had achieved.

Many of my students come to the subject with preconceived ideas about art, what it is and their own abilities and aptitudes. A widespread opinion among students, and indeed society at large, is that *you can either do art or you can't.* Few people tend to recognise that the concepts, skills and techniques involved can be learned. Talent is thought of as pre-existing ability, something a person either has or does not have. My own view is that talent, rather than being expressed as fully developed ability, is present in the form of aptitude, potential, the capacity and enthusiasm to learn. Among my pre-inquiry observations were my students' low aspirations coupled with their high level of dependency on teacher input. Only exceptionally did students display a sense of their own capacity as learners. Throughout my project, students began to develop an awareness that abilities are neither inherent nor fixed. They became open to suggestion and began to see that obstacles could be overcome through process. This transformation of thinking was, I believe, due to the powerful effect of allowing the students to exercise choice in relation to both the process and content of their learning. This enhanced rather than diminished their sense of ownership and purposefulness, their human agency (Frost, 2006).

Choice as to content

At the beginning of the project, I asked each group for a brief description of their project on a planning form. This was fairly typical:

> *We are doing a street out of clay. We are having a house, pub, football pitch, park and shop.*

Not only does this resonate with students' social and cultural profile, it suggested to me a low level of academic understanding and engagement with the subject. On the surface, this is not the objective of a student of art but that of a child seeking light-hearted recreational activity. I began to doubt the wisdom of the project as a whole and to worry that whilst students may be occupied on their respective projects, they might not be suitably challenged. However, I attempted to avoid rash judgements and took time to think about students' proposals. On reflection, I realised that this was a starting

point worthy of any great artist: art is not validated by the subject matter, nor by the artists' ability to articulate his or her ideas and intentions, but by the execution. Here was a child who wanted to represent her physical environment in some way. As such, she shared the motives of many artists, but she simply hadn't articulated her intentions in the most eloquent style. It occurred to me that I was anticipating the quality of her work based on her statement of intent. But if an artist such as Claude Monet were to jot his intentions in a notebook: *I will paint a pond with a bridge and lilies,* or Andy Warhol: *my next picture will be lots of cans of soup*, I would not be so prejudiced when anticipating outcomes. The work of these artists is familiar to most of us and its quality is not diminished by simplistic or inadequate descriptions. So I began to recognise the potential of each group's intentions, however simplistic the proposals seemed. I also became more fully aware of the level of scaffolding and support students would need in order to realise their own intentions.

Choice as to process

As students began to work together in groups, they took ownership of the physical space of the classroom and gradually began to direct their own programmes of learning. The teacher-student relationship was redefined. Much less of my time was taken up with controlling student behaviour. I had been concerned that I would not be able to divide my time effectively between the six groups. Initially, this was the case. In the early weeks of the project, much of my time was spent teaching students how to plan their topic and explaining the need to research and develop their ideas. The initial break with routine had caused some excitement, but in time the class underwent a process of settling and behaviour improved significantly.

Allowing students the opportunity to choose their topic removed the negatives often associated with compulsory study. In making their choices, they considered topics and tasks they were interested in and felt they had the capacity to manage. Building on this positive framework, students worked in self-selected groups, with those they wanted to be with. As individuals within groups, each member had a unique and personal contribution to make as shaped by his or her learning preference. All students knew their learning preferences. Since Jackie Johnson's project, it had become policy to profile this on entry at Year 7 (Johnson, 2006). Some students had collaborated on the homework any way, so grouping according to topic and interest did not present difficulties. Other groups contained more than one of each type of preference. I anticipated that this might

cause problems, for example too many Intrapersonal learners in one group could result in a severe breakdown in communication. But I decided to work with their choices. This arrangement promoted a certain kind of dialogue between students in groups. I identified parallels between my own observations and some that had been made in our school in a previous project.

> Pupils developed the capacity to evaluate themselves as learners, became more committed to the learning process and developed empathy for each other which led to a dramatic effect on the classroom climate; behaviour was more positive and there was a discernible increase in the level of cohesion in the class.
>
> (Frost and Roberts, 2004:12)

Though they had difficulty dividing tasks exactly according to learning preference, tasks and processes were discussed within that contextual framework.

With few exceptions, each student seemed confident of his or her position, or status within their group situation. My impression was that their security as members of a group was based on their degree of self-knowledge grounded in their awareness of their preferred learning style. This was not some piece of abstract information such as you've got brown eyes or you are allergic to cheese. It was information that carried weight and leverage in providing the student with agency, a solid base on which to build a structure.

Conclusion

In preparing for this project I reflected on a number of visual images. The most alarming for me was that of the Henry Ford production line: this provided me with an analogy for what I see as a mechanistic, formulaic approach to teaching and learning. Among my chief concerns was that my teaching had become routinised; that, within a results-driven hierarchical system, I had tended to focus on control at the expense of teaching and the process of learning; that my students were over-dependent on teacher-led activities. As Watkins (2005) suggests, teachers' agency is compromised when governments impose prescriptive measures; teachers become more controlling in response to the burden of accountability for pupil performance.

Through my project, I sought to erase this image and replace it with the communal glow of Stanley Spencer's shipyard murals. To some extent, I think I have succeeded. There is a sharp contrast between

my early scribbles and the eventual composition of a learning community. The most important idea I have put to the test is that young people have strong social values which can be capitalised on in the classroom. Learning is essentially a social activity in which learners need to express their own agency.

Through attempting to enable my students to articulate their own voices and develop a stronger sense of authorship in their learning I have been able to recover my own sense of authorship. I have discovered how to draw on my own intellectual resources and experience as tools in the process of inquiry and development work.

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'The Play's the Thing': Developing children's writing through drama in a Primary School

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Abstract
Susan Thomas graduated from the Herts. MEd in Teaching and Learning in 2004. She has recently relocated to San Diego, California. In this article she provides an account of a teacher-led development project using drama techniques as a pre-writing activity within literacy lessons.

I wanted to help my primary school children improve their writing and so I planned a project in which I would use and evaluate some drama techniques as preparation for writing (Thomas, 2004). I wanted to see if this would help the children to explore character, motivation and viewpoint with the hope that they would be better able to develop the purpose, organisation and style of their writing. I was the English Coordinator for my school, so I wanted to see if I could help my colleagues throughout the school to learn to use drama techniques. Through this challenge I also gained insight into the challenge of leading change within a school.

'The Play's the Thing'[1]

My interest in drama began several years ago in the autumn term when I was teaching a Year 3 class that was underachieving in writing. We had just begun our study of the play script genre. The children performed the scenes after each day's reading. Comprehension of the story plot and the character's motives were extraordinary for even the least able child. What made this event even more remarkable was that the text studied was not a familiar story; it was a child's version of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Burdett, 1997). The most striking

[1] from William Shakespeare, Hamlet, III, i

change in performance, however, was the high level of writing produced by the children.

As English Coordinator, one of my responsibilities was the analysis of assessment data for end of Key Stage English tests. Year 2 children's reading results were consistently better than their writing results. By the time they reached the end of Year 6, this performance gap had nearly doubled. Development of writing content, referred to in the official documentation as 'Purpose, Organisation and Style', were found to be the main weaknesses in most of the children's writing. Weaknesses in writing seemed to be a national problem: in OFSTED annual reports and reviews (1998, 2002, and 2003) it had been observed that children were unable to produce sustained accurate writing; teachers had difficulty in linking text analysis with composition and oral language development within the classroom was neglected. It seemed to me that improvement in all of these areas could be achieved if drama techniques were used as a linked activity.

The drama-before-writing project

My project was conducted within Years 2, 3 and 4 for the autumn term planning cycle. I set out to gather the perceptions of children and their teachers through weekly diaries, notes from planning sessions, informal verbal feedback and interviews. Pieces of writing were then assessed to ascertain if these perceptions could be measured through writing outcomes. All learning intensions and outcomes during the project were linked to The National Literacy Strategy's (DfEE, 1998) autumn term objectives specific to the teacher's year group(s). The project was organised so that each unit of study included 'published' pieces of writing to give the children a strong purpose for writing. The same texts were used across all three year groups and were unfamiliar to the teachers and children. Barrs and Cork (2001) found that powerful texts, containing emotionally powerful experiences, 'moved children and led to valuable discussions about the human situations they dealt with' (p. 215). Therefore, the texts chosen included an historical diary about two characters called Lewis and Clark who had been sent into unexplored territory (Schanzer, 1997); a children's version of *Much Ado About Nothing* that dealt with deceit, lies, love and trickery (Burdett, 2002), and *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*, a story that deals with the emotions of loss and loneliness (Wojciechowski, 1995).

To make my project manageable I decided to focus on a sample of children so I used the assessment data to divide the children into 3 categories based on their level of progression in writing. I selected two from each category giving me a total of 6 children. This would enable me to learn something about teachers' expectations in relation to the different ability levels.

Prior to the summer break, the whole staff participated in a hands-on drama technique session to introduce ways of incorporating drama into a unit of work. Initial support was then given to each participating teacher through one-to-one medium-term planning sessions for English during the summer break. The plans incorporated the use of a drama technique between each piece of text read and each writing task. The specific drama techniques used were chosen by the individual teachers according to their level of comfort, the nature of their class and appropriateness to the written outcomes. At the conclusion of each one-to-one planning session, every teacher independently requested assistance with weekly planning for continued support. It was through these continued planning sessions that individual dilemmas emerged, giving an insight as to why the change in lesson structure posed some difficulties.

The issues that we talked about during the weekly planning sessions were not what I had expected and were quite challenging. They included:

- How can we group the learning objectives to allow a longer, more in-depth study of a given text?
- How does breaking down a text into story plot components, recognising character development and identifying literary devices, contribute to the effectiveness of the story?
- Is verbal play with words and ideas an acceptable outcome for a given lesson even if it means there is no written work during the lesson?

Evaluating the lessons

Using data from interviews, I compared the views of each teacher with that of their pupils. I also explored the differences between the teachers involved and looked at how these views changed during the course of the project. The three stories that follow highlight some of the barriers we encountered along our journey of development and change.

The efficacy of drama

One colleague, (I shall call her Gert), had expressed scepticism when she first agreed to participate in this project. Her views and those of her class were diametrically opposed. During the first unit of study (making an emergency shelter and then writing instructions) Gert thought that the lesson did not progress the children's learning because the highest and lowest ability groups didn't finish the construction of their shelters. She didn't see how the physical act of making the shelter would contribute to remembering the order because the children kept changing their constructions. All in all, she said she would never repeat the lesson and that nothing had been learned by the children about instruction writing. During verbal feedback provided immediately after the lesson, she stressed that the lesson was too loud and involved a lot of arguing about construction methods.

Contrary to the teacher's view, the children of all the ability groupings reflected on how good and exciting the lesson was because they liked working with other children and it gave them more ideas. One child reflected on how drama had helped her learn because 'when work is hard it helps to get me into what we are doing.'

All of the children's instruction writing was at least two-thirds of a level above their assessed writing level for the end of the previous school year. As the children were only one month into the new school year, this signaled a significant trend of progression in writing content development as it was equivalent to a normal year's progression. I cannot attribute this success to the drama activity with any certainty of course; there may have been all sorts of contributory factors such as the amount and quality of support given when writing. The indicators of success were not strictly comparable either since the end of year assessments were collected under test conditions whereas this piece of writing was produced in a more relaxed class context. However, what was clearly evident was the way the writing referenced the physical actions of making the structures. One child with special educational needs included phrases such as:

> *Tied to stiks to geir put they in the Gound faces to geve. Put to Bould in the milulle of the stiks in gound.*
>
> (Tied two sticks together put them in the ground faces together. Put two boulders in the middle of the sticks in ground.)

The inclusion of instructions to make the sticks face each other and the placement of the boulders in the middle of the sticks represent an understanding based upon physically working with the structure.

Curiously, Gert chose to present the children's shelters and instruction writing for their October parent assembly. By the end of the project, she felt that participation in the research had taught her about drama techniques, how to use them in the curriculum and how enjoyment in the activities gave the children enthusiasm and motivation for written work.

Ability

References to ability groups had always dominated staff room conversations and the teachers' journal entries often focused on their perception that drama techniques benefited one particular ability group more than another. Another colleague (I shall call her Fiona) had begun using drama techniques at the end of the previous year as we were developing a two year cycle of planning for Years 3 and 4. At the beginning of the project, she commented that the children who normally performed below average benefited the most from drama. Over the course of the project, Fiona's perceptions of ability, performance and the use of drama techniques changed, thus enabling her to see a wider scope for drama within the curriculum. In the second week of the project, her journal reflections focused on how the lower performing children worked quickly and more successfully than some of the more able children. At the end of week three, Fiona felt that the drama techniques were having a big impact on the written work produced by the less able children. By the final week of the project, Fiona's reflections explained how the more able children really looked beyond the literal meaning of the text and the less able added adjectives to their writing easily. She also felt that the higher, middle and some lower performers were really thinking about why characters in the story had changed. Towards the end of the project I interviewed[2] Fiona: she told me that children performing below expectations sometimes floundered when doing writing under normal writing circumstances because they didn't have the language to express themselves. She said that the use of drama before writing allowed access to language not only through participation in performances, but by watching performances as well. She was able to report that when the children carried out the writing task of the 'diary recount as Lewis or Clark' the level of performance of five out

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[2] These interviews were done by a research assistant

of six children in the sample group had improved by at least two-thirds of a level.

Comfort zone

During the project, another teacher (I shall call her Denise) appears to have been working on the fringe of her comfort zone in both literacy and drama. When I interviewed[3] her towards the end of the project, she described her discomfort with being in front of others. She also explained her dislike of literacy as a child although she did express her enjoyment in using the books in this project and in the children's responses.

At the beginning of week five, Denise wrote in her diary that drama was encouraging the children's interpretation of the text. She explained that drama before writing helped the children get a feel for the characters. By week seven, she notes the children's ability to quote phrases and recall detail of the text during the drama sessions. In a week nine drama session, Denise found the children able to provide reasons for their feelings as a particular character. In her final journal entry, Denise noted again how drama techniques helped the children understand the feelings of a character and the story plot.

When I interviewed Denise six weeks after the end of the project she told me that, even though the drama enhanced the children's comprehension and made them look deeper into the story, she had not used drama since the end of the project. This was because she had to focus on preparing the children for SATs comprehension questions. Therefore, the class had been trying to 'catch-up' on written comprehension exercises. She explained that, although teaching should be more about developing the whole child rather then just pen and pencil work, it didn't happen unless a school was 'progressive'. It is paradoxical because the head teacher and board of governors are supporting the drama-before-writing development project. It seems that the pressure exerted by the national testing regime is pushing Denise away from what she believes to be good educational practice. She expresses the view that the problem lies with the nature of the school but the school's management had supported the drama-before-writing project. So it seems that the obstacle to change was her perception of the overriding demands of the SATs testing and school inspections. This seems to be a widespread phenomenon. In follow-up research twenty years after their initial ORACLE project, Galton and colleagues found that

[3] These interviews were done by a research assistant

traditional teaching approaches based on direct instruction, teacher talk and pupil listening are still dominant (Galton *et al*., 1999).

Learning through fun

As I began analysing the children's journals and interviews, I found myself surprised by the children's insight into their own learning. Their responses had common themes, irrespective of their age, gender, class teacher, measured ability, drama experience or drama technique described. The children's reflections on drama could be summed up in one word as it appeared in every child's journal – FUN! Although fun was the most frequently used term, other adjectives included: excellent, happy, fantastic and good. These references to pleasure could easily be dismissed and categorised as an extension of playtime, but as Vygotsky argued many years ago, play enables children to 'rise above their average behaviour' (Paley, 2004: 3). The high standard of writing by the children in my project makes me wonder if their 'above their average behaviour' in the drama sessions enables them to produce 'above their average writing?' These two journal entries are both from children who had previously been assessed as below average in writing achievement for their year group.

> *I thought it was fun because some people like Tom opened their heart out and it got us to know about the characters.*
>
> *Drama relaxes me and so I can think better and more easily.*

I was very pleased to see that the quality of their writing was as good as that from the children who normally performed better in assessments.

Language and thinking

The project highlighted for me the essential inter-relatedness of language and thought. In 1990 an influential government report on quality educational experience for 3 and 4 year olds discussed the importance of play, pleasure, social context, experimentation and activity in learning experiences was discussed (Rumbold, 1990). Talk was considered central to the learning process. Vygotsky suggested that a small child's running monologue during their play develops into the basic structures of their thinking. In the USA one teacher reported that when the children in her class were asked to dictate their stories and then act them out onstage, the connections between play and analytical thinking became clear (Paley, 2004).

The children's comments collected during this project seem to support these ideas because not only do the children talk about images in their head after drama activities and reference drama as a source of ideas, but several journal entries refer to pictures created. Here are a few illustrative examples:

> *I like drama before writing because I can get a picture of who or what I'm writing about.*
>
> *…Also it helped me to write out my stage directions because I could see what it was going to look like.*
>
> *I think writing was easy and fantastic because we had done all the actions for it.*
>
> *…because once I've done the acting its there for me to help me write.*

So by including drama in the reading/writing cycle, were the children returning to the structures through which their thinking has been developing? Certainly, a journal entry by a Year 4 boy, assessed as below average in writing with diagnosed specific learning needs, led me to think so. He wrote that drama helped him to think and it put his ideas together.

Conclusion

Although clarity of purpose was sometimes clouded during the hours of juggling teaching, marking, support and data collection, the outcomes from the project established a positive trend in writing outcomes when drama was used as a linking tool. The process of change made a real difference to everyone involved. The school benefited not only from the project itself, but also from a more open school development dialogue that encourages participation from all teachers. This was most evident as I prepared to leave for the USA. Colleagues verbally acknowledged their commitment to continuing future development through discussion, debate and support among all staff members.

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Scaffolding conversations about learning: a work in progress

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Abstract

Scott Martin graduated from the Herts. MEd in Teaching and Learning in 2005. This article provides an account of his attempt to use 'learning preference profiling' to develop student understanding of the learning process. It charts the changing focus of his project and the way in which he and his MEd supervisor, Amanda Roberts, collaborated to support students in becoming proactive in the dialogue about their own learning.

Unlike the other contributions to this journal, this article is jointly authored. One author is the teacher whose project is the focus of the article and the other is his MEd supervisor who acted as collaborator and source of support. Scott Martin is an Assistant Headteacher who undertook a project as part of his work supporting his colleagues in developing teaching and learning in the school (Martin, 2005). The insider-outsider collaboration that developed in the course of this project was to become a key learning point.

Adeyfield was designated a 'school facing challenging circumstances' by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2001. This category is for schools whose General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results are less than 25% 5 A*-C grades. Being placed in this category entitled the school to additional funding for three years through a Leadership Incentive Grant. The Headteacher decided to use this to fund strategies to enable the school to raise standards through the development of teaching and learning which had been highlighted as a key concern.

The school had introduced The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), championed by Smith (1998), as one way of developing teaching and learning. Within this, a focus on learning preferences had been developed. Scott's initial strategy was to use a conversation about learning preferences to develop students' understanding of their own learning which he hoped would raise levels of student motivation as had occurred elsewhere (Murray-Harvey, 1994; Dunn *et al*., 1989a; Johnson, 2006; Peacock, 2001). He also thought that considering student views in this way would help him to review his own practice and at the same time generate tools to help colleagues engage students in their own conversations about learning.

A project to foster pedagogic dialogue

The project was launched at a whole staff meeting with interested staff being invited to attend a follow-up meeting. Of the 18 teachers who attended, 11 decided to take part in the project. Teachers generally decided to work with two of their own teaching groups. The students within these groups were given a Learning Preferences Profiling instrument to enable them to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which individuals learn. This instrument is based on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and had been used in a number of Hertfordshire secondary schools (Johnson, 2006). It resembles a 'questionnaire' in format and appearance but it generates data which is more useful for teaching rather than research purposes. Scott and his colleagues used the students' responses to the instrument to draw up a list detailing each individual's most and least preferred learning style. The teachers taking part in the project then shared this with the students and discussed with them their preferred learning styles and strategies.

The teachers taking part in the project had been asked to review their schemes of work for their chosen groups to ensure that they included activities which would appeal to students across the learning preference range. Teachers would then review their lessons with students, using learning preferences as a starting point to initiate a dialogue about learning, a strategy that had proved to be effective in other projects (Roberts, 2001; Younger and Warrington, 2003; Johnson, 2006). Scott asked teachers to record interesting features of their conversations with students either by writing brief descriptions on post-it notes, keeping a more detailed journal and using a dictaphone to record comments. There was some take up of the first option but no one chose to use a dictaphone. Teachers were asked to

encourage students to talk about their experience of the lesson by providing them with a series of prompt sheets which asked students to respond to a statement starter such as “In this lesson I enjoyed ….”. Students were grouped, sometimes with students with the same preferred learning style and sometimes with students who had quite different contributions to make. Students were asked to record interesting points which people in their group made about learning on record sheets designed for the purpose.

Although the project had similar characteristics to other projects that had been successful (Johnson, 2006) Scott’s project failed, at least in the way it had originally been planned. Teachers were finding it difficult to record their learning conversations with students. Time may have been a factor but also perhaps a lack of understanding of what constituted a learning conversation. Students equally were happy to talk to one another but found it hard to record their own or one another’s views. It was becoming clear that support for the project was falling away and when Scott talked to his colleagues he found that only one teacher was prepared to continue with the project. He needed to re-think his strategy.

Scott revisited his original question: How can we encourage students to talk about their learning in a way which supports that learning? He went back to his reading to try to find a way forward. Fielding (2004) argued that it is important that students involved in a project focusing on dialogue feel part of the process, rather than having something imposed on them. In talking to the students, Scott learnt that they did not feel they were gaining a great deal from the learning conversations. They students were interested in talking about learning but they wanted more freedom to air their views.

Back to the drawing board

The students did not want this conversation to be restricted to ‘learning preferences’ but they were keen to share more general views about how they felt their learning could be supported in school. This seemed to be a fruitful way forward but Scott thought that it might be more effective if the discussion were to be led by someone new, someone who was not perceived to be part of the school hierarchy. This would make clear that this conversation was different from those which had gone before, that the agenda was theirs. He explored this with his MEd supervisor, Amanda Roberts. Amanda was also accustomed to this sort of activity in her role as a leadership consultant so she offered to facilitate a workshop, working

with the students to enable them to share some of their beliefs about learning in a more open forum. It was decided that Amanda would lead a workshop called 'Thinking about Learning'. Rather than focusing solely on learning preferences, the 90 minute workshop allowed students to discuss wider opinions about school and learning. The 24 Year 10 students who had participated in the project were informed of the proposed workshop and were given the opportunity to withdraw. All agreed to participate. Scott's role was to act as a data-gatherer, to record students' views both in note form at the time and by videoing the workshop for future analysis.

The workshop aimed to generate dialogue with students about learning but with the focus on listening to students and allowing them to shape the agenda. Stimulus material was provided: for example, a card sort activity was used to provoke student debate on the value of school and of their own self-image as learners. Students responded very positively to the activities and to the opportunities for free dialogue. Their comments showed that they felt strongly that their learning was affected either positively or negatively by a number of factors. From the initial analysis of the data Scott was able to group the factors under five headings: the teacher, the activity, friends, motivation and the environment.

For these students, teacher behaviour impacted directly on student behaviour and, ultimately, self-esteem. 'Showing respect' became a key phrase.

> *The one's that I really work for are the one's like Miss A coz she shows us respect.*
>
> (Student C)

> *They [teachers] expect us to be polite and stuff to them but they think they can talk to us how they like.*
>
> (Student F)

Variety of activity was similarly seen as a key lever to learning, with students wishing to have their individual learning needs met.

> *Work should be adapted because this might be better for all pupils. Most teachers seem to have one thing for everyone to do, this is not always easy for everyone.*
>
> (Student H)

By extension, students also appeared to understand the part played by motivation in their learning, with this being linked to activity for many.

> *I don't like it when lessons are boring with long speeches from the teacher.*
>
> (Student G)

The impact of peer relationships on learning was seen to be very strong, either positively or negatively.

> *It's difficult (to learn) when I'm being distracted by a group of friends.*
>
> (Student G)

> *My friends help me because they support what I do.*
>
> (Student H)

A discussion about the learning environment demonstrated that the impact of this on student learning was strong. When student A mentioned that he preferred to learn at home, a chorus of agreement came from the rest of the students. The majority talked about the 'freedom' they had at home to choose what their space looked like.

Wanting to know more

The data from this workshop provided new insight into the students' opinions yet Scott felt that it generated only a superficial perspective. He decided to use semi-structured interviews to enable him to get beneath the surface of students' views (Denscombe, 2003), selecting 6 students for this purpose. The choice of method was particularly important because Scott wanted to respond to the students' desire to control the agenda. Semi-structured interviews would enable a flexible approach, driven by the interviewee's responses (Robson, 2002). The questions focused on the five themes which arose from the workshop: the teacher, the activity, friends, motivation and the environment. Broad questions were formulated to allow students to elaborate on the effect of these aspects of the school experience on their learning.

Choice of activity was seen as an important factor in effective learning, although they recognised the need to balance freedom of choice with the learning objectives of the lesson. Many of the students demonstrated a narrow view of the purpose of learning however, linking it overtly to the passing of exams. Interestingly,

they attributed their success in learning to the teacher rather than to their own motivation. Students reiterated their view of a 'good' teacher as one who gave them respect, spoke in a calm and reasonable way and developed a good working relationship with the class. Environment was again stressed as a key factor, as was the influence of friends.

What did we achieve? What did we learn?

This project began as an attempt to stimulate dialogue to increase students' awareness of how they prefer to learn on the assumption that this would enable them to improve their learning strategies. The project had the potential to contribute to improved teaching and learning across the school but it faltered and the plan had to be abandoned. However, it is important to highlight the fact that, ultimately, the project was extremely productive. It was productive in two ways: first, it acted as a catalyst for further developments, and second, it led to a number of important insights into the process of development itself.

Being a 'school facing challenging circumstances' necessitates finding a way to start a process that can lead to the raising of achievement, and student consultation of the sort that emerged from this project seems to be a key aspect of the drive for improvement. The key is the students. Throughout this project they demonstrated a level of maturity that would surprise some of their teachers and the ability and willingness to offer suggestions to improve their school. This view is well supported in the literature on student consultation Rudduck *et al*., 1996; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004; MacBeath *et al*., 2003). A number of really positive proposals came out of this project: for example, the inclusion of students in the school's Teaching and Learning group. Despite the difficulties encountered in the course of this project, it has illuminated the need to re-construct students as partners in the enterprise of school improvement. Students are keen to take on this active role and relish 'opportunities for dialogic encounter' (Fielding, 2004).

Insights into the process of development

A number of key insights can be gained from this story. The power of a collaborative approach to development work is clear, despite the difficulties encountered by Scott in working with colleagues as originally planned. In this case, collaboration with Amanda supported Scott in reframing his problem and in deciding on a way forward. There are many other sources of investigative partners –

students, parents, local authority advisors – who could be brought in to work productively alongside teachers.

The fact that Amanda is external to the school may itself be significant. The perceived authority of the teacher can be an obstacle when inviting students to take the lead in pedagogic exchange. In this case, Amanda was unknown to the students and therefore able to interact with them without the potentially intrusive influence of custom and hierarchy. The use of a 'visitor' as a collaborator can have the added advantage of allowing the context of the development work, in this case the school, to itself be seen in a new light.

Clearly this project was not one which went according to plan. However, Scott's positive attitude to the direction which the students themselves gave to the project allowed him to gain some valuable insights. In this case, the original objective of using learning preference profiling as a vehicle to encourage dialogue was re-framed by Scott as a 'starter exercise'. From his initial attempts to encourage student dialogue he learnt what was really important to the students to discuss.

This demonstrates well the warning that Michael Fullan gave us when he put forward key lessons about managing change: he said that 'Change is a journey not a blueprint' and 'Planning comes later' (Fullan, 1993). With these slogans Fullan was trying to point out that we need to accept that the path of change is hard to predict and that we have to be prepared to re-think. We may launch a planned process of development but it is probable that we will only be in a position to plan effectively once we have made a beginning and discovered what we are really dealing with.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the project, the main challenge that faced the school is how to engage members of the teaching staff in this pedagogic dialogue. Scott's story reveals the difficulties of getting teachers involved in such a dialogue. Students found the initial approach limiting and it is perhaps the case that the teacher collaborators had a similar experience. While student consultation is a vital component of school improvement, pedagogic dialogue has to involve all stakeholders, especially the teaching staff. As leaders of development work, therefore, we have the responsibility to ensure that the experience is a positive and educative one for all involved. The real challenge then is to find ways to involve both students and

teachers in an open dialogue about learning and the conditions that enable it to occur.

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Developing problem-solving capacity in a primary school environment using control ICT

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Abstract
Shelagh Mackenzie graduated from the Herts. MEd in Teaching and Learning in 2006. Her project was carried out in collaboration with two Hertfordshire schools, one secondary and one primary. In this article, she provides an account of her research, which explored the use of control ICT[4] with Year 5 pupils to develop problem-solving capability.

A key aspect of my role as a primary ICT adviser for Hertfordshire local authority is to identify and develop ways in which ICT can support teaching and learning. As the Primary Strategy guidance states: "Children are engaged by learning that develops and challenges them and excites their imagination" (DfES, 2004a:4) and there are many applications of ICT which have the potential to provide such intriguing and stimulating learning opportunities. My project targeted one of these: control ICT (Mackenzie, 2006). I wanted to investigate the potential of this technology to engage and develop pupils' problem-solving capability, exploring the teacher's role in such a process and considering what support might be needed.

Control ICT and problem-solving capability
Control ICT involves developing instructions to control electronic devices in order to achieve specific outcomes, and builds towards the study of robotics and programming. The instructions referred to extend beyond verbal or word-based commands and the range of devices capable of being controlled is diverse. Control ICT activities could encompass a nursery child stepping on a music mat to create a 'tune', a year 2 pupil exploring directional movement using a floor turtle, or older students programming instructions to guide robotic arms or control the flow of water through a simulated lock gate.

[4] ICT – Information and Communication Technology

The link to problem solving develops through the pupils' interaction with the control devices. Developing these models is a key part of the cognitive process because learners construct modes of representation to support their understanding of reality (Bruner, 1986) and Control ICT provides tools that enable them to represent a problem and experiment with possible solutions. The result of any set of instructions is directly observable in the action of the device being controlled, and, through this, pupils are drawn steadily into adjusting their solution to achieve a desired objective (McFarlane, 1997). It seems to be the gap between the observed and desired outcomes which is powerful in this respect. As Griffiths and Blatt (2004) observed in a study of young children interacting with the éTui robot, the children were stimulated to solve problems by the disparity between what they imagined the robot could do and its actual capability.

The problem solving process seems to be enhanced where pupils are working collaboratively as lively discussion is stimulated around visual perception of, and physical interaction with, a programmable device. For example, Chioccariello and colleagues (2004) describe how Italian children, aged 5-6 years old, seeing hungry birds in the snow, collaborated to design and program a robot to feed them.

ICT can provide problem-solving opportunities but can it also be used to build problem-solving capability? This would involve helping pupils develop general strategies 'that can be drawn out and, applied again in new contexts' (Wegerif, 2002:2). It was a key aim of my project to explore both the problem solving potential of control ICT and the extent to which this potential could be seen to support the development of a broader capability.

The role of the teacher in a control ICT problem solving process

The inventor of 'Logo', the programming language, argued that, once given access to tools like Logo, children would become architects of their own learning (Papert, 1993). However, I think that the role of the teacher is crucial in this more open learning process because, although pupils can become successfully engaged in activities such as Logo, the learning may not be consolidated without the teacher ensuring that they are aware of what they are learning (Higgins, 2001; Hoyles and Sutherland, 1992; Wood, 2004). Teachers also have a key role in stimulating pupil thinking to move their investigative work to a new level. Reviewing and supporting

such teacher input was a further strand of investigation during my project.

Prior to the project, I had run a number of sessions with pupils and with teachers, developing the use of control ICT within specific problem-solving contexts. When using control ICT themselves, both teachers and pupils became rapidly, and enthusiastically, engaged in the problem-solving challenges. During the pupil sessions, teachers commented on the involvement of their pupils and the productivity they demonstrated. In discussing the use of control ICT in the classroom, however, many of the teachers voiced concerns about running such activities themselves. They worried that they lacked the necessary expertise and that the resources would be too costly to purchase. Such concerns can cause teachers and schools to avoid using control ICT, a picture evident in Hertfordshire as well as nationally (OFSTED, 2004; QCA, 2004).

Investigating problem solving using control ICT

The project was developed with a Hertfordshire primary school, which was already being supported by its local secondary school in teaching the Year 5 database and control ICT curricula. I planned a joint approach to the project with the secondary ICT teacher providing this support and the two Year 5 teachers, building in their input during the project design and implementation as well as the collection and interpretation of data.

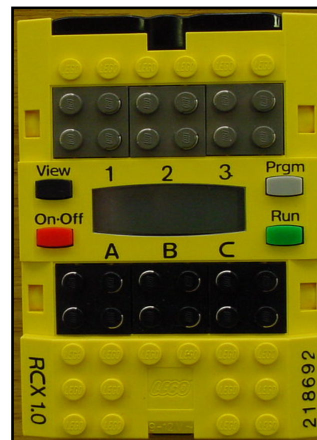

Figure 1. The Lego RCX brick™. (The black outputs can control, motors buzzers or lights; the grey inputs can link to light, touch or sound sensors.)

During this planning stage, I was awarded one of three 2005/6 Bill Tagg Bursaries by NAACE (National Association for Advisers of Computers in Education). As the bursary is directed towards teacher-led development, I used it to fund supply time for the project teachers, enabling them to plan and assess additional problem-solving activities with their classes. The secondary school teacher also agreed to act as a critical friend in the research, discussing and evaluating the project outcomes.

Designing a control ICT environment

The control ICT environment was designed around Lego Robolab™ because it combines onscreen programming with a physical device ('the brick'), allowing the contribution of these elements to the problem-solving process to be explored. The device, a programmable Lego RCX™, has a building surface to which sensors, output devices and construction elements can be connected (see Figure 1). The input and output devices are controlled through programs written onscreen and downloaded to the brick. The flexibility of this environment enables pupils to apply it to a wide range of situations, making it ideal for open-ended problem-solving challenges.

Robolab's™ embedded programming language is capable of great complexity, but it is icon-based and requires few reading skills (Figure 2). I thought that this aspect might support pupils with lower literacy or English-speaking capability and was interested in exploring this further.

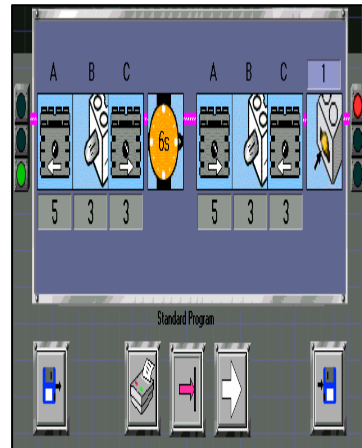

Figure 2. An icon-based Robolab program. (It will turn the motors linked to outputs A and C, and shine the light connected to B, for 6 seconds. The motors will then reverse direction until the touch sensor in input 1 is pressed.)

Finally, many of the Hertfordshire primary schools teaching control ICT, including the project school, were using Robolab™ (CSA Control ICT survey, 2005). This would mean that the investigation and any resources developed would be relevant for the schools I support in the county.

Data collection methods

For a thorough evaluation I needed different kinds of data (McEwan and McEwan, 2003). As well as semi-structured interviews with the teachers before and after each phase of the project, I asked them to note down any thoughts, ideas and observations and feed them to me informally. This informal input, together with data from my own research journal, was designed to balance and expand the responses from the interviews. The views of the pupils were collected through whole class discussion, and a pupil reflective journal. The journal was paper-based to fit into the classes' routine, but the format was free allowing for notes, drawings, jottings etc (Northcott and Brown, 1998). In

order to ensure pupil freedom in using these books, it was agreed they would be shared but would not be marked. Finally, I filmed the control ICT challenge sessions and collected audio recordings of the pupil discussions to facilitate the review of data from the pupil activities.

The pupils' exploration and understanding of their own processes of discovery through trial and error – the heuristic process – was central to the investigation. I discussed the project with them, asking for their involvement and support as 'co-researchers' (Kellett, 2005). I introduced the problem-solving journal, explaining that, after each control ICT session, we would discuss the challenges they had encountered and allow time for them to note ideas in the journal.

The sessions

For the initial control ICT sessions at the secondary school, the teacher put the pupils in partnerships of two or three, avoiding combinations where one pupil would dominate the others. The pupils were introduced to increasingly complex elements of the control ICT environment. They were highly motivated by the Lego Robolab™ kits and all engaged in the problem-solving activities. Many of them also found working with physical kits was helpful: *I like problem solving on models and gadgets* (Pupil Journal, 2005).

The final three sessions were held in the primary school. The pupils chose their partners and worked independently and collaboratively, planning the problems they were going to solve within a given framework. For example, in one session they were asked to design, build and program a toy, the movements of which they would control using the RCX brick.

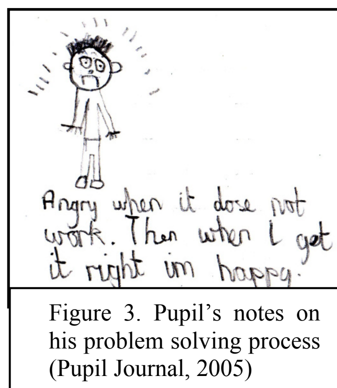

Figure 3. Pupil's notes on his problem solving process (Pupil Journal, 2005)

Pupils rapidly adopted the problem-solving journals and began requesting different recording sheet formats. They increasingly used drawings and notes, rather than writing, which the teacher thought helped lower ability pupils to engage in reflection. Their notes often extended beyond the original requirement of noting any problem-solving strategies. They frequently recorded emotional reactions: *The problem was I could*

not cope with E… (Pupil Journal, 2005) and how emotions changed as they worked on problems (See Figure 3).

Problem-solving strategies

In whole class discussion towards the end of Phase 1, we developed a list of problem-solving strategies which pupils said they used regularly. In Phase 2, we began this process earlier, asking pupils to contribute to a class display of strategies and approaches while they were working through the control ICT session. The resulting array of possible approaches was more successful than in Phase 1, with some pupils beginning to be able to analyse changes in their behaviour: *I used to ask for help. Now I try try again* (Pupil Journal, 2006). The teacher gave photographs of the display to the pupils so that they could identify when they were using one of the strategies (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Copy of problem-solving display annotated by pupil.

After the control ICT sessions, the teachers explored problem solving in other contexts. These included model building in Design and Technology, investigating "mind boggler" puzzles (see Figure 5), maths investigations and a problem selected by each pupil from an area of their life. The secondary school teacher used the context of databases for a further problem-solving session.

Project outcomes

The project's control ICT environment drew pupils into problem solving, giving them ownership of the process and establishing the teachers as supporting facilitators. Given that control ICT had been taught in the same school previously without the benefits observed during the project, the data shows that there were elements of this design that were particularly effective.

Figure 5. A "mind-boggler" puzzle. The objective is to separate the two pieces.

However, while it was evident that the technology did engage pupils in increasingly complex problem-solving activities, it was also apparent that other factors contributed to this success. In the project, it was not so much control ICT itself, but the flexible and open-ended way it was used which were particularly powerful. The primary teachers' ownership of the control ICT curriculum helped to link it to the rest of the primary curriculum, but the real impact derived from the involvement of all the teachers and the pupils in a collaborative and open-ended problem-solving exploration.

> *There was excellent sharing and team work. ... They were so engaged in the problem solving that they shared bricks and understood the need to do so.*
>
> (Teacher interview)

> *I like working in groups so we get all our answers and when you add it together you get the answer and understand the problem.*
>
> (Pupil Journal, 2005)

Ruth Kershner proposes that an effective learning environment relies on teachers' ability to be 'strategic, reflective and creative in finding ways to enable children to become active learners in the school environment' (2000: 31). Within this environment, the control ICT was motivational, engaging the pupils and acting as a catalyst in the problem-solving process. It then supported pupils' independence by giving them a physical object to think with and visual feedback to guide their process.

The teachers involved in the project agreed that the control ICT supported pupils through the engagement with the physical device:

> *Children would have had far, far less involvement without the bricks - especially the less able children. They could see the fruits of their labour when they have programmed it. So if they program it and it goes backwards, they can see they did it and they have to think how to change that. It's the visual feedback.*
>
> (Teacher interview)

This, combined with the open-ended nature of the problem solving challenges, meant that these pupils became personally engaged in the activities and demonstrated increased persistence and self-reliance. This was particularly evident for pupils who normally relied on adult support.

Before I started Robolab as soon as I got stak (stuck) on a question I asked all the time and now I try and try and try until I get the ansere (answer)

and if the question is really hard I will ask. I try and try.

(Pupil Journal, 2006)

There was a more even performance across the class, with most pupils being able to develop solutions to their problems. This outcome links to work by Hart and colleagues (2004) into pupil assessment and consequent differentiation of work. Their suggestion that pupils can become used to working at the level expected of them and indeed become dependent on the support they are given is perhaps relevant here.

In the project, the increased attainment for pupils regarded as lower ability, was not matched for those assessed by the teachers as higher achievers. There was, however, a significant change in the way these pupils worked, including increased structure and planning, and far more detailed recording of their work.

…what surprised me was that they (the pupils) could say what they had done. They seemed quite structured in approach. Also, they were more persistent than I expected. In design and technology, they have produced better models than last year's group. Last year's group went to (the secondary school) for control ICT, but the teacher had not really drawn out the problem-solving aspect with them.

(Teacher interview)

These pupils seemed to be challenged by the openness of the problem solving and took time considering the various options open to them. There was also the possibility that the technology itself slowed this process down, and that if they had had a rapid onscreen environment in which to work, this exploration of various options could have been completed more quickly. Ofsted has reported on the success of using an onscreen approach in this way (2004). However, I consider that including interaction with actual devices is important. It would be interesting to investigate this further, perhaps using a more challenging control ICT device, such as the recently released Lego NXT™ brick. My initial work with this device has shown it to have greater capability in the way it can be programmed to interact with its environment. I continue to think that if pupils are to be able to engage with the real world, to develop into engineers and physicists, they need to test their concepts with actual devices, as well as exploring possible options in a virtual environment.

Developing problem-solving capability

Through the project, pupils became more self-reliant and persistent in their problem solving. They frequently sought peer and adult support as an aid to their thinking process, rather than just providing the answer. There was an increase in structure, planning and organisation in their approaches. These were attitudes rather than strategies and could not be classified as thinking skills, but they were maintained in a non-control ICT context in the project. What remains to be explored is the resilience of such attitudes. There was already some evidence in the project that when the open-ended problem-solving approach was not used, pupils seemed to revert to their traditional models of behaviour. As with the control ICT environment, it seemed to be the classroom approach to the problem solving, rather than the focus of the problem or the tools that could be used to solve it, which were central in supporting new heuristic attitudes. The role of the teacher in creating this classroom approach emerged as central to its success.

An unexpected outcome from the project was the contribution of pupil reflection to problem solving. Giving the pupils a reflective journal which had a clear purpose and over which they had ownership seemed to make a significant difference to their achievement of successful outcomes. It also had a relationship to the way they approached problem solving. I intend to explore this area further.

Supporting teachers in their use of control ICT

One of my aims was to devise ways of encouraging teachers' use of the technology. Although the teachers involved in the project needed support with control ICT and two of them had not previously used the technology at all, in this case, all three rapidly became convinced of the value of the project. They were very keen to develop positive outcomes for their pupils, adaptable to new ideas and prepared to experiment with different approaches. This meant that, once they had access to the technology and time to discuss and explore, these teachers were able to make rapid progress.

> *I would like to implement it more in class. I have had the resources and haven't used them because of time constraint, but I feel confident to use them and I would be happy for the children to lead it and support me and this would be valuable for all of us.*
>
> (Teacher interview)

The project produced some materials to support teachers' use of control ICT. These could be used with a larger group of teachers, within an environment where my support is not so readily available.

A linked project theme was that of teacher involvement in the problem-solving process. The project teachers all noted that pupils' increased independence resulted in part from the fact that teacher input was directed towards the process, rather than the end goal, with control of problem-solving activity remaining with the pupils (Hoyles and Sutherland, 1992). The teachers also noted the same effect when using problem-solving activities in other curriculum areas.

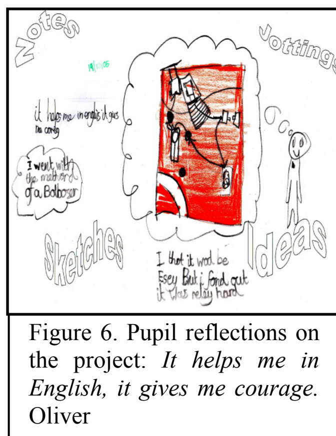

Figure 6. Pupil reflections on the project: *It helps me in English, it gives me courage.* Oliver

Conclusion

Through the project I have moved from a somewhat evangelical belief in the potential of control ICT itself, to a more considered view of how the technology can be used productively in the classroom. I still think that control ICT has huge potential, especially for pupils who are not engaging in the learning within the class and who have perhaps become dependent on the support they receive. I also think that further research is needed into its role in supporting those regarded as more able. However, the project demonstrated the importance of making the control ICT part of an open-ended, pupil-empowered learning environment. It also demonstrated an interesting role for pupil self-reflection which I hope to explore further.

Finally, the opportunity provided by the MEd programme, to explore a concern of central importance to my practice has been both exhilarating and enlightening. The project has impacted on my view of control ICT, and my approach to supporting teachers in using the technology, but it has also challenged my ideas on pupils' engagement in their thinking and learning and provided impetus for new research directions.

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Towards a culture of student leadership and volunteering

Nicola Bourne
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Abstract

Nicky Bourne is a member of CANTARNET, a network of teachers engaged in teacher-led development work with the support of a masters programme led by Judy Durrant at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her article provides an account of Nicky's innovations aimed at engaging students in leadership roles.

I have been Head of the Physical Education School of Learning at Herne Bay High Specialist School and Sports College for three years. Building on experience in my subject area, I wanted to develop an effective model of community leadership training for students (Bourne, 2006). This article concerns the initial phase of the development.

A vision for student leadership and participation

My motivation for this development work arises from my personal discontent with the image branded of young people today. Following the Government's introduction of ASBOs, the school introduced its own 'SASBO' (School Anti-Social Behaviour Order) to reprimand the small proportion of students who exhibit negative behaviour such as smoking, chewing gum, using mobile phones, swearing, being out-of-bounds and causing vandalism and graffiti. Yet within physical education and school sport I often see positive behaviour, where students show respect, interact and communicate well with others, work with younger students, become positive role models and enjoy school. I also see the power of sport and leadership as tools for engaging disaffected students and helping them to change their behaviour. I wanted to widen this beyond my department, to generate an ethos of leadership and volunteering within and beyond the school community and to increase students' confidence, sense of responsibility and feeling of belonging.

Herne Bay High School's 1500 students were recently divided into five mini-communities or families. While the identities of these communities were developing, the prefect system had not changed, except in name. The more mature and responsible students in Year 11 were selected as prefects by the Headteacher, given a very brief talk and allocated duties such as patrolling different areas during break and lunchtimes. There was no formal training and no reward other than adding 'prefect' to their C.V. It was clear that they did not enjoy their duties and lack of respect from younger students frequently led to conflict.

I began to develop a vision of a more effective structure based upon my experiences within physical education and sport. For many years we had been teaching the Sports Leaders UK Sports Leadership Awards to students in Key Stages 4 and 5. I had already worked with colleagues to pilot a mini-community sports leader programme, which immediately got students interacting with students from other year groups. I started to consider how I might develop such leadership programmes across the whole school.

The potential for developing students' life skills and citizenship within the school community rather than in the curriculum is vastly under-used, despite being enshrined in government policy (see DfES 2004a; 2004b; 2005a). This requires a broad view of education to include the development of personality, social skills and life skills. Student voice is essential to this; while Rudduck's work (2003, 2005) emphasises particularly the benefits of giving students opportunity to discuss their learning, here we wanted to consult students to support development of their leadership.

This development work is therefore based on the premise that if participation is to be meaningful, it has to involve students in decision-making (Kirby *et al.,* 2003). It has to move beyond the classroom and beyond the school boundaries, to encompass genuine participation in strategy, change and improvement and acceptance of responsibility for the future of communities as well as schools (Barnes and Collins, 2004; Nelson and Kerr, 2005; Respect Task Force, 2006; Russell, 2005). The new organisation 'Student Volunteering England' holds that the most exciting opportunities are those where students are empowered to create change.

Some ambitious intended outcomes

I planned the potential impact of the new developments in student leadership against the five outcomes for "Every Child Matters: Change for Children" (DfES, 2004b), which sets out the government's vision for re-shaping children's services. I also used statements from the inspection criteria where appropriate (DfES, 2005b). Research suggests that the outcomes of this kind of initiative can be deep and far-reaching. For the individual, leadership and volunteering "…broadens horizons, improves confidence and builds skills" (DfES, 2005a:21), creating employment opportunities by improving communication and team working (Institute of Volunteering Research, 2002). It can lead to better educational attainment and reduces the likelihood of offending, smoking and depression (Feinstein *et al.,* 2005). Young people learn by 'doing' and valuable extra-curricular learning opportunities can complement their formal education experience. Individuals' new perspectives, interests and aspirations should enable them to make a more positive contribution to their communities and our national life (Respect Task Force, 2006), with much potential for learning through leadership and the inspiration to remain active and involved throughout their lives.

The time-scales were ambitious: during 2005-6 I planned to run pilots, gather evidence, plan change, design leadership training and initiate a programme across the whole school for a launch in September 2006. Despite the pressures of time, I felt that the need for a new structure for whole school improvement far outweighed the huge challenge ahead.

Supporting and sharing leadership of change

I see my school as a forward thinking, well-led, well-resourced institution, open to change and improvement in the interest of enhancing teaching and learning and increasing opportunities for the local community. Change may often be instigated by senior management, but increasingly leadership is being devolved to the middle management layer of the school, as reflected by the Headteacher's recent creation of an 'Innovation and Transformation Team' consisting of the Assistant Heads and heads of the main curriculum areas.

I approached this development work collaboratively prior to, as well as during implementation, because this is our normal approach to change. I also built in research to underpin the development at every

stage (Frost and Durrant, 2003). I had considerable confidence that I would have a sound case for raising the students' profile within the existing leadership structure, thus distributing leadership further. The first developments have inevitably been somewhat adult initiated and there is always the danger of using students in a tokenistic or manipulative way to achieve our own aims (Beech, 2005; Miller, 2003). However, as time progresses, I envisage that leadership initiatives will be developed and run by the students themselves.

New developments in student leadership and volunteering

Recognising current success and identifying need

I gathered evidence of the success of the Sports Leaders training programme I had been running for many years, using feedback from students, teachers and feeder primary schools. It is apparent how the level of teacher input declines over the course, until the activity sessions, evaluations and planning are driven almost entirely by the students. I used this evidence of students' empowerment to support my argument for change.

I evaluated the current prefect system through discussions and questionnaires using a broad framework of questions. I met with all one hundred Student Leaders to establish perceptions, issues and needs, squeezing meetings into registration time over 3 days. It was evident that there was some understanding of being a role model and supporting other students, but most felt their main function was being 'on duty' in a particular area. Most believed they had been given the position based upon their own behaviour record, maturity, common sense, reliability and trustworthiness. The most common difficulties were related to the Student Leaders' interactions with younger students who either ignored or back-chatted them. Their training needs revolved around improving their knowledge of how to deal with situations, talk to younger students and find support if needed.

To avoid their complete disengagement, I quickly gathered a team of supportive colleagues to provide generic training. The Youth Worker attached to the school was able to offer a variety of resources used by the Youth Service to train young leaders. However, numerous other Year 11 commitments meant that the first available time would be in April, just two months before the Year 11 would leave the school. Feeling defeated, I resorted to offering a voluntary drop-in session in which we discussed how to deal with a range of scenarios. I also

made a point of circulating around the different duty areas to offer support, although not as often as I would have liked because of my lunchtime sports commitments.

Eventually I realised I must give up trying to change the existing system and look to the future. The Student Leaders' role as door monitors had to change. The job was such an unconstructive one, only ever resulting in negative interactions and confrontations. The students were called 'leaders', but they were not actually being given any opportunities to lead.

Sharing concerns and gaining support

I planned to create a very different model with the Student Leaders having more status, positive interactions with younger students and a more valuable and valued role in the leadership structure of the whole school. First I had an informal discussion with a senior colleague to check priorities and ideas. Next I needed to gain the support of my colleagues across the school, so sent a simple email to all staff briefly explaining that I wanted to engage some of the Student Leaders in activities beyond their duties, as I felt many had a lot to offer the school. I asked staff to consider any positions of responsibility, jobs or roles where students might assist, giving a number of examples.

I had a wide variety of responses, including the following suggestions:

- a buddy reading scheme working with the English Faculty and learning support,
- establishing a new French club,
- assisting with a variety of lunchtime clubs in sport and ICT,
- supporting Year 7 mentor groups at registration times,
- monitoring and helping to create and update school displays,
- assisting with the school production.

I decided to trial a number of these roles with any current Year 11 Student Leaders who wished to volunteer.

Piloting some initiatives

I devised a form to gauge preferences. Thirty two replies from a Student Leader body of one hundred gave me an adequate number to make a start without being overwhelming. It was important to be able

to demonstrate quality and positive results in order to support the argument for change.

From here the project rapidly developed. I became the facilitator, liaising with colleagues and passing on names of students to team leaders for briefing or training. I kept a database of student leaders, their activities and staff overseeing them. I designed and issued a "Herne Bay High School Community Leadership and Volunteering Record Card" and registered all Student Leaders with the Millennium Volunteers, a national programme which encourages young people to give up their time to help their local communities and has its own certification scheme. We introduced a new prize at our awards evening as well as celebrating any students who completed the challenging targets of fifty or one hundred hours of volunteering.

Evaluating the pilot initiatives
I decided, for reasons of speed, to evaluate the pilot initiatives by consulting through individual or paired conversations. Although informal and in some cases a little brief and rushed, I had taken time to consider a number of factors prior to the conversations, including the basic pre-conditions of motivation and trust (MacBeath *et al.,* 2003). I needed the students to know that I was interested in what they had to say and committed to listening and I was careful to treat them with unconditional positive regard. I was not over exuberant, as this might have led to students assuming that their positive responses would guarantee changes. I had explained from the outset that I was trialling new leadership opportunities and that these may or may not work. The students were aware that their honest feedback would be helpful with a view to finding those which were worthwhile for both students and staff and which would enrich the school community.

The students responded confidently and openly. Most of the initiatives mentioned above were working well. Others had been less successful for a variety of reasons; where this was the case they were keen to offer reasons and suggestions as to how it could be made more worthwhile. I shared the outcomes and developments with all the Year 11 volunteers and we briefed the whole school staff, which helped to ensure continuing collaborative support.

Seeking support for whole school change
As the scheme was growing rapidly, I needed wider support. A senior colleague, seconded to the school for a year, had been asked by the Headteacher to offer critical friendship and make

recommendations for change, so I shared my views and gained her support. I also approached a colleague who was working with Year 11 mentors. I was amazed to find that both these colleagues had already had conversations about the ineffectiveness of the current system and were very keen to collaborate on a proposal for restructuring so we set up a working party. Our proposals were taken to the Headteacher, reinforced with some case studies of leadership and volunteering activities. The principles and practicalities were discussed and debated by the school's senior leaders and we were finally asked to develop more detailed plans.

Planning and approval

Finding time within the normal teaching day for collaborative activity is always difficult. When our proposals had gained approval, we were granted a day off-timetable, which was most productive to enable us to plan the new structure and write a time-framed proposal for implementation. Colleagues outside the working party were invited to offer critical comments to help us to refine the proposal.

The proposed structure divided the Student Leader body into three groups: Sports and Activity Leaders, Peer Leaders and School Leaders, allowing for differing student interests and needs across the school. Staff Team Leaders would be the key point of contact for Student Leaders, facilitating, overseeing and reviewing the work in progress. We planned to involve both Year 10 and Year 11 Student Leaders to ease pressure at examination times, increasing flexibility and sustainability. We also integrated the sixth form leaders, who had previously not had a major role.

We produced a timeline for the launch, selection process, induction and training. All students would receive three modules of generic leadership training led by the Kent County Council Youth and Community Service and could, if they wished, attend a residential course to complete a national accreditation in community leadership and volunteering. We would also continue to link with the Millennium Volunteers scheme.

We all now felt passionately about the need for this new structure, had invested a considerable amount of time in planning it and could foresee many possible positive outcomes, but the ultimate decision as to whether we could alter the whole school structure was the Headteacher's. It was soon clear that he appreciated our collaborative efforts and he was complementary about our document's sound rationale and logical timeline. We were given the go-ahead and now

needed to move fast, to put the structure into place before the end of the summer term.

The start of implementation

I introduced the new Student Leader roles to next year's Year 10 and 11 students in assembly. We issued application forms on which students indicated their preferred category of leader, stating briefly why they wanted to be a Student Leader and what they felt they could bring to the role. We were delighted to receive more than 100 applications. To ensure that all staff were engaged and supportive, we published a list of students who had applied and asked for feedback. Staff from all curriculum areas highlighted students who were not on the list and all of these, when individually approached, agreed to become Student Leaders. We held a meeting of staff team leaders and assistant team leaders to finalise the lists.

The new structure was launched to colleagues at a staff meeting and to students in assembly. Leadership training was booked for students and in the final weeks of the summer term we rushed around making preparations. We informed and congratulated the students on their successful applications, made plans for the initial training on the first school day in September and for the two-day training course with Kent County Council and began to identify roles for Student Leaders. In September 2006 we were ready to induct 41 Sports and Activity Leaders, 30 Peer Leaders and 30 School Leaders, with a good balance between Year 10 and Year 11. Males dominated the Sports and Activity and School Leaders, while a higher proportion of females wanted to develop their mentoring skills as Peer Leaders.

Establishing a review structure

Regular review of the new structure and initiatives has been planned, involving student meetings with staff Team Leaders and staff discussions. It will be important to evaluate our work, from all perspectives – staff, the Youth Service, the main student body and of course the Student Leaders' points of view. The diversity of the work that the Student Leaders will be doing sets particular challenges for monitoring impact. Quantitative data is limited; qualitative evidence will be of more value but measuring the impact of student leadership on school culture, learning and teaching can be "…as difficult as tracking the effects of throwing small pebbles into large pools" (Cox, 2003:5).

We realised the need to set up an integral monitoring and review process, which will provide evidence of our achievements, successes

and pitfalls along the way. It is important that all the Student Leaders are fully engaged in this process, just as they are already aware that they are pioneering the scheme for the school. Younger students can report on the leadership initiatives that we have set up. Sixth form students will assume key leadership roles within each of the three categories of Student Leaders. It is envisaged that the senior students, not the staff, will take on the role of chairing meetings, organising rotas, gaining feedback and monitoring the work of their teams.

Making it last

Although the developments so far are highly embryonic, the sustainability of the new structure is already of great importance. The new structure must be sufficiently robust to withstand changes of key staff and must be embedded to the extent that our Student Leaders seem indispensable. The new system is designed to support all students for their own betterment and development with equal opportunity and access for all. We have been conservative in our use of resources, using the in-house experience of our attached youth workers to deliver the leadership training and requiring very little funding to establish the new structure.

Staff involvement and confidence will also be important to sustainability. I have drawn in colleagues to oversee initiatives that interest them, convinced that their involvement will be rewarded with benefits including enhanced relationships with students and support for their day-to-day work. I am aware, however, that while the enthusiasm of interested colleagues must be encouraged, we must also ensure that they understand the philosophy behind the structure and the need for student empowerment rather than over-assertion of their own ideas.

Another important influence on the sustainability of the scheme is that we want younger students to be exposed to positive role models to raise their aspirations. We believe we are establishing a system that should strengthen over time, particularly if we can maintain a sense of ownership amongst students (Fielding and Bragg, 2003). So far the students have responded positively, but we need to ensure that this is maintained; if they do not remain engaged or are unreliable or apathetic about their commitment, the continuity of the scheme will break down.

Inclusive student leadership

Although the potential for consulting and engaging pupils is considerable, it can falter if a few fundamental errors are made. The quiet voice must get heard, not just the louder articulates (Rudduck, 2003). This is why we actively recruited some students who would make good leaders but who did not put themselves forward immediately.

I have already explained the importance of voluntary rather than conscripted leadership. The danger in this lies with uncertainty about the students we have engaged and the effects on the rest of the peer group. Accepting this risk, we intended our launch process and the three types of Student Leader role to give credibility and inclusion to the structure. We invited students from both Year 10 and Year 11 to volunteer in an attempt to improve collaboration, and realised that we had attracted a range of personalities, with a mix of 'behaviour backgrounds', allowing each student to start with a clean slate. This gives even the most vulnerable students a chance to take the right road, whatever their previous circumstances. With sensitive monitoring, this type of responsibility can be a very powerful tool in developing reliability, commitment and maturity. Having been surprised and rewarded in seeing some of our more disaffected students progress through the Sports Leader Award programme, I believe the recruitment of a broad spectrum of Student Leaders will bring credibility to the new structure amongst their peers.

A culture of leadership and participation

My involvement has been motivating and rewarding and I have learnt particularly the importance of listening to pupils directly. I hope that I have introduced a structure that is founded on listening to young people's voices, valuing and acting upon their comments and giving them the skills and opportunities that they need to be successful. The initiatives trialled so far were successful because they were allowed the time, support and co-operation from a range of bodies, with crucial support and commitment from the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team. Implementation now requires a level of trust and 'buy-in' by all parties if it is to work, moving through raised awareness, understanding and belief to true commitment (Walker, 2004). We need to consider how to sustain this process within the school but also, and much more challenging, how it can be adapted for our four partner secondary schools and numerous secondary schools within the School Sports Partnership of which we are the hub.

Time will determine the success of the new structure within our school and its capacity to be re-modelled elsewhere. I hope that I will be able to make a significant, evidence-based contribution to the next review of the school's behaviour management policy in terms of a reduction in the need for SASBOs. As the scheme develops, I believe we will see more powerful evidence of the beneficial effects of encouraging widespread positive engagement through student leadership, voice and genuine participation.

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See also

Millennium Volunteers: http://www.millenniumvolunteers.gov.uk/

Sports Leaders UK: http://www.bst.org.uk

Student Volunteering England: http://www.studentvol.org.uk

Sonia Turner's Development Work: **Raising boys' achievement through BUG** at Francis Bacon School, St Albans

Sonia Turner was a member of the Teacher Led Development Work group at Francis Bacon School, St Albans (2005-06).

Sonia had a responsibility as Learning Coordinator when she carried out a project to try to engage and motivate a group of Year 8 boys who had been identified as underachieving. She thought that investigating alternative lessons and an incentive system would enable the boys to develop more positive relationships with teachers and feel more positive about their school experience. Boys' achievement was a whole school priority as the attainment gap at GCSE[5] between boys and girls was 20% in July 2005.

Sonia had taken note of an Ofsted report that advises:

> Boys often respond better to lessons that have a clear structure and a variety of activities, including practical and activity based learning, applications to real-life situations and an element of fun and competition. Many boys find it helpful to be given short term targets and feedback that focuses on how they can improve.
>
> (Ofsted, 2003:4)

She could see the sense in this but was aware that colleagues at her school would need support in developing these strategies.

Sonia decided to set up a Boys' Underachievement Group (BUG) that would work on students' 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1996). If it were possible to nurture social skills, self-awareness and motivation this might help the boys to develop more harmonious relationships with each other and with their teachers and lead to improvements in their learning.

[5] General Certificate of Secondary Education: examination taken at the end of compulsory education at 16.

Sonia began her development work by working with the Deputy Headteacher to identify boys who had underachieved at the end of Year 7 based on their Key Stage 2 scores[6] in English, Maths and Science. She also carried out lesson observations in Year 8 in which she noticed a strong correlation between the boys who were difficult to engage, lacked enthusiasm and who disrupted the learning of others and those who had been identified from the data. She also noted that, where there was a greater variety of activities within lessons, boys seemed to be more engaged.

Sonia followed up the observations by interviewing the boys she had identified; 17 boys agreed to be part of the group. In her action plan she noted that all the boys felt negative about their school experience and their own abilities.

> The interviews made me more determined to make these boys feel important and give them a more positive experience at Francis Bacon. My aim was to see these boys more motivated, engaged and enthusiastic about their learning.

The BUG group would have one lesson per week. Sonia drew colleagues into working with the group by asking them to teach a lesson and evaluate it afterwards. A wide range of lessons ideas were provided for the group and included:

- a drama session featuring role play about loyalty and friendship
- a session to produce the TV show, 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' in French
- a team-building, exercise 'Desert Island', where pupils had to design and build a musical instrument, a game and an animal trap from materials provided
- a science lesson on fire writing where pupils practised handwriting and spelling
- a communication session where pupils had to guide each other through activities using only whistles and claps

Other staff were drawn into the development work by the use of a reward system. Teachers could award stars for enthusiasm, motivation or positive contribution to their lessons. The star charts were displayed in the staff room and Sonia used staff briefings to remind and encourage staff to use the system. In her portfolio Sonia

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[6] Key Stage 2 scores: results of tests taken at the end of primary education in English, Maths and Science.

reflected that not all staff were positive at the outset about the reward chart, but her confidence in this aspect of the initiative was boosted by a DfES report on gender.

> When praise is given it is usually for academic performance rather than behaviour, so if boys are not performing academically, then they receive less praise.
>
> (DFES, 2003:2)

Staff and pupils evaluated the sessions and Sonia monitored the boys' progress throughout the year through the effort and attainment grades system at the school. The majority of boys' effort and attainment grades improved throughout the year. Sonia notes that for one or two boys membership of the group did not lead to any improvement in their engagement with school. Staff evaluations indicate that the boys' ability to work together, to listen to each other and to try different tasks had improved. One teacher noted in her evaluation:

> *It's really important for these boys to have a chance to be encouraged and supported in an environment where they don't feel the need to show off and mess around. It has also been a great opportunity for teachers to improve their relationship with the boys they teach through the reward system or through teaching a BUG lesson.*

The boys themselves evaluated the BUG lessons highly. They valued the opportunity to do active and practical sessions and felt that the focus on role play and team work in some of the sessions had enabled them to find more strategies to modify their behaviour.

In her reflection toward the conclusion of this project Sonia concluded that:

- small, short term targets supported the boys' motivation and engagement
- boys respond to lessons where there are activities for different learners such as auditory, kinaesthetic and visual learners
- an element of competition engaged a lot of the boys
- ICT was an important motivating tool for the boys

Sonia was able to use evidence from her work at a staff meeting in January 2006 to share the work being done and to generate further ideas to engage and motivate boys.

The staff meeting led to the drawing up in faculties of Boys' Achievement Action Plans. One issue of the school's teaching and learning newsletter was devoted to strategies to engage boys to keep the momentum going and to share ideas staff were experimenting with. Faculties have responded in different ways to the challenge: technology and maths have trialled some single sex groups for example. Sonia took the lead on all of these initiatives which in large part grew out of her development work. Her plans as the work moves forward are to:

- take the group through to Year 9 and to set up a new Year 8 group
- focus on learning by introducing a learning record card
- involve parents more closely in the process

Sonia has learnt about the power of teacher-led development work for improving both pupil engagement and teacher pedagogy. Her development work contributed to a school-wide effort to raise the engagement and motivation of boys. As Sonia noted in her portfolio of evidence, schools have a moral responsibility to provide opportunities and a conducive environment within which all children can achieve more than might ever have been expected.

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Samantha Murray's Development Work: **Using Key Stage 3 teaching strategies with post-16 History students** at The Thomas Alleyne School, Stevenage

As a teacher of History, Samantha was concerned at the lack of motivation of some of her post-16 students. She felt that a negative disposition contributed to low examination grades. She was very positive however about developments across the school in learning and teaching at Key Stage 3 and wondered if she could apply some of her new understanding to developing more effective ways of working at post-16.

Samantha joined the Teacher Led Development Work group running in the school in 2005/6 so that she could share her ideas with others and develop a way of experimenting with new ways of working in her classroom. She felt that student passivity was a key issue in her lessons and was interested in Ginnis's (2001) view that student stimulation is a major factor in successful learning. Samantha often used a variety of activities to encourage lower school students to engage with learning. She wondered if adapting some of these activities for use with older students would have a positive effect on their engagement and motivation to learn. She was particularly interested to explore whether the use of such activities would support her older students in developing as independent learners, as suggested by QCA[7] (2005).

She decided to teach a module of work using the lesson format and activities she had developed for her Key Stage 3 lessons. She planned to experiment with this way of teaching her post-16 students at the start of the Spring Term. The school had recently used a learning preferences profiling instrument to establish each student's most preferred way of learning. Teachers were given this information about the students they taught so Samantha decided to make use of this in planning her new-style lessons.

[7] QCA: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Samantha wrote detailed lesson plans to guide her work. Each lesson was divided into 3 or 4 parts. Each lesson included activities to appeal to students with diverse learning preferences. Games, movement around the classroom, oral and aural work were all included. Samantha wanted the students to keep journals to record their reflections on these activities. She would then link this evidence to her own journal entries. She also planned to take photographs of the students at work which could be used as the basis for discussion about the value of these learning activities. However, things do not always go to plan. Samantha was asked to take on a new post within the school and a bout of ill health also intervened and she was unable to start this experimental stage of her project until the Summer Term. There was not enough time to complete all the elements in her original project action plan so she abandoned the idea of journals. She was able to take photographs of students in the classroom, however.

Students' enjoyment is one indicator of motivation and Samantha wanted a simple way of recording students' level of enjoyment throughout the lesson. She provided each student with a blank graph with 10 minute intervals marked along the x axis and levels of enjoyment on a scale of 1-10 on the y axis. Students were asked to rate their level of enjoyment of the lesson using this instrument at ten minute intervals throughout the lesson. An analysis of the graphs and of the supporting photographs against the detailed lesson plans confirmed Samantha's view that students were more engaged in their learning when they were involved in these activities usually favoured lower down the school. She was more surprised to learn that students could be equally engaged by less active elements of the lesson as long as they found the work stimulating. The photographs also gave Samantha some further understanding of students' abilities to work independently. She found that it was very clear who was fully committed to a given task, who was leading group work and who was disengaged.

Samantha was keen to share what she had discovered with other teachers in the school. She discussed what she was observing with other members of the Teacher Led Development Work group and planned to share her observations more widely across the school. She was also interested in the views of other History teachers and therefore contributed to a seminar on teaching and learning for post 16 students on the 'School History' website.

This project influenced Samantha's work in a number of ways. She discovered new strategies which she and others could use to scaffold students' learning. She also discovered the power of teacher reflection. Samantha has continued to analyse her own practice as she experiments still further in order to contribute to a school-wide effort to raise the profile of learning.

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Lee Wells' Development Work: **Scaffolding extended writing to raise student attainment** at Barnwell School, Stevenage

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Lee Wells was a member of the joint Barnwell/Barclay schools Teacher Led Development Work group in 2005-6 when he had been teaching for just one year.

Lee wanted to develop ways to support his low ability Year 10 students in completing extended writing tasks, as part of their GCSE[8] English work. He began his development work by asking his Year 10 students to share their views on their learning in English. Lee was disappointed that this discussion was dominated by a few vocal students, with others not having a real opportunity to contribute. He did form the view, however, that students' self-belief was low which rendered them incapable of undertaking the type of writing required. In order to give all students the chance to express their views, Lee asked them to complete a questionnaire which indicated that, although their self-belief was low, they still had the desire to succeed; they simply did not know how to go about it.

One of the obstacles to developing writing seemed to be the emphasis of the outcome – the product – rather than on the process of writing as others had found (e.g. Bates, 1990). In GCSE English classes Lee noted that more time seemed to be spent on task completion than on cognitive development. He read a teacher's account of having used a structured approach to writing (Fones, 2001) which he then experimented with but abandoned because it did not suit his own students. It was a helpful step, however. He then decided to try building on a strength exhibited by the students – their oral work. Members of the Year 10 group were able to answer complex questions verbally, provided that Lee broke them down into smaller, closed questions to structure their thinking. He adapted this to structure the writing tasks he set his students.

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[8] GCSE: see footnote 3 in Sonia Tuner's story

Lee focused on three coursework assignments. He decided to investigate what would happen if he scaffolded the first coursework assignment very heavily and gradually withdrew his support over the next two pieces. He hoped that students' independent writing skills would be enhanced. He began by putting a series of questions on one half of the board to help his students to undertake Assignment 1. The students were asked to build up the answers to these questions into paragraphs, and the paragraphs into a completed assignment. On the other half of the board, Lee wrote outline statements to guide the students' writing.

Lee had hoped that students would move from using the very structured scaffolding provided on one half of the board to the more general guide provided on the other once their confidence and writing skills developed. In fact, few students made the necessary cognitive leap; most of them remained heavily reliant on the structured questions to guide their writing. Discussions with students told Lee that that they were happier with their work and that their levels of self-confidence had grown but this did not seem to be leading to greater independence in extended writing.

Reflecting on the insights he gained from his development work, Lee decided to research different types of accredited Key Stage 4 courses for low ability students in English. He found that the AQA[9] specification for the Entry Level Certificate scaffolds tasks in a very structured way and allows for cognitive development. This enables students to achieve a GCSE. Lee felt that this might, therefore, be appropriate for some low ability students. This course was introduced by Barnwell School in September 2006 with Lee leading it and continuing his development work through it.

At the end of the project, Lee had discussions with colleagues from different areas of the curriculum and it was at this point that he became aware that his development work was more widely relevant than he had previously realised. It became clear that his work could make an important contribution to the school's understanding of teaching and learning. This was an important realisation that enabled Lee to extend his development work by collaborating with colleagues to explore cross-curricular links. His final reflection at the conclusion of his portfolio underlines this commitment to

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[9] The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is the largest of the three English exam boards. It sets and marks public exams such as GCSEs and A Levels, as well as other qualifications.

exploring the possibilities of this development work for whole-school impact.

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Tom Murphy's Development Work: **Students as teachers** at Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden

Tom Murphy was a member of the Teacher Led Development Work group at Sir John Lawes School between 2005 and 2006. Although Tom was only in his first year of teaching, his development work was to have an extraordinary degree of impact in the school and beyond. At the conclusion of his project he was invited to give the opening keynote address at the whole staff professional development day. So what was it that had led to this?

Tom's thinking had been influenced by Albert Bandura's ideas about self-efficacy and social learning (1976, 1985, 2002) which he read when he did his PGCE[10] (initial teacher training course). He subsequently recognised these ideas in the practical guidance put forward by Paul Ginnis in 'The Teacher's Toolkit' (Ginnis, 2001). He became convinced that the students themselves could exercise influence over each other in ways that teachers cannot. Like many teachers, Tom wanted the students to take more responsibility for their own learning and he wanted to explore whether it would be possible to cast them in the role of teacher as a way of realising this aim.

Tom knew that it would be a risky venture so he chose to experiment with a Year 11 class of moderately able students who presented no particular behavioural challenge and with whom he enjoyed a good relationship. He divided them into small groups each of which was asked to take responsibility for teaching a lesson. They were given the learning objectives for the lesson and a week to devise a plan. Tom met with each group during the lunchtime to review their lesson plans. These meetings sometimes included a rehearsal of practical demonstrations.

Once the plans had been agreed Tom resolved to restrict his role to that of observer and camera operator. The students took complete responsibility for the teaching of the lessons. At first this was extremely challenging; students were not used to listening to each

[10] PGCE: The on year post-graduate initial teacher training course

other and it was tempting to intervene, but Tom remained unavailable for questions or any other response usually expected of the teacher. After initial hesitations, the class began to work with the new scenario. Learning activity began to be more interactive with students getting up from their seats to examine resources and members of the teaching group circulating around the class to support fellow students' learning. Tom captured everything on video; this helped him to reflect on what had happened but it also enabled him to hide behind the camera and allow the students to shoulder all the responsibility.

These student-led lessons had a number of benefits. The innovation itself was captivating and drew the students into an explicit and purposeful discourse about learning. As might be expected, the level of empathy was high, so, for example, the students began to really listen. They listened not because an authority figure had demanded it of them but because they were assuming responsibility for the success of the learning process. Similarly, they became noticeably more questioning. Tom observed a significant shift in the classroom culture. One remarkable feature of this culture was the way students began to take notes without being asked to. They noted what they saw as important or puzzling and used their notes to pose questions.

There were a number of additional benefits that Tom had not predicted. One was the way he learned about new teaching techniques from the lessons the students planned and taught. For example, one teaching group used a technique they had experienced in a Modern Foreign Language lesson; it was an amusing activity that involved the students rushing forward and slapping a word or image that was mounted on the wall to indicate an answer to a problem. Tom had never seen this activity before but could immediately see how this could be used in science lessons. Here he was tapping into the pupils' knowledge about teaching and learning accumulated over many years of experience of a wide variety of lessons in all subjects. Another benefit was that, in preparing their lessons, the student teaching groups examined the range of software packages they found in the electronic resources cupboard and chose ones that were particularly useful. This was something the salaried teachers lacked the time to do.

Not all student-led lessons were successful of course. In the early stages, one teaching group had their fellow students copying notes from the board, but even this had hidden benefit. The feedback process that Tom had insisted they build into their lesson plans

enabled the other students to voice their views. They made it clear that they did not regard copying notes from the board as educative and it was agreed that this strategy would not feature in future lessons.

The assessment of the students' work subsequent to these student-led lessons indicated a higher than normal level of engagement with the subject matter, but what mattered more to Tom was that the feedback from the students suggested that they perceived themselves to be developing as independent learners and that they had become more effective as a learning community.

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Lesley Hetherington's Development Work: **Evaluating marking and feedback strategies**
at St Francis College, Letchworth

Lesley Hetherington was a member of the Letchworth Schools' Teacher Led Development Work group (2005-06) and a part-time teacher of English at St Francis College, a secondary school in the independent sector.

Lesley was concerned that teachers invested a considerable amount of time and energy in the marking process and were dispirited when students failed to respond successfully to the constructive criticism about their work. She wanted to explore ways to ensure that her marking and feedback would make a difference to the students she taught.

The first thing Lesley discovered was that there is a great deal of literature available about assessment. She found most of this refreshing and inspiring. It seemed to resonate with her own experience and was rich in accounts of effective classroom practice with the experience of students being to the fore. In particular, she found Shirley Clarke's book *Formative Assessment in the Secondary Classroom* helpful (Clarke, 2005).

Another initial strategy was to visit a local primary school to learn more about the strategies the children had experienced before they came to St Francis. At St Thomas More Primary School the headteacher and staff shared with her their ideas for the 'Big Writing' initiative. This project emphasised the importance of sharing specific learning objectives with the learners and developing marking strategies based on the objectives set. This was a good practical illustration of some of the ideas that Shirley Clarke had put forward. Lesley gained a better understanding of the assessment strategies as well as the skills and experiences children bring with them when they transfer to secondary school.

Before trying out different approaches to marking and assessment in the classroom Lesley wanted the students' viewpoint. When she

explained her plans to the students, they seemed genuinely interested in her project and had many fascinating opinions and ideas to contribute. Having read about the findings of the Assessment Reform Group's review of research on formative assessment, (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Black and Wiliam, 1998b) she wanted to see for herself the effects of 'comment only' marking. The research indicated that the impact on attainment was far higher when feedback consisted of constructive comments as compared with feedback in the form of marks and grades or a combination of comments and marks.

Lesley began her project by marking the work of students in Years 9 and 12 with comments only instead of marks or grades. She then used a simple self-evaluation tool to enable the students to express their feelings about the ways in which their work had been marked and assessed. She discovered that Year 9 students paid more attention to the comments but wanted to know their grades, whereas Year 12 students did not value comment only marking at all and relied on grades even when they were poor. She revised her strategy for year 11 and marked their work highlighting the positive points. This was very successful because it boosted their confidence and generated a positive discussion about how to improve grades in examinations. She was pleased to note a significant improvement in the quality of their writing in their next assignment.

Lesley then decided to focus on Year 9 and devised a questionnaire for them to complete. Their responses were enlightening. For example, students expressed frustration with the vague comments staff wrote and their often illegible handwriting. However, they appreciated it when staff highlighted the positive points about their work rather than commenting on their spelling and handwriting. They particularly valued being set clear learning objectives and having their work marked against those objectives. Praise emerged as important to them but they were also keen to know how they could improve their work.

Some of the points that students had made were about other teachers' practice. This indicated to Lesley that, if improvements to assessment practice were to take root in the school, she would have to begin to involve colleagues in the project. She consulted a number of colleagues on a one-to-one basis, asking them about their current strategies. She found their responses positive and supportive. Staff were keen to share their ideas and voice their concerns. Through these discussions, Lesley gained a good understanding of the range

of approaches to assessment and marking across the school as a whole. A genuine commitment to helping all students to achieve their potential was evident and it was abundantly clear that there was the need to find more opportunities within school to share ideas and good practice; to celebrate successes and support each other in development work.

So what could she do to maximise the impact of her development work? In order to share what she had done more widely, Lesley devised a powerpoint presentation and a set of follow-up questions to be used during an INSET day at the start of the following term. She wanted to report the highlights of her investigation and raise issues for discussion. She hoped that this would lead to a whole school evaluation of assessment techniques and strategies and that it would enable the debate to be taken forward across the school. The presentation at the INSET Day went well; it successfully raised the profile of assessment and a small, informal working group was established. Members of this group experimented with small incremental changes in assessment practice. Plans were then put in place for a follow-up INSET Day to be focused entirely on Assessment for Learning (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).

Overall, Lesley found the development work professionally refreshing; it had led to critical awareness about the strategies and techniques she uses in her day-to-day teaching. Collaborating with other departments in school has expanded her view of the role marking and feedback to students plays in helping them to achieve their potential. The impact on whole school development is as yet unknown but she is optimistic that her work has made a significant contribution to the school's pedagogical knowledge.

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Wendy Wilson's Development Work: **Developing older pupils' oracy in English lessons** at St Mary's School, Cheshunt

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Wendy Wilson was a member of the Teacher Led Development Work group at St Mary's High School (2005-06).

Wendy was Head of English and had been asked to take up the challenge of raising 6th form students' achievement. To begin with she decided to focus on developing their oracy in English lessons having experienced a particularly reticent group which she taught once a week. Their unwillingness to contribute to discussions made the pace of the lessons slow. She often left the lessons feeling a sense of failure and when she discussed this with colleagues she found that they were experiencing similar frustrations.

Wendy looked on the internet for ideas and found a website produced by the Leicester local education authority on which there was good advice about 'Speaking and Listening' (Leicester City Council, 2005). This included useful guidance on the purposes of talk, strategies for organising group work and 'golden rules for talk'. She thought that the following quotation was particularly apt:

> Real discussion is more likely to take place when there is an authentic task, a reason to communicate and where pupils have negotiated a set of ground rules.

Wendy became increasingly aware that she needed to discuss with students the purpose of discussion work and the valuable skills which it would enable them to develop. She found support for this through reading Professor Robin Alexander's book, *Culture and Pedagogy: international comparisons in primary education* (2000). She realised that many of her students were held back by the belief that the purpose of school was 'work' rather than learning and that the real work was necessarily written work.

Wendy wanted to find out more about the students' perceptions of oral work in order to explore how she might encourage participation.

She asked them to complete a questionnaire to see if there was a pattern in their experience of being taught English by three different teachers. Initial comments were encouraging as the students agreed overwhelmingly that they were given opportunities to contribute orally in English lessons. However, the students fell easily into three categories: those who were confident in both whole class and small group discussions; those who would contribute to whole class discussions but only if they were sure of the answer, and those who would only contribute in small group discussions. The factors that appeared to discourage participation were: fear of being wrong, concern about other students' responses, and not knowing how to break into the discussion.

Wendy reflected on this and asked herself why she spent so much time holding whole class discussions when it was evident that only half her students were confident enough to express their ideas. She concluded that this was a response to the pressure that she felt about covering the syllabus and monitoring everything that her students said. She resolved to devise a range of teaching strategies which would encourage all students to contribute. She decided to keep a journal in which she would record her evaluation of the lessons and arranged some peer observations between herself and a colleague.

The strategies Wendy adopted included:

- Pen passing: Students were only allowed to speak when they had the pen. Everyone had to be included. Students could not ask for the pen but had to wait for it to be passed to them. No writing was allowed.
- Names on the table: These were used in a variety of ways; students could not speak once their name was off the table or had to think of two questions to ask the group if their names were left on the table. Two cards each on the table meant that they had two turns at speaking.
- Paired talk time.
- Collaborative presentations: Students worked in pairs to prepare presentations to the whole class.
- Silent thinking time.
- Whole class brainstorm followed by small group discussion.

Keeping the journal enabled Wendy her to reflect on the progress of the group and the impact of her new strategies. One of the issues her journal showed was that there was an emerging tendency for some

students to dominate the discussion. She found that structured activities and groupings chosen by the teacher not only benefited quieter students but helped the more outgoing students to work more collaboratively and considerately.

Keeping the journal also helped Wendy to see that students need thinking time and that starting discussions too quickly leads to poor quality discussion where the teacher has to intervene all the time. She was forced to consider the whole purpose of discussion. Students' responses to her questionnaire had indicated that they were unclear about this and that for many it was simply a process of finding the right answer or guessing what the teacher was thinking. Wendy found herself questioning whether she should allow students to continue in discussions which appeared to be heading in an unproductive direction. She found the use of structured worksheets and tasks were ways of guiding discussion and led to heightened engagement and sense of achievement at exploring and evaluating their ideas. As the quality of discussion improved Wendy found that the need to intervene lessened.

The peer observations that Wendy carried out with other members of the team raised some key questions about their approaches to teaching. It became clear that monitoring group dynamics was important, that shorter, more focused discussions were most productive and that clear ground rules enabled teachers to guide both dominant and reticent students without making criticism seem personal.

Wendy's department responded positively to what she discovered and were keen to improve students' oracy across all key stages. She arranged a department meeting to consider strategies to develop oracy skills. She worked with the TLDW tutor and planned a whole school professional development session in which she asked colleagues to consider these key points:

- Students talk more freely if they feel comfortable with other members in the group: therefore, the teacher should manage groupings according to different purposes, and should ensure that their composition was changed regularly.
- Teaching students the necessary language skills for discussion increases confidence academically and socially.
- Classroom management strategies should support discussion.
- Students need thinking time.

- We need to explain the purpose of tasks and help students to evaluate their success in completing them.
- Students need to be freed from note-taking during oral work.

By raising these issues with her colleagues Wendy sought to extend the impact of her development work on different teaching and learning areas. This was just the start of a process of raising awareness of the importance of oracy for students' learning and developing practice at a whole school level.

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Liz Brown's Development Work: **Supporting homework through peer assessment** at Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden

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Liz Brown is Head of Modern Foreign Languages and a member of the Teacher Led Development Work group at Sir John Lawes School. She wanted to improve the effectiveness of 'homework' as a learning strategy for her students.

The problem with homework seemed to exemplify the difficulties she had in encouraging children to value learning for its own sake (Dweck, 1986). She felt instead that she had to cajole her children into learning through the promise of external rewards. Her reading suggested that there is a common problem with homework. One commentator claimed that only 2% of children enjoy homework and this resonated with Liz's own experience (Stern, 1997). Awareness of this problem with homework and its potential contribution had clearly been around for a long time: in the 1980s the Hargreaves Report said that the appropriate use of homework could add the value of at least one year of full-time education (Hargreaves, 1984).

Liz decided to lead a discussion with students in one of her Year 8 groups to help her to understand more about their views on the purposes and usefulness of homework. After reflecting on what her students said she decided to experiment with three different ideas to see if she could impact on their attitudes towards homework in general and on their own homework practices. She decided to:

- use different terminology to refer to homework
- introduce student-led homework
- introduce a Study-Buddy system

The effectiveness of these strategies varied.

Changing terminology is a well known strategy to encourage people to think differently about a practice. Liz began to refer to homework as 'independent study' to try to reframe this activity. On reflection however, Liz felt that she should have spent more time with the

students looking at the significance of this change of terminology. In order for the change in language to have more impact it needed to be accompanied by a more obvious change in activity. Liz felt that if she had done this it might have been more effective in changing students' homework habits or their perceptions of the value of homework as a learning strategy.

Introducing the concept of student-led homework was more effective. Liz provided students with a grid which gave details of her own ideas regarding the content of lessons and accompanying independent study for one module of work. Students were invited to annotate this grid with more inventive ideas for independent study and also for lesson content if they felt this to be appropriate. Although students did suggest some alternative activities, they appeared to feel constrained by the amount of detail which Liz had originally given them.

The peer-assessment strategy came later. Liz decided to action this through the setting up of a 'Study-Buddy' system. Her reading suggested that peer assessment can scaffold the development of students' responsibility for their own learning (Black *et al.,* 2003; Black and Wiliam, 1998; Weaver and Cotrell, 1986). Liz also saw it as compatible with her wish to encourage a trusting and collaborative environment for learning. She put her students into pairs and explained the Study-Buddy system to them. Students would help their Study-Buddy by assessing work and feeding back to them on how it might be improved. They would design activities to help their Study Buddy revise work covered in class. If students had not completed their independent study, they had to write their name in a book and give a reason for this. Study-Buddies would monitor the completion rate of their partner and set detentions and give rewards where appropriate, although this aspect of their responsibility was supervised by Liz.

Liz asked a colleague to interview the students to find out their reactions to the Study-Buddy system as it progressed. A final questionnaire was then used to give her more information on students' reactions. Liz was interested to see the degree to which her students' experiences accorded with those described in the literature.

She learnt that most students worked together productively and felt that the distribution of work between them was fair. All enjoyed working co-operatively to share opinions and ideas and to check for accuracy. Liz herself noted some rise in student attainment which

she attributed to the development of a greater degree of knowledge of errors made and appropriate remedial action. Students also appeared to be more conscientious about their independent study tasks, perhaps because of the impact of the failure to complete work on their Study-Buddy.

At the end of her project Liz reflected on the impact of the project on the school as a whole. She felt that this development work had allowed her to participate more actively in whole-school development activity. She shared the story of her project in several forums, both within her own school and beyond, and initiated a whole-school discussion on homework policy and practice.

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