LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

A review of learner voice initiatives across the UK's education sectors

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Preface

In January 2007, Becta (British Educational Communication and Technology Agency) commissioned Futurelab to carry out a meta-review of current learner voice activity across primary, secondary, further and higher education. Desk-research and expert interviews inform the main corpus of this report. In addition, a workshop with practitioners, researchers and technologists was held to update information regarding the potential use of technology in learner voice initiatives.

We would like to acknowledge the following people for providing insights into learner voice activities across practice, policy and academia: Sue Attards, Sara Bragg, Nell Banfield, Alex Bols, Martin Brennan, Anna Craft, Lynn Davies, Matthew Dean, Peter Ferne, Clare Fox, Sarah Fletcher, Su Garlick, Richard Gentle, Adrian Gray, Carl Greenham, Roz Hall, Diane Hallas, Julia Hayes, James Hartley, Andrew Hudson, Peter Humphreys, Michele Innis, Asher Jacobsberg, Alex Jones, Jo Lee, Clara Lemon, Jack Lewars, Matt Little, Gill Mullis, Philippa Newby, Sean O'Sullivan, Tom Reed, Tim Riches, Luke Rodgers, Ros Smith, Dan Sutch, Dan Tagg, Hugh Thomas, Maggie Thomas, Peter Twining, Ed Whitelaw.

The purpose of this report is to provide educators working within primary, secondary, further and higher education with a guide to how learner voice is currently being used to shape policy and practice in education. Case studies have been chosen to illustrate the potential impact learner voice can make across the UK's education sectors. Although the case studies provided are from different sectors – we would encourage readers to explore the methods and activities used in each, as these may offer new perspectives that you may wish to consider in your own context. In addition, the report discusses how digital technology may be used to advance learner voice initiatives by enabling greater learner-driven practice, as well as engaging all learners, particularly those who are typically under-represented.

The main aims of this report are:

_ To summarise the evidence from research, policy and practice for the promotion of learner voice engagement across the primary, secondary, further (FE) and higher (HE) sectors of education.

_ To highlight current learner voice practice and the need to enhance the process.

_ To outline the potential role of digital technologies to empower all learners to have their say.

_ To provide useful guidance on developing learner voice activities.

_ To provide a directory of resources to engage learner voice across the education sectors.

The audience of this report is likely to be headteachers, college principals and practitioners as well as academic registry officers and local authority education advisors.

Section 1: Introduction to learner engagement and learner voice

Contents

1.1 Defining learner engagement and learner voice

"For engaged learning to happen, the [learning space] must be conceived of as a knowledge-building learning community. Such communities not only develop shared understandings collaboratively but also create empathetic learning environments that value diversity and multiple perspectives. These communities search for strategies to build on the strengths of all of its members." Fletcher (2005)

Research increasingly suggests that when learners are engaged in shaping and leading their own learning and education this can result in benefits for all learners, educators, the institution and the education system as a whole (eg Davies et al 2007). In particular, the benefits for learners who are involved are said to include:

_ greater sense of ownership over their learning

_ increased motivation

_ improved self-esteem

_ greater achievement

_ improved relationships with peers and educators

_ increased self-efficacy.

At the same time, failure to engage with learners in the education process risks increasing disengagement and disillusion amongst learners with their educational experiences. There is also a risk that education will become one of the few areas of social life in which core communities and consumers of a service remain unconsulted. Learners are part of a community and the best way of empowering communities is to listen to them and act upon their views. When people have a voice and an influence on decisions and outcomes they are more likely to participate and also to learn through participation.

There is a range of definitions that embrace the concept of learner voice, including:

"How students come to play a more active role in their education...as a direct result of their [educators] becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students want to say about their experience of learning." Hargreaves (2004)

It should be noted that in most studies the concept of 'learner voice' is referred to as 'student voice' or 'pupil voice'. For the purpose of this report we shall be using the term 'learner voice' to encourage debate on 'who' the learner actually is, as today, the student (both adult and young), the teacher or even their parents are now often referred to as 'learners' whose voices should be heard and acted upon. However, to date, the greater share of this field has focused upon students in learner voice activity so this report and the case studies it presents, reflect this current position.

1.2 Learner voice drivers

The call to engage learners in the whole process of their education is not new:

"To teach is to learn twice."[1] Joseph Joubert (1782)
"The greatest lessons in life, if we would stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children."[2] Mahatma Gandi (1931)

"When adults think of students, they think of them as potential beneficiaries of change. They rarely think of students as participants in a process of change and organisational life."[3] Michael Fullan (2001)

What is new is the importance policy and practice communities are now placing upon learner voice as a key agent for greater learner engagement. Since 2002 the Education Act requires all schools to consult with students for example, Ofsted expects inspectors to report on the degree to which schools seek and act upon the views of learners (Ofsted, July 2005), and the recently introduced Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) specifically asks: 'What are the views of learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders and how do you know?" Learner voice has appeared explicitly in recent UK policy promoting personalised learning – with agendas around school improvement such as Every Child Matters (DfES 2006) being at the forefront of this new learner-driven improvement practice.

In addition, the current National Healthy Schools Standard[4] sets out as one of its elements a whole-school approach 'to give children and young people a say.' Furthermore, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2007), having published a report investigating citizenship education, has recommended that every school should have a school council.

In summary, the key drivers in statutory education that are influencing learner voice initiatives are:

_ children's rights

_ active citizenship

_ school improvement

_ personalisation agenda.

What is noteworthy is that for many commentators in education, the drive towards personalised learning came from concerns that significant numbers of learners were refusing to attend school, let alone aspire to further education or training – these youngsters were (and are) using their feet to express their voice about their unhappiness with current schooling. Perhaps, this is our strongest example of how learner voice has driven educational policy and practice in recent years.

However, the suggestion that learner voice should be a major vehicle for driving through the above education agendas has been greeted with concern from some quarters of the education community. The potential burden that learner voice mechanisms may add to already busy learning establishments has been aired – with most union leaders not in favour of mandatory councils. Therefore, the guidance of good practice that this report hopes to offer will be in the context of concerns and barriers from stakeholders working in educational institutions.

The government has shown a recent commitment to guiding schools, and more recently post-16 institutions, through documents such as: DfES (2004) Working Together: giving children and young people a say (revised version due April 2008); DfES (2005) Higher Standards, Better Schools for All; and the LSC's (2007) FE handbook 'Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy'. This change is a product partly of the legal changes which have acknowledged the rights of children and partly of the increasing number of educators who are witnessing the benefits of consulting learners about the issues that directly and indirectly benefit them in their learning institutions and beyond. Both perspectives are clarified in Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child:

"Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It should be noted that most change has occurred in education sectors serving statutory-aged learners. However, this learner-driven culture is increasingly witnessed in institutions working with non-statutory-aged learners in further education Since Sept 2007, all post-16 education providers are requested to have a 'Learner Involvement Strategy'. This is part of a wider programme of change and personalisation within FE to ensure that provision meets the needs of students.

Similar to the primary and secondary sectors, lead drivers for learner voice in Further Education include:

_ personalised learning agenda

_ active citizenship.

Other drivers also include:

_ Foster review

_ LSC's Framework for excellence and learner involvement strategy

_ QIA Improvement strategy.

Since September 2007, all post-16 colleges must have:

_ a Learner Involvement Strategy

_ a student committee

_ a mechanism for engaging learners collectively

_ two student governors and a Staff Student Liaison Officer.

Furthermore, with the government plans to raise the education leaving age from 16 to 18 – learner-driven policy and strategies will no-doubt become more common within FE in particular, but also Higher Education (HE). In HE there has been a long tradition of using student representatives, often from the National Union of Students (NUS) to inform policy and practice of the learners' perspective. At present, a key system driver for fostering learner voice initiatives at HE is the audit carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The QAA expects all HE institutions to have in place mechanisms for gathering and acting upon learner voice in order to assure academic standards and quality – HE educators must show a 'paper trail' of evidence indicating where learner voice has been captured and importantly, acted upon. At a national level there are students and/or NUS

representatives on various sector-wide organisations, shaping the policy-making process, including the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Office of the Independent Auditor and, several Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) committees and the QAA. In addition, it should be noted that learner voice engagement is a common occurrence across HE at institutional level, with many regarding this activity simply as good practice. Most universities have student representatives on all their committees from the department and faculty level to institution-wide level (except committees dealing with promotion and pay).

From September 2009, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) will be judging the quality of Initial Teacher Training Institutions on their process of engaging learner voice and the impact this has made to their provision.

In its recent literature review of learner voice research, the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) (Hudson 2007) identifies some strong reasons for pursuing learner voice initiatives:

_ Raising academic achievement: The Carnegie Young People Initiative (Davies et al 2006) found a link, albeit indirect, with higher achievement. They found that learners in democratic institutions feel more in control of their learning and show enhanced communication and competence due to their increased participation.

_ Increasing learner engagement: Consultation can help learners have a more positive attitude toward learning (Rudduck 2004).

_ Taking responsibility: Collaborating on projects can be an effective way to help learners engage with the curriculum and take control of their own learning (Somekh et al 2006).

_ Improving educators' practice: Learners taking on the role of researchers can help teachers gain insights that advance their own professional development (Fielding and Bragg 2003).

Building confidence and self-esteem, improving attendance and achievement, encouraging better behaviour and developing communication skills are all benefits of learner voice approaches cited by a recent literature review by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (Halsey et al 2007).

1.3 What is 'genuine' learner voice?

Learner voice is about empowering learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests and needs in order to develop educational experiences better suited to those individuals – critical if your educational institution wishes to deliver a personalised education system.

Learner voice is not about learners shouting to be heard, nor is it about educators giving away all their 'powers' to learners. Learner voice is about considering the perspectives and ideas of learners, respecting what everyone has a say, taking risks, sharing and listening, engaging and working together in partnership.

At one end of the spectrum, learner voice is about keeping learners informed as to how decisions are taken and processes involved. At the other end of this spectrum we see decision making about the form, style, content and purpose of education that is negotiated and shared with learners. Learners are offered greater opportunities to have their voices heard, to affect outcomes and bring about change.

While the prevalence and diversity of current learner voice initiatives is a reason for celebration, Michael Fielding (2006), a lead researcher of learner voice, reflects that the initial optimism that it would challenge fundamental injustices has not yet been realised. Both Fielding (2004b) and the late Jean Ruddock (2006) quite rightly had concerns regarding the present climate, where learners may be consulted about their learning in order to raise standards and increase attainment rather than for reasons of personal and social development or any sense of active membership of their learning community. Robinson and Taylor (2005) identify four core values at the heart of successful learner voice practice if it is to offer true empowerment and engagement:

_ a conception of communication as dialogue – ie a social interaction that aims to reach an understanding

_ the requirement of participation and democratic inclusivity – ie learning institutions need to think carefully about who they listen to, how they listen to learners and what they listen to learners about

_ the recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic – ie it is the responsibility of all learner voice initiatives to challenge mechanisms of power that may hinder the opportunity to foster equality of voice for all

_ the possibility for change and transformation – ie listening to learner voice alone is not sufficient, what happens to this information and what is done with it is also of great importance.

Being listened to and being taken seriously fosters a positive relationship between learners and their educators. It encourages a positive sense of self in both parties which can have an enormous impact on individuals' learning outcomes. But as Fielding (2008)[5] warns "listening to (learners) voices will not always be easy. We have to be disappointed and delighted by what they say." Bragg (2001) extends this by suggesting that current practice does not always listen to the more difficult voices – the ones you may not wish to hear. Bragg concludes that learner voice initiatives must listen and act upon "incomprehensible, recalcitrant or even obnoxious voices". The absence of these voices points to an 'implicit contract' to speak responsibly, intelligibly and usefully. It is only by including these voices that the potential of this work to achieve social justice can be realised.

In light of the issues raised above we must heed the concern raised by the new policy and practice push to engage learner voice:

"Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on the rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation?... Or are we presiding over the further entrenchments of existing assumptions and intentions

using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control?" Michael Fielding (2001a)

However, in order to move the debate on positively so that practice may foster successful learner voice initiatives we conclude that:

_ Learner voice is about self-esteem and personal development for both educator and learner. It fosters behaviour that causes educators to reform with and not for the learner.

_ Learner voice is about listening as concerned partners, coherent contributors, and equal agents of change.

_ Learner voice enables learners to practice the same levels of social responsibility and personal freedom that they are given in other aspects of their lives.

_ Learner voice embraces the responsibility that learners have in shaping their own education, therefore promoting relevant skills for the future.

Learner voice should be considered as a vehicle for shifting towards a 'new cultural attitude' supported by a variety of approaches that will support and bring about personalised education. David Hargreaves (2004) has suggested that learner voice is one of nine 'interconnected gateways' for bringing about personalised learning and teaching. These are:

_ curriculum

_ learning to learn

_ workforce development

_ assessment

_ learning establishment organisation and design

_ new technologies

_ learner voice

_ advice and guidance

_ mentoring.

A useful exercise is to consider how learner voice itself may be used to develop and shape each of these 'gateways' – listing the most suitable methods for doing so.

1.4 Developing learner voice

Questions that you may wish to consider prior to considering exploring learner voice further in your own institution are:

1. What is your learning institution doing already to promote learner voice?

2. If no learner voice activity appears apparent, why not?

3. Do learners themselves feel they are being listened to – ask them?

4. Who is being heard – are your current methods only accessible to particular learner groups?

5. Does the culture of your institution foster the development of learner voice?

6. Are there clear processes for involving learners in decision-making or are they simply informed or consulted on decisions that are 'out of their hands'?

7. Are learners able to drive their own agendas or issues or are they always led by the educators?

8. What methods and tools are being used – are your tools suitable for engaging the voice of all your learners?

9. Why is learner voice important to you and what would successful learner voice engagement look like in your context? Remember to ask learners - do you share the same vision?

1.5 Value of digital technologies in learner voice engagement

"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice." UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 13.1

There is an array of methods used to engage learner voice already in use (see Section 2 and 3). However, very few have yet to consider the vast, new opportunities offered through the use of digital technologies. Beyond formal education, learners are increasingly accessing a range of technologies and tools to acquire, retrieve, capture and disseminate information for themselves. They are doing this through social networks that can help them develop an active role in society, ie the tools to support active citizenship. Technology potentially allows learners to set their own agendas as it opens up new opportunities for regular participation on evolving and relevant issues.

"In the 21st century we don't hear student voices through a representative 'student council'; we hear it through the channels that technology has brought us: texts, podcasts, diaries and blogs, conversations and more." Stephen Heppell (2006)

Nevertheless, throughout all education sectors, there is little evidence of educators harnessing effectively the digital tools observed in abundance outside formal education settings. Their use tends to be restricted by time and location and their perceived appropriateness to predefined tasks. Learners are effectively being asked to "power down at the school gates" (Rudd, Colligan and Naik 2006).

Recent research from JISC (2007) that explored the attitude of 16-18 year olds who were hoping to go to university suggested that this generation of learners are regular users of social networking sites. A significant number are frequent bloggers and wiki users. Perhaps of greatest interest, were findings from the study that reported that over 54% of students felt that the use of ICT in their schools was insufficient, with 62% of participants agreeing with the statement 'I expect IT to play a much

bigger role in my learning than it does now' with regards to their future education. Furthermore, over a quarter of participants claimed that they learnt better with a computer compared with face-to-face interactions with their educators.

That said, it takes more than technology to engage the voices of all learners – in particular those seldom heard from under-represented groups. Guidance offered by government and outside agencies often calls for learner voice strategies to include consideration of hard-to-reach learners (see Every Child Matters (2006)), but how is this to be done? One of the benefits of digital technology is its ability to connect with a wide number of people. This trait coupled with its popular use in youth culture should be enough – but it is not. What many educationalists from both policy and practice communities still fail to realise is the need for social and cultural support in using one's voice to give an opinion or to recall an experience – access to learner voice tools is not enough. However, the anonymity of using such digital tools is attractive to many learners who would rather not share their voice with others but would still like change to happen.

In Section 4 we explore the potential use of technologies to advance learner voice initiatives including the necessary support required to engage all learners. In Section 5 we consider how public and third sector organisations, such as local authorities, are themselves using learner voice to inform their own practice. We conclude with a discussion on how these same organisations may be able to engage with learner voice further to maximise the intelligence gathered from such activities. Section 6 provides readers with a directory of references and resources to help foster successful learner voice practice in their own context.

The following section outlines approaches to successful learner engagement practice in the context of practice evidence. We take the view that although policy has provided frameworks and guidance for engaging learner voice, it is through practice and experience that stakeholders in education may be able to see how relevant and critical learner voice is to the successful running of their institutions, and importantly, the well-being both academically and emotionally of all its learners.

Section 2: Current landscape of learner voice initiatives

"Imagine a [learning community] where democracy is more than a buzzword, and involvement is more than attendance. It is a place where all adults and students interact as co-learners and leaders, and where students are encouraged to speak out... Picture all adults actively valuing student engagement and empowerment, and all students actively striving to become more engaged and empowered. Envision classrooms where teachers place the experiences of students at the centre of learning, and education boardrooms where everyone can learn from students as partners in change."[6] Fletcher (2005)

2.1 Different types of learner voice

Learners' involvement becomes meaningful when they become allies with educators in improving their learning communities. Embedding learner voice within an institution means that the institution's approach becomes genuinely learner-centred. Learners are genuinely engaged and are setting the agenda, not simply responding to issues set by staff. Futurelab (Rudd, Colligan and Naik 2006) has developed an approach that represents the different levels of engagement and types of involvement possible:

_   inform

_   consult

_   involve

_   collaborate

_   empower.

This ranges from the lowest level of participation, where learners are informed of decisions, to the ultimate level of learners empowered to set agendas for change.

Examples in this report show how institutions are implementing learner voice strategies across the three sectors: primary, secondary and further education/higher education (FE/HE). We have identified these examples as good practice in this particular area of work. This is not to say that all individuals mentioned in this report would say they have achieved the highest level of transformation in their institutions; rather, it is an attempt to show good practice as part of this process of change.

2.2 What methods are being used to develop learner voice engagement?

Developing learner voice is about working towards a culture of engagement and co-design around practices that empower learners. Rudd, Colligan and Naik (2006) suggest that tools such as questionnaires, interviews, surveys, focus groups, opinion polls and discussion groups are just a few of the potentially useful methods for gathering the opinions of learners. The key here, however, is that the more learners are involved in determining the areas to be explored and in collecting and analysing data, the deeper their engagement will be.

The research literature is rich with examples of methods that can enhance learner voice. The examples in this section show a mixture of methods used by learning institutions. These reflect the many ways in which learners can be involved and the variety of approaches that can be used, depending on an institution's particular circumstances.

Using the Futurelab approach, we can categorise the various methods according to the five levels of participation. Some of the methods listed in each of these categories may overlap. The purpose is to illustrate the range of the different types of possible approaches.

Inform

Staff regularly inform learners about their rights and ways of participating within the institution. Methods include:

_ presentations

_ assemblies

_ websites

_ notice boards

_ meetings and forums.

Tools for informing learners include newsletters, information sheets, minutes from meetings and the institution's website.

Issues to remember

This is a vital first step on the ladder of developing learner voice. It opens the door for wider learner participation. However, it is a one-way approach with learners on the receiving end of information with little attempt to ensure that communication has been understood.

Action point

Effectively informing learners can open the door to creating opportunities for wider participation.

Consult

Taking a consultation approach encourages greater learner involvement than simply passing on information. In this case, educators seek the views of learners and give learners full feedback on any decisions taken. Methods include:

_ learners responding to surveys

_ circle time, with learners and educators having a dialogue about issues

_ a designated time and place within the institution to consult learners, such as tutor time.

Tools for consulting learners can include opinion polls and focus groups (where learners are invited to respond, rather than lead). Other tools include staff-led consultations and workshops as well as questionnaires with closed-ended questions.

Issues to remember

Consulting learners can be of benefit to staff as well as to learners. For instance, asking learners about ways to improve classroom practice can produce valuable new ideas.

Example: Consultation benefits the institution as well as learners

As part of a plan to make personal development a key part of the curriculum, Birches Head High School held a whole-school consultation. It showed that learners wanted to be more actively involved in planning activities. "Students need to know what is going on and we need to stop being kept in the dark" and "Ask students their point of view" were typical comments. In response to this consultation, the school appointed an assistant head of participation who set up five student action teams focused on the areas of community, environment, people, communications and learning. Each team is made up of 20 learners representing all year groups, abilities and learning styles. Each also includes some learners who gave either very positive or very negative responses to the consultation. Since the work began, the teams have organised and taken part in over 60 projects, working closely with individuals, focus groups, teaching groups, departments, year groups, the whole school, the community and even national and international agencies. School staff and representatives from outside agencies work out of hours to supervise this.

For more information read this case study in full at: curriculum.qca.org.uk /key-stages-3-and-4/ curriculum-in-action/casestudieslibrary/ case-studies/Pesonal_development_at_ the_heart_of_school_improvement.aspx

In designing a survey, institutions should take steps to ensure that it is accessible to all learners. For instance, certain learner groups, such as those with English as a second language (ESOL), may need staff support or adapted questions. Providing more than one way of responding to a survey is often a good strategy.

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Example: Making survey methods accessible for everyone at Orchard Hall College

One teacher developed a 'scrapbook challenge' approach to gathering feedback from adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The teacher and learners together review a collection of photos and video footage of activities undertaken by learners over the week. The teacher gauges learners' reactions to judge whether or not they enjoyed the activity.

(LSC 2007)

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As part of the consultation process, staff should explain the purpose of the consultation, and learners should know how the information they give will be used. Learners should also feel confident that giving their opinions will not disadvantage them in any way (Rudduck 2007). Staff should always make sure to let learners know the outcomes and, wherever possible, invite further discussion and activity.

Having said this, it can sometimes be difficult getting learners to take part in discussions. Harkin (2006) conducted a survey aimed at learners becoming part-time further education learners. He noted that it was difficult to get them to talk about their views and concluded that they were unused to being asked about learning issues by authority figures. Ruddock, Brown and Hendy (2006) found that teachers they worked with said that neither they nor their colleagues had been trained to handle one-on-one dialogues with learners. Encouraging learners to express their views is obviously a crucial part of consultation and can be a challenge for educators. To do this effectively, staff will need the training and support.

Action points

_ Learners should have as much input as possible into any consultation process. At a minimum, staff should explain how the information will be used and let learners know the outcome of the exercise.

_ All methods should be accessible to learners.

_ Many staff will need training and support in holding dialogues with learners.

Involve

Involving learners means that they contribute throughout the decision-making process. Staff and learners work closely together to be sure that all views are taken into account. Methods include having:

_ Councils: representative structures for learners, through which they can become involved in the affairs of the institution, ideally working in partnership with governors, senior managers and staff.

_ Learner governors: learners are elected to represent learner interests at governors' meetings.

_ Advisory committees: learners participate in committees which advise staff on a variety of issues such as their personal experiences, courses, internships, research opportunities and career assistance.

_ Learners on staff appointment panels: learners are involved in interviewing and appointing teaching staff.

Tools for involving learners include inviting them to give their input during workshops and having consultations that are led by learners and staff. Also common are staff-directed interviews, where learners are asked to respond to open-ended questions.

Issues to remember

All of these methods can improve levels of learner participation in institutions. By having representation on governing bodies, working with senior managers, sitting

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on advisory committees and having a role in appointing staff, learners can influence their institutions and develop their own leadership skills.

These methods can also yield other benefits. For instance, councils can lead to an improvement in self-esteem, according to research done with schools recently. Some 70 per cent of respondents to a School Councils UK study said that learners' self-esteem had improved as a result of having a school council (Davies and Yamashita 2007).

Learner governors can be successful in influencing policy as well as inspiring other learners to take part. The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) considers learner governors to be so important that the organisation has a category, Student Governor of the Year, as part of its Learner Voice Awards[7] . However, according to the National Learner Panel[8], approaches such as having learners as governors will only be effective if the learners in these roles are properly trained and supported (LSC 2007).

Rudd, et al (2006) suggest these issues should also be considered in relation to using the above methods:

_ How much power to achieve real outcomes does the council, committee or panel have?

_ How well does this represent all learners?

_ Which feedback mechanisms are there to ensure that learners' voices are truly heard?

Whitty et al (2007) warn institutions not to become so distracted by the process of having learners involved in committees and councils that they overlook the reason for having these in the first place.

Example: Learners make an impact on staff appointment panels

Learners at George Mitchell School in Leyton interview all prospective teachers - even the head. Student panels were introduced two and a half years

ago in an attempt to give students more ownership of their learning. Some 20 of the secondary school's 45 teachers have been interviewed by students before getting their jobs. With the scheme in place across the school, the head herself had to face a student selection panel when she applied for the job on a permanent basis.

Find out more on the BBC site:
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4785538.stm

Some universities are encouraging learners and staff to work together as part of staff development. The idea is to break down barriers and help staff see the learning experience from the learner's viewpoint.

Example: University of Birmingham—bringing staff and learners together

The University of Birmingham brings staff and learners together as part of professional development for educators. Staff meet with learners and hear their views first-hand in a safe, non-threatening environment. This helps staff understand learners' reactions to the process of learning. Using learners' voices in 'live' events ensures that staff are hearing their real views (and not making assumptions). There can be risks in using this approach but if well prepared and facilitated the benefits can be tremendous.

Hearing the Student Voice: Final report, The Higher Education Academy.
www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/profdev/publications.htm

Action points

_ Learners in leading roles such as learner governors and council members should have support and training.

_ Learner voice methods such as councils and committees should have clout and be representative of

all learners. Institutions must remember the purpose and avoid getting distracted by the process.

_ Staff should be given professional development opportunities to help them see the learning experience from the learner's perspective, without making assumptions.

Collaborate

Collaboration means that all aspects of decision-making are done in partnership with learners. Methods include:

_ learners as co-researchers: learners and educators work together to develop research projects and explore relevant issues

_ learners on management committees: learners attend meetings and contribute to institution-wide management decisions

_ course representatives: learners offer feedback on a variety of curriculum and other issues, such as diversity and equality.

Tools for working in collaboration are based on encouraging learner participation. These include learner-led consultations and discussion forums.

Issues to remember

Involving learners in the research process is an ideal way to develop learners' skills, ensure they have a greater say in the activities of the institution and inspire them to take the lead. In one example (Rudduck, Brown and Hendy 2006), Year 10 learners researched the issue of inconsistency and lack of detail in feedback from educators. They devised a questionnaire for their peers and parents, tested their ideas and presented their findings to a meeting of heads of subjects. Learners came up with solutions such as a more detailed formative assessment procedure and the use of 'well done' cards to show teachers' appreciation of good work. These are now being implemented.

Example: Learners as researchers

A secondary school principal in Bear Valley, California started a learner-research program. The group focused on the questions, "Do our restructuring activities make fundamental changes in the learning process?" and "Does all of our work have an impact in the classroom?" As part of the year-long study, the learner researchers participated in a twice-weekly course that focused on their work, and consequently the students became the driving force in the data collection and analyses. Students conceived the methods used and led the data collection work. In their study, they collected data from 200 of the school's 1,600 students. They also explored: learning outside of school, how students learn best, and the institution's impacts on students' learning.

(Kushman1997).

Even quite young children can become researchers with support and training. The Open University has set up the Children's Research Centre, which is helping schools develop younger children's research skills. This work is based on the principle that children are experts on their own lives. Topics of children's research include email use, diet, homework and how to make a film more enjoyable. One of the project leaders (Kellet, 2005) argues that by learning research methodology children become empowered and enabled to actively participate in their own education.

Even if the project is initially educator-led, learners should be able to work towards leading their own research studies. They should be able to shape the direction of their research. To do this, they need support and training to develop their skills.

Learners taking part in management and curriculum committees (course representatives) can be another useful method to enhance learner voice. However, as a warning, Forrest (CEL 2007) stresses that some learners may not have the confidence to participate in the workings of their institution. In such cases, learner voice methods

should not encourage the emergence of a powerful elite whose voices become dominant, forming a barrier to wider engagement. One way to address this risk is to ensure that learners are trained to support others.

> **Example: Course representatives**
>
> Leicester College has a system of course representatives who give feedback on a variety of issues, such as providing learners' perspectives on cross-college matters and any improvements to be made. Representatives also support fellow learners in working with staff to help them achieve a personalised learning experience. They sit on groups such as the Equal Opportunities Committee and participate in meetings and events. The college offers support for its representatives, employing a Student Liaison Officer who offers them training, support and guidance. The training is tailored to meet the needs of different groups of learners.
>
> (LSC 2007)

Action points

_ Learners should have support and training in becoming researchers.

_ Even younger children can be researchers.

_ Learners should be able to shape the direction of their research.

_ Institutions need to make sure that learners who are involved in management and curriculum committees do not become an elite group. They should have training to support other learners to air their own voices.

Empower

When learners are empowered, they can set the agenda for change. They work together, organise themselves and have responsibility for management decisions.

Activities include:

_ learners leading their own research projects - these help shape institutions' activities according to learner perspectives

_ decision-making delegated to learners - learners organise consultations of their peers and meet to decide on the best way forward

_ peer support - learners help one another in their education, which includes buddying systems and peer assessment. It also includes peer mediation, where learners take a problem-solving approach to conflict resolution.

Tools for empowerment include learners being able to set the agenda for their research and consultation activities as well as manage these processes.

Issues to remember

Learner engagement takes time to develop. Learners need to be encouraged to become researchers and decision-makers. They need to have the skills and support to lead enquiries and to help shape their institutions according to their perspective. In this approach, educators listen to learners. Dialogue is learner-led, and learners themselves are engaged in decisions, such as "What makes a good lesson?" This more significant learning experience is based on dialogue, self-reflection and recognition that ultimately staff and students are on a shared journey of discovery that dissolves boundaries between these roles (Shuttle 2007).

Peer support is a crucial step in empowering learners. Research has shown that peer assessment, for instance, can enhance learning. In one project, Rudduck, Brown and Hendy (2006) found that two Year 9 English classes taught by the same teacher produced very different results. The difference was peer assessment and support. One class used peer assessment and the other did not. At the end of term, the peer assessment group had covered much more of the curriculum than the other group. The teacher said that the peer-assessed group was learning at a much faster pace.

Peer mediation, another way of encouraging learners to support one another, can also be a way of successfully developing learners' problem-solving skills. Some fairly serious issues can be addressed by peer mediation, even in primary schools (Baginsky 2004). The most common issues include bullying, name-calling and the threat of getting a gang or older siblings to deal with the other person. Baginsky argues that institutions need to identify which issues and situations are appropriate for the ages of their learners.

Tyrrell (2002) suggests that the question that needs to be asked is: who will benefit most from being a mediator?

Institutions considering this approach will need to think about some of these issues:

_ Who gets to become a mediator?

_ Which problems should they address?

_ What about staff support and training?

_ What about mediator support and training?

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Example: Mediating at playtimes in primary school

Year 5 and 6 pupils at Denton West End Primary School help to settle disagreements on the school playground. They have received training to be active listeners and to encourage problem solving between pupils. This work is endorsed by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

For more information, visit the school website:
www.dentonwestend.tameside.sch.uk/peer.htm

</div>

Action points

_ It takes time to empower learners. Staff and learners should have the support and training they need.

_ Institutions should consider ways to involve learners in different approaches to peer support including assessment and peer mediation.

Conclusion

According to Shuttle (2007), learner voice activity needs to be woven into all aspects of the institution, creating the conditions for a leadership model that is increasingly learner-led. Many institutions have grasped the importance of learner involvement and are beginning to encourage student representation, appoint student governors and organise focus groups.

2.3 What enables learner voice to develop in schools?

There are important factors that can enable student participation in schools (Davies et al 2006 and Whitty et al 2007). These include:

_ being clear about why provision for learner voice is being introduced - remember the purpose and don't get distracted by the process

_ being willing to change the school's ethos and showing a commitment to listening to learners and acting on their views

_ assigning sufficient time and space for learners to be involved

_ making sure learner voice methods have sufficient status to gain the respect of the whole school

_ devolving responsibilities from senior managers to staff and learners

_ having a 'no blame' culture

_ including all learners in the provision for learner voice, not just those who are actually on the school council or who are most comfortable expressing their views

_ making sure educators are committed to developing learner voice approaches

_ training learners in decision-making, communication and managing meetings

_ having a special place for learners to meet.

As part of the process of personalisation, learners need to be active in making their own voices heard. However, educators should also develop ways to enable learners to express their views, allowing everyone to enter into dialogue and bring about change.

2.4 What enables learner voice to develop in further and higher education?

The National Learner Panel paints a clear picture of a further education organisation that has taken learner voice principles to heart. "It is an organisation in which learner involvement is embedded throughout the organisational culture, learner representation is strong and responsiveness to the needs of the individual has helped to improve provision" (LSC 2007).

It will also have:

_ a dedicated learner liaison officer on the senior management team whose role is linked to quality and curriculum issues, not just pastoral concerns

_ an independent learner committee or student council, led by the learners and supported by staff

_ a mechanism for involving learners in review processes that reports annually on how learners' views have helped the organisation to improve.

Listed below are the key factors to developing a strategy to involve learners in further education, according to the LSC and Campbell et al (2007):

_ Focus on learner ownership: collaborating with learners rather than simply consulting them encourages them to get involved.

_ Establish good relationships between learners and staff: this can dissolve barriers of perceived authority and encourage more open dialogue.

_ Celebrate learner voice: learner conferences, away days and open evenings are all ways to celebrate learners taking ownership of decision-making.

_ Have a clear vision: learners' perception of their own empowerment is influenced by strong messages promoted throughout the institution.

_ Have robust and continuously improving processes: participation is greater in organisations with evolving processes than it is in those that simply consult learners.

_ Develop organisational structures: learner participation needs to be woven into all aspects of the institution.

_ Make room for dialogue: student discussion areas, conferences and open-door policies are all ways to encourage participation.

_ Limit the restraint of business-cycle boundaries: learner engagement doesn't always coincide with the business cycle. A longer-term view will encourage a more natural development.

_ Give staff opportunities for professional development around encouraging learner voice activities: staff benefit from understanding issues from the learner's perspective.

There is a clear difference between more mature organisations and those that either inform or consult with their learners. The most mature are increasingly engaging students at all levels of the institution.

The next section gives case study examples of methods being used across the sectors. We would recommend reading the examples that are not specific to your sector as they may provide ideas for your own context.

Section 3: Case studies

Contents

Each section contains five case studies that represent current best practice in developing learner voice work.

Institutions have been chosen for this report for different reasons. All have achieved at least one of the following:

_ an 'outstanding' grade from Ofsted for their work in the personal development and well-being of learners

_ a national Learner Voice Award (organised by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership)

_ Investors in Pupils status

_ success in taking part in a national project to explore learner voice development

_ improvement in their learner voice work as a result of being involved in specialist research

_ recognition from national organisations such as the Carnegie Young People's Initiative and the Innovation Unit for their learner voice work.

Each case study shows how a particular institution is using one or more of the learner voice methods explained in Section 2 to good effect. Each is a snap shot, which shows where an institution is in the progress of this work.

3.1 Primary schools

Having your own budget makes a difference at Heaton Avenue First School, Cleckheaton

Heaton Avenue First and Nursery School received an 'outstanding' grade from Ofsted for their role in pupils' personal development and well-being. The school has also received the Investors in Pupils Award. The school council is democratically elected and has its own budget.

Context

Heaton Avenue First and Nursery School is in the Cleckheaton ward of Kirklees local authority. Pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 to attend the local middle school. The school serves a mixed catchment area, with the intake of pupils reflecting the full ability range. Attainment on entry to the school is in line with expectations for the age of the children, but standards rise to above average at the end of Key Stage 1.

Method of learner voice engagement

Pupils elect the school council each year. Its role is to actively work with the leadership team of the school. The council provides advice, selects equipment and plans opportunities to enhance further the quality provision within the school.

For instance the school was invited to bid for funding from the Royal Bank of Scotland last year. The student council played an important part in securing a £4,500 grant from the bank. As part of the preparation for the bid, the student council discussed what they wanted to do with the funding and how they would use it. This included a school-wide discussion with their peers. Having held discussions, the children said they would like a stage. They now use this for school performances.

There are 12 pupils on the council, two from each class in Key Stages 1 and 2. The council has a £200 annual budget. They consult with their peers how to spend this money. This feels like a lot of money, particularly to the younger children, so being able to consider the costs of things, such as playground equipment, helps them understand budgeting. Once they hold these discussions, members of the council report back on the decision. They have purchased playground equipment and jigsaws and games for indoor activities.

Part of the school's Investors in Pupils status means that pupils must be aware of financial issues and the need to take care of what they have. The school holds assemblies with governors, who explain where funding for

the school comes from. Children are aware of classroom management issues, such as not being wasteful.

Teachers wanted to encourage children to develop a sense of responsibility and understand how important decisions are made in the school. The children work with governors: they speak in the playground and take part in discussions with them on activity days.

Level of success

Having their own budget provides excellent opportunities to negotiate with peers and adults which assist in developing skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being.

They have learned that they get greater benefit from the effort they put in and their behaviour reflects this.

Ofsted report:

www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=2778 01&providerCategoryID=4096&fileName=\\school\\107\\ s5_107668_20051215.pdf

Children's online comments help inform teacher's planning at Sunnyside Primary School, Northampton

Teacher Richard Moult is using the Durham Learning Gateway as a safe online chat room with his pupils. The idea is to get feedback from pupils and get to know them better. The school was part of the ICT Test-Bed Project, which ran from 2002-06.

Context

Most pupils at the school come from White British backgrounds. A small number of pupils of Polish heritage are at the early stages of learning English. A few pupils are Travellers. On entry to the Foundation Stage, children have skill levels similar to those expected for their age. When they start in Year 1, children's attainment is also at the level expected. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average.

Method of learner voice engagement

Richard had previously tried using a traditional suggestion box to gather feedback from pupils. He then set up an electronic one using the Durham Learning Gateway, and posted some questions on there to find out how the children felt about their lessons and their environment. He received some very constructive comments along the lines of "I like class three when kids are being good". He found it interesting to discover how much children valued harmony in the classroom.

These exchanges have led to the Durham Learning Gateway being used like a safe chat room, with the children able to say what good things they like about the class and the lessons, as well as what they don't like. For example, they do like the new way he has set out the classroom, but they think the homework he set is too hard. He had previously thought they would hate the new desk arrangement and he hadn't realised the reason that children didn't hand in homework was because it was difficult.

Using the chat room has also made him more aware of some of his pupil's emotional states. For example, there is one girl who often seems down. By tracking her comments on the gateway, he has realised that there is more to this than a couple of bad days and he is keeping an eye on her in class to try to keep her involved.

Focus of engagement

This work began with Richard's desire to get to know his pupils better. He originally started using the Durham Learning Gateway as a system that would automatically mark spelling work and return it. By chance, he found that the gateway offered an electronic guided suggestion box scheme. He started by posting some questions such as "What kind of after-school club would you like to join?" and "What can we do to make the class better?" Soon, children joined in and began to share ideas with one another.

Level of success

Some of the children seem to be more open to using the Durham Learning Gateway than having a face-to-face conversation, where the peer pressure of their classmates can colour their responses.

Richard is using pupils' comments from the chat room to inform planning. For example, he recently block booked time to do an extended D&T lesson on moving monsters,

after realising that the children really enjoy the artistic and practical side of these lessons.

Richard feels that this has been a useful exercise for himself, but also believes that other teachers could benefit. He suggests that this is a tool for any teacher new to a school, or a class, who wants to know about the pupils in the class and their social skills. Sometimes it can take a while to get to know the learners, but this process has helped him to do that a lot quicker.

This is based on a case study in the Evaluation Report of the ICT Test-Bed Project:
www.evaluation.icttestbed.org.uk/community/research/primary/interest/learner_voice

Children's views are part of school improvement at Sandfield Close Primary School, Leicester

This school is working to help strengthen the voice of its learners. The Innovation Unit noted the school's work in a case study in its latest publication on school councils: 'Real decision making? School councils in action', 2007.

Context

Sandfield Close is a large, mixed, maintained (junior, middle and infant) primary school based in the East Midlands, catering for pupils aged 4-11. The number of pupils who are entitled to a free school meal is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special needs is average. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is very high.

Method of learner voice engagement

School council members were recently asked to consult their classes to find out what the children really liked about their school and areas which they thought could be made better. The council compiled the lists into one document. They then discussed what was realistic, achievable or affordable. The council then prioritised these. Improving the playgrounds and increasing the range of after-school clubs were the two top priorities chosen.

There are 12 student councillors, who each serve for one year. As part of the election process staff and pupils discuss the qualities that school councillors need. Secret ballots are not used in the younger age ranges, so in some classes decisions about who is to be the class councillor are made through open discussions guided by the teacher.

The school waits until a few weeks into the new school year to get younger councillors involved. Although there is no representative for the reception class, these pupils are consulted wherever possible.

Staff attend council meetings for relevant items. The head writes up the minutes of the meetings in a narrative style. This is in response to the issue that some of the younger councillors can find it difficult to report back to their class about what the council had been discussing. Now the pupils have a fuller record to help them inform their class, while the narrative style means the teachers can help them explain issues to the class. This has also had the added benefit of involving teachers in the work of the council.

The head also reports on school council matters at staff meetings, while the school newsletter to parents and carers often contains council news. The pupils' lists of things they really like about the school and areas which they think could be improved forms part of the school improvement plan for the coming year.

Focus of engagement

The school council is primarily for the purpose of developing democracy in school and making pupils feel more involved in their school. The headteacher and staff look for ways to build on their work to improve learner voice. They feel that an active student council is a good way to do this, alongside the other work that they do. For instance, the school has a buddying system in place, where nominated pupils provide support to their peers during break times.

Level of success

The school's most recent Ofsted report said that pupils are very proud of their school, behave well and have good attitudes to learning. "Consequently, they enjoy school and work hard. Attendance rates are above average. One pupil said, 'School is fun, we laugh a lot and it helps us to learn.' Parents commented about their children being happy and feeling valued...Members of the school council fulfil their roles diligently and have, for example, made useful suggestions to the school cook about school meals."

This is informed by a case study taken from: Whitty, G Wisby, E and Diack, A (2007), 'Real decision-making? School councils in action', Innovation Unit:
www.innovation-unit.co.uk/about-us/publications/ real-decision-making-school-councils-in-action.html

Peer mediation is working at Ireland Wood Primary School

Ofsted has graded Ireland Wood's approach to pupils' personal development and well-being as 'outstanding'. The school's peer mediation scheme is included in a case study on the Participation for Schools website, developed by Save the Children UK, Carnegie Young People Initiative, and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Context

This is an average sized primary school serving a socially and culturally diverse area. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has received many awards: the Leeds Inclusion charter mark, Investors in People, Investors in Pupils, the National Healthy Schools award and the Becta ICT Mark.

Method of learner voice engagement

The peer mediation scheme has only been running for a year, but has already proved successful. A whole class of Year 5 pupils were trained in listening, speaking, conflict resolution, role-play and facilitation skills. There are now 15 peer mediators who work in pairs in the playground during lunch breaks.

Focus of engagement

Peer mediation was established to promote positive relationships between children, to allow them to take ownership of their own relationship development. A further goal was to increase the responsibility and self-esteem levels of those children selected to be peer mediators.

As a result of this, children quickly began to make themselves accountable for their own actions and the reduction in low-level incidents dropped to a point where playtime and lunchtime staff have become positively involved in play. They have been able to become proactive rather than reactive.

The training for the peer mediators was invaluable as it gave a clear framework and structure to deal with issues and it also gave ideas for appropriate questions to ask. Peer mediators are there to support children in resolving their own issues. The concept of not having to solve the problem for the other children has been a difficult one to change for the mediators and the training has supported this. Ongoing training sessions also support peer mediators and refresh their learning.

Level of success

Peer mediators keep a brief record of the children and types of incidents they work with. These indicate that the mediators are being approached by a range of children and are having a positive impact.

Being a peer mediator is thought to be important and children are willing to approach them if issues arise. Lunchtime staff have said that they have felt the benefit and feel that children are approaching them when in the past, the staff would have approached the children. Sometimes the mediators have to refer on to an adult, but they are dealing with less serious issues on a regular basis.

Ofsted report:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/index.cfm?fuseaction= summary&id=107896&bar=no

Children take part in decision-making at Lark Rise Lower School, Bedfordshire

"Pupils talk with passion about their work and are eager to take responsibility," says Ofsted, who gave Lark Rise a grade of 'outstanding' for the third time in recent years. In this school, the culture is centred on dialogue between pupils and all adults leading to actions for change. The school has won a variety of awards including the Healthy Schools Award, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investors in People and the ICT Quality Marks.

Context

This school is average in size serving an urban community north of London. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, although the percentage known to be entitled to a free school meal is below average. Children begin school with standards that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. The percentage

of pupils coming from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. However, the percentage with statements of special educational need is higher than usually found due to the school's recognised excellence in planning for children who require significant nurturing.

Method of learner voice engagement

The school has a culture of enquiry, in which decisions are based on the views of the pupils and the adults. They try out initial ideas; reflect on these and any actions for change, before they form policy. Children are involved in this as well as the adults. This way, the voices of all contribute to the distribution of power.

The headteacher is researching her own practice into how she can take a 'We decide' rather than an 'I decide' approach. There are three main areas of learner voice work: the student council (an elected group), classroom-based pupil action teams and pupils choosing their own pathways. Through this work, pupils and adults have a voice in deciding the way forward in areas that directly affect them. Children actively want to come to school to explore their ideas further.

The school also has 180 children acting as mentors on a rota basis each week. They are responsible for planning and organising activities alongside mediating any relationship needs of other learners. One pupil, aged 8, volunteered to explain how this works. "I ask each side if they would like to say what the problem is. I ask if they feel able to talk with me together or if they would rather talk to me separately. I listen carefully and make sure I don't take sides. Then I repeat what I have heard to make sure I have understood. That helps them to see what they are getting upset and angry about too. Then I ask them what they would like to be done about the problem. We then think about different ways to sort things out. If we need any advice from teachers we'll ask for it."

Teachers research their own practice collaboratively with the pupils, who are more experienced in how they learn and what they feel. This dialogue helps to transfer the power of decision making throughout the school.

Focus of engagement

There is a belief in the school that it is important for every child to develop an awareness of how their behaviour can affect others. They also need to know how to negotiate with those who appear to be more self-centred. Such skills transfer easily into the classroom from the playground. Having a curriculum that addresses the emotional needs of pupils has raised achievement significantly.

Level of success

Ofsted has described the way staff listen and respond to children's views as 'exemplary.' The inspection report also says that attendance is well above average and pupils' behaviour is excellent. It describes pupils as confident and independent learners who talk with passion about their work and are eager to take responsibility.

Lark Rise Lower School:
www.larkrise.com

3.2 Secondary schools

Learners are becoming researchers at Abbs Cross School and Art College, Essex

This school wanted to find new ways to empower learners and involve them in all areas of the work of the school. They invited staff from the University of East London to work with them as part of a collaborative project to develop learners' research skills.

Context

Abbs Cross School and Arts College is an 11-16 Foundation school with around 840 pupils. It has an intake of 168 pupils in each year. Overall, there are more boys than girls. The socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are average, although pupils come from a wide variety of home circumstances, including advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Method of learner voice engagement

Some 92 learners met with researchers at the university. They took part in workshops and learned about research methods and ethics. They divided into groups that would explore the issues of teaching and learning, student behaviour, change and the teaching and learning

environment. The learners in these groups were from different forms and were therefore a mix of age ranges.

Each of the three groups decided on a methodology that they used back in school. The behaviour group thought it might be interesting to post anonymous comments on a wiki about good learning behaviour in various classes and why it occurred. The wiki ended up not being used as much as expected. This process actually developed into learners getting feedback directly from their peers and keeping a written behaviour log. The reason for this may be the restricted access to the technology that can occur during the school day.

The other groups also collected data. For instance, the environment group did a whole-school survey of learners from across the school on what makes an environment conducive to learning.

Each of the three groups then wrote a ten-point charter, based on what they learned from their research. The charters were printed and hung in every room.

The bursar now uses the charter to make sure she is in line with what the learners want. For instance the environment charter suggested colour schemes for classrooms that might make the surroundings more supportive of learning. When it came to redecorating the rooms during the summer, the bursar checked the recommended colours and used those. When they returned in September, students said, "Wow! They listened to what we said."

The behaviour charter stated that learners need to take responsibility for their own behaviour in the classroom. The teaching and learning charter asked teachers to address them by name. Teachers have said how refreshing it is to see learners talking about mutual respect and everybody working together.

Focus of engagement

Senior managers at the school wanted to encourage students to have more of a voice in their learning environment. They wanted learners to develop their research skills as part of this. The school invited the university in to help support the process.

Level of success

The school has introduced a variety of changes because learners have been able to make their voices heard. Learners have evaluated this process and judged it to be a success. They have now elected new members from the different form groups to carry the work forward for this academic year.

Abbs Cross School and Art College:
www.abbscross.havering.sch.uk

Having a voice in classroom practice at Charles Edward Brooke Girls' School, South London

Students at this girls' secondary school took part in a Creative Partnerships project, Talk to Learn, to find out how to become researchers. They are now using research techniques to document their ideas on classroom practice and hold learning conversations with teachers.

Context

This Church of England girls' school is slightly smaller than most. It holds media arts and music specialist status, and is a full-service extended school. Half of the students are entitled to free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties is higher than expected nationally and attainment on entry is well below the national average. Approximately one fifth of the students start at the school at times other than the beginning of Year 7. Students represent an increasing range of diverse cultural backgrounds with over 50 different languages spoken at home.

Method of learner voice engagement

Year 7 and 8 students are researching the impact of classroom practice on learners as part of a project with Creative Partnerships, an organisation that encourages students' potential and creativity. Specifically, the students are analysing evidence based on classroom observation and are filming practice in lessons. Year 8 students are learning from Creative Partnerships' researchers how to collect and analyse evidence, and are in turn mentoring Year 7 students in these techniques. The students have also been working with a filmmaker to record what is happening in their classrooms. Their aim is to develop learning conversations with their teachers about pedagogy.

The research centres on these questions:

_ When does deep learning take place?

_ What enables it to happen?

_ What blocks it from happening?

Twelve students are working with 14 teachers on this research project. They are contributing to the editing process and are putting their video clips onto DVD with a view to widening the discussion to other students and teachers in the school. They also plan to put the clips on the school website in order to hold similar conversations with teachers and students in other schools.
3This is a mixed group of students. Some have emotional and behavioural difficulties and are on the special needs register, while others are identified as gifted and talented.

Focus of learner engagement
Ofsted inspectors had identified some outstanding teaching practice at the school during their inspection in March 2007. Staff wanted to develop an approach that would make this practice consistent.

They also wanted to enhance student engagement in order to channel students' voice and creativity into their learning experience. This project has helped students develop the skills they need to hold meaningful learning conversations with the teachers in the project.

The Year 8 students are going to develop a 'child-friendly' observation package that will be used in the school. Thinking is in initial stages, but they are planning to include Talk to Learn ambassadors to strengthen communication between learners and teachers and improve behaviour for learning.

Level of success
Already the students and staff involved in the project have better relationships in class. Also, understanding lesson observation techniques has reminded teachers about good practice, such as being aware of the pace of lessons and offering more choice within lessons.

Find out more about Creative Partnerships:
www.creative-partnerships.com

Charles Edward Brooke School:
www.charlesedwardbrooke.lambeth.sch.uk

The CREATE research group at Exeter provided the researchers and film-maker to train students and teachers in making the DVD resource:
www.education.ex.ac.uk/create

Developing a vision for learning at St Boniface's Catholic College, Plymouth
St Boniface's students have been involved in creating a vision for teaching and learning in the future. They did this as part of the Aspire Project, a national partnership between schools, research organisations and policy-makers. Researchers from the project said that teachers and students are all engaged in a genuine process of learning and change. The school is a winner of the Teaching Awards 2005 and was given a grade of 'outstanding' by Ofsted in its approach to personal development and well-being.

Context
St Boniface's Catholic College is an oversubscribed Catholic school for boys, which also caters for a small number of girls in the sixth form. It has specialist science and mathematics status. Students travel from across Plymouth and from rural communities outside of the city.

Method of learner voice engagement
Students at St Boniface's have been taking part in a project to offer their views on the future of learning. The Aspire Project brought in researchers to work with the students and teachers. Initially, the researchers asked for 10-15 students to take part. The first meeting took place on a Saturday at the school and around 35 students showed up on the day.

The students found that although they did want longer-term transformation, they could make small, immediate changes. Having spent time informally on a Saturday, wearing their street clothes, they decided they wanted to have more comfortable uniforms. Through the school council, they negotiated with the governing body so that

they could design new uniforms. This was agreed and the students are now wearing these.

They have also worked with Aspire project researchers to devise an electronic box of resources to help other schools who are interested in introducing the idea of learner voice and thinking about a vision of learning for the future.

The Junior Leadership Team (JLT) is empowered to work on whole-school issues that directly impact on teaching and learning. So important is their perspective that they have an annual budget of £5,000 to help raise standards across the school.

Similarly, the Teacher Development Team (TDT) consists of nine students who explore teaching and learning methods used in class by their teachers. Rather than offer official feedback, the group give their views to the member of staff and offer honest opinions on the areas of the lesson that were positive. They also use video recording to track improvements and teachers find this useful for their professional development. This work has been so successful that Teachers' TV produced a programme highlighting the work of the TDT team.

The students involved directly in the Aspire project work each term to ascertain new objectives for teaching and learning, and share these ideals with members of staff to encourage new and innovative practices.

The students are now involved in leading other students in their school and students in other schools, as part of the project's next phase.

Focus of engagement
The school wanted to develop its learner voice work, particularly in building learners' communication and leadership skills. The idea has been to prepare learners for the future challenges of higher education and employment. Getting involved in the Aspire project gave teachers and students a new focus for developing this approach.

Level of success
The impact on the college has been positive. This has

been officially recognised by Ofsted in their recent inspection and the Training and Development Agency (TDA) Teaching Awards in 2005.

A panel of junior leaders are now present in staff appointment interviews - including that of the headteacher, whom they are currently in the process of recruiting.

St Boniface's students feel empowered and able to have an input on shaping a new future of education for themselves and other students. The learner voice work will continue in its many forms. The roles of both teachers and parents will be explored in the coming year, and students will play a key role in their involvement.

St Boniface's Catholic College:
www.stbonifaces.com

Aspire Project:
www.schome.ac.uk/projects

Find out more about the Teaching Awards and the Teachers TV project:
www.teachingawards.com/pressreleases/Teachers_TV_helps_improve_learning_.ikml

Contributing to course design at City Academy, Bristol
This institution provides a good example of linking learner participation directly to the course curricula, according to research from the Carnegie Young People Initiative. The school values learners' voices in creating better and more relevant courses for future students.

Context
The City Academy Bristol opened in September 2003 and has specialist status in sports. The academy is much larger than most other schools. It acts as a lead partner for post-16 provision in the area, working with five other schools. The total student population is around 1,100. Many students live in neighbouring communities which are socially disadvantaged. More students than usual (55 per cent) are entitled to free school meals. A large number are either refugees or children of asylum seekers. Three in every five students are from minority ethnic groups. Over a quarter of the students

learn English as an additional language and 40 are in the earliest stages. Over a quarter of all students have some learning difficulties or disabilities and over 70 hold Statements of Special Educational Needs.

Method of learner voice engagement

The Finance Academy is one of a series of sixth-form specialist courses held at City Academy. Part of the course includes a six-week programme of work-based learning. Currently there are 25 students taking part.

The academy has a decision-making panel consisting of a student representative, industry and business members and the governing body. The panel decides on the content of the academy curriculum. Students feed back their ideas on the current curriculum. They also make suggestions for the future. These are discussed at the panel meetings, which are held three times a year. Due to the growth of the programme across the region, all participating schools are now asked to give their input to this process.

Specifically, students articulate what they need regarding personal development or aspects of the curriculum, including their work-based learning. Individual students can raise these issues, or the student representative on the panel might raise issues for the group.

Staff will do what is required to meet these needs, such as inviting in speakers from outside or organising training events.

Focus of learner engagement

The purpose of the engagement is to try and ensure that the courses are relevant to a young person's life.

City Academy encourages students to take ownership of their learning. Staff also work to ensure that the courses remain inspirational and worthwhile. A deeply held belief among staff is that education is not something that older adults inflict upon young adults. In this course young people are encouraged to take a deeper interest in the purpose of the education and training provided.

Level of success

Some 80 per cent of students go on to university from this course, with 100 per cent of them remaining in university for the entire course. All students have job offers at the end of the course or university. All students are confident, self-aware and employable. Over 50 per cent are able to pursue their chosen career with a range of soft skills that make them 'work-ready'.

The students' contribution to the community is outstanding, according to Ofsted. Inspectors say that students at this college are prepared very well for their future economic well-being and for taking their place as good citizens.

The City Academy Bristol wishes to work in partnership with schools and businesses from around the world.

For more information about City Academy Bristol, read: Carnegie Young People Initiative, Inspiring schools, case studies for change: taking up the challenge of pupil participation, p30:
cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/cypi/publications

Student Executive Team at Hornsey School for Girls, Haringey

Ofsted has judged this girls' secondary school to be outstanding in the personal development and well-being of learners. In particular, inspectors praised the work of the student executive team.

Context

The school is much larger than average and serves an area of significant deprivation. Almost 90 per cent of students come from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds with just over half having English as an additional language. The largest groups come from Black, African-British, and African-Caribbean heritages. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is higher than usually found, while the proportion of students with a statement of educational need is below average. Students start school with levels of attainment that are below those expected for their age.

Method of learner voice engagement

Students must apply to become a member of the student executive team, and short-listed candidates are asked to give a presentation to a student panel on a management

theme such as strategic planning for the school. Posts are open to students from Years 7 to 13, although the head and deputy posts are only for students in Year 10 and above.

The executive team meets after school for about 90 minutes once a fortnight. Meetings have agendas and minutes and are chaired by the head girl. Staff members attend only if invited or if they have asked to discuss a particular topic with the team.

Executive team members train a wider group of students to interview candidates for every teaching post. They also train students to observe lessons.

Each student member is linked to at least one subject department and year group, and also has an area of whole-school strategic responsibility. The current areas of responsibility include community links, fundraising, behaviour, attendance, student support and guidance, educational visits and curriculum development.

Three members of the executive team attend each full governing body meeting on a rota basis. Executive team members have influenced some major changes such as introducing a formal school uniform, tendering for the school catering contract and planning meetings for the Building Schools for the Future programme. They host VIP visits and, along with the leadership team, were present to greet the Ofsted team at the start of its inspection earlier this year.

Focus of learner engagement
The school has an ethos of developing harmonious relationships and of members of the school community learning from one another. There is a fundamental belief that everyone is different, with different learning styles, gifts and talents. Therefore the school places a high priority on finding ways to encourage students to develop as confident, flexible, independent learners who are prepared for the challenges of life, work and higher education.

Level of success
Ofsted was particularly impressed by the work of the school executive team. "This is taking on real responsibility in your school, which has an excellent

impact on the lives of all the girls…You told us that you feel that the school is training you to be 'leaders of the future'. This is highly commendable," said one inspector in a letter to the school.

Visit the school website:
www.hornseyschool.com

Democracy for learners and staff is key at Sands School, Devon
Sands School is a democratic school promoting learner participation and the voice of learners in the management of school life.

Context
Sands School is located in Devon and provides education for young people aged 11-17 years. The Sands ethos is based on the idea of democratic schooling, "which puts students' social and emotional development at the heart of learning, to equip each young person to be an effective and contributing member of a free democratic society". At the time of the school's last inspection in 2007, there were 54 learners on roll, four of whom had a statement of special educational needs. Several had failed to thrive in their previous schools. Most places at the school are privately funded, although a small number are funded by a charitable trust or by learners' local authorities.

Method of learner voice engagement
There are ongoing discussions between staff and learners, stemming from a belief that young people want to develop their skills and be actively involved in organising their own education.

As part of a dialogue with staff, learners have the right to choose what to study and to challenge the relevance of anything they are studying. For instance, despite there being no compulsory subjects, all learners at Sands study maths and nearly all take a GCSE in it. The school has a gentle approach, encouraging learners to take part in the subject mainly through discussion. The small class sizes mean that learners get the support they need.

There is also a culture of sharing responsibilities for the school's upkeep. For instance, everyone has the right to eat school lunches; those who choose to do so then have

the responsibility to do their fair share of washing up once a week.

Focus of learner engagement

Sands School is a democratic school, which can be defined as teachers and learners having an equal vote in the decisions about their learning and social lives. This is the premise on which the work of the school is based.

Level of success

Sands' Ofsted report identifies the school's focus on discussion and making decisions democratically as being effective in promoting learners' personal development. Ofsted has given the school a grade of 'outstanding' in this area. "Students become confident and expressive learners and make good progress," says the report.

Inspectors also reported that learners who had failed to do well in their previous schools have made good progress at Sands. They attribute this to the school's culture: "The flexible curriculum and caring ethos successfully promote students' self-confidence and improve their attitudes to learning. In the words of one parent 'my son has changed from a bored, unenthusiastic child into a lively, chatty and very sociable one'. This reflects the outstanding progress students make in developing their speaking and listening skills."

Read the school's Ofsted report:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/portal/site/Internet/menuitem.7c7b38b14d870c7bb1890a01637046a0/?urn=113619&providerCategoryID=16384

Sands School:
www.sands-school.co.uk

3.3 Further education and higher education

A strong learner voice at Bridge College, Stockport

Bridge, a specialist college, won the national Learner Voice Award in the Representative Organisation of the Year category against competition from general further education and sixth-form colleges. The college won for the work of its student council in affiliating to the National Union of Students (NUS).

Context

Bridge is an independent specialist day college for students with complex learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and autistic spectrum conditions. The college has an expertise in supporting students with communication difficulties and is a centre of excellence for Makaton, a signing system for people with learning difficulties.

Ofsted has judged the college to be 'good' in all aspects including equality and diversity. Inspectors said that students make a successful transition into adulthood through good progress in developing self-esteem, skills for life and independence.

Method of learner voice engagement

The commitment of staff and students to developing feedback has transformed the concept of 'learner voice' at Bridge College over the past year.

Students succeed in having a real impact and influence on their environment through their student council and appropriately designed feedback mechanisms that include the use of sign, symbol, voice synthesisers, electronic communication aids, specialist software and speech. They use these tools to communicate with each other, with staff and with the wider community. The college thoroughly assesses the communication needs of all students before college and provides equipment and software to help them communicate.

Students are active in the college 'green' strategy—they minimise college waste by using it in art projects and by recycling. Students take part in college activities organised by the student council to raise money for good causes such as the Marie Curie Cancer Care, Amnesty International and Comic Relief.

Focus of learner engagement

The project to affiliate to the NUS was proposed by the students. The college sought to support the project in order to develop those skills in independence and self-esteem noted by inspectors.

Students take part in all staff appointments, including that of principal. There is a student panel of interviewers that

devises questions and scores the answers. Those scores are incorporated into the judgement and decision-making. A candidate with a low score on that part of the interview would not be appointed.

The college also has a process to include teacher and manager candidates in classes, which enables students to assess and comment on them. Students with communication support needs have the help of sign interpreters, symbols and electronic aids in this process as in all other activities.

Students are regularly canvassed for their views about all aspects of college life through surveys, vox pop and their student council.

Level of success
The structures have become so well established that the college senior team has become fully engaged. The college itself has gained membership of the NUS, proving its active democratic structures.

The community of students and staff at Bridge is fully committed to sounding out, hearing and acting upon the student voice. Of the three students who received the learner voice award, two use electronic communication aids. Students make regular reports to governors. One governor and the deputy principal attend student meetings.

Winning the learner voice award and having autonomy within their NUS branch are two major accomplishments that have affirmed students' sense of self and ability to command a place in the adult world.
Bridge College is part of the Together Trust:
www.togethertrust.org.uk/education/bridge%20college/about_us.php?area=education&s1=4&s2=1

Find out more about the learner voice awards:
www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/?Page=nomenuReadNews&id=456

Student views featured on DVD: University of Westminster
Staff involved in a research project recorded student views on DVD for use in staff training. The comments focused on what and how they like to learn.

Context
The University of Westminster has a policy commitment to student-centred learning, but parts of the institution have not been perfectly clear on what this means. To address this gap, a staff research team set out to capture students' views on what they find helpful in supporting learning and which teaching approaches they find useful.

Method of learner voice engagement
The project team selected a journalism student to interview students from across the four campuses of the university in places such as canteens, common rooms and outside. The journalism student asked these students to comment on what they find most and least helpful in terms of supporting their learning and what motivates them.

The research team gathered the comments on a vox pop basis. The comments were put on a DVD and formed a presentation of just over 20 minutes. Prior to being recorded, the students were reassured that the material would only be shown as a staff development tool. It was also emphasised that staff would see directly what students said, so that comments would be directly attributable to them.

Care was taken to ensure that the edited video was a full representation of the students' views rather than a representation of any preconceived views of the research team. The students expressed enthusiasm for a range of student-centred approaches and for variety in teaching and learning activities, reinforcing the university's policy. The DVD was shown in a variety of staff training settings.

Focus of learner engagement
Engaging staff in a large institution such as this is a challenge for many reasons, particularly time constraints. Workshop uptake is low, and the project team was seeking an approach that could be used in a variety of ways. The project team had learned from previous experience that having students voice an opinion gives it more credibility than if the same message is conveyed by a fellow staff member. Using recorded material on a DVD provided flexibility to use the students' comments with different groupings of staff over the longer term.

Level of success

The majority of staff who viewed the DVD found it a compelling expression of the students' views. As a result of watching the DVD, staff identified these areas for further reflection:

_ reviewing teaching and learning styles

_ trying to be more student-focused

_ getting students more involved in lectures, such as drawing examples from students' work

_ giving more feedback to students.

The university is now considering using the DVD more widely, such as for staff induction and in department sessions. University officials plan to show it to students at course committee meetings to seek broader views and test the validity of the views expressed on the DVD. They also plan to include students alongside staff in workshops on teaching and learning.

Students' comments from the DVD are being transcribed for use in a guide to student-centred learning for staff. This guide will be made available in hard copy and on the web.

This case study was taken from Hearing the Student Voice: Final report, The Higher Education Academy. Read it in full: www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/profdev/publications.htm

Peer mentoring at University of Western Ontario, Canada

Second-year learners supported first-year learners as peer mentors in this research project.

Context

Some 983 first-year learners at the University of Western Ontario submitted applications to be mentored by an upper-year learner. From this sample, 537 learners were selected proportionally across different curriculum areas including arts, engineering, science, music and media studies. They were also selected across four levels of self-reported academic motivation: low, moderately low, moderately high and high. The remaining 446 applicants formed a control group, also distributed proportionally

across these levels of motivation. A third group of 506 learners, who did not apply, were selected at random from the total population of first-year learners. This became a second control group.

Method of learner voice engagement

Selected learners were invited to an initial event scheduled three weeks after the beginning of classes and were assigned to their peer mentors. Mentors initiated and maintained weekly contact with their groups, either in person or via email or telephone. They were instructed not to tutor their learners. The idea was to share their own experiences of being first-year learners in their respective faculties and to help first-year learners prepare for the challenges of academic life.

Peer mentors within each faculty met weekly with one another and a team leader. These meetings were standard across faculties such that weekly topics followed the flow of the academic year. For instance, mentors for all faculties provided study tips about two weeks before the first set of exams.

Following this weekly meeting, peer mentors would meet with their learners and pass on what they had learned, so that all participants were getting basically the same information at about the same time across the campus.

Peer mentors might hold weekly meetings with their learners featuring study tips and introductions to campus resources such as library services. They encouraged their learners to take advantage of the academic resources available, such as learning skills workshops, and to get involved in campus life as well as the local community.

Focus of learner engagement

This study set out to learn more about the effect of participation on first-year university learners in a full-year peer mentoring program. It also explored individual differences in motivation in relation to outcome measures of retention and achievement.

Level of success

The results comparing the peer-mentored group and the applicant control group showed a significant difference in the relationship between anxiety and academic achievement for each group. In the applicant control

group, learners with high levels of anxiety did significantly worse than learners with low levels of anxiety. However, in the peer-mentored group, learners who felt high levels of anxiety achieved grades comparable to those of their low anxiety counterparts. Explanations for this could include the possibility that peer mentors alleviate some of this anxiety by sharing their own experiences of being a first-year learner.

This case study is based on Rodger, S and Tremblay, P, The Effects of a Peer Mentoring Program on Academic Success Among First Year University Students, Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 2003, Volume XXXIII, No. 3, 2003 pages 1-18.

Learners' views are top priority at Chichester College, Sussex

The college won the Learner Voice Awards in the Principal of the Year category. Its good practice has been recognised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in its handbook, Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy.

Context

Chichester College is one of the largest general further education colleges in Sussex. There are over 15,000 students, of whom over 4,000 are full time and some 11,000 study part time. The college also provides for over 1,700 adult and community education students. In 2002/03, just under 5 per cent of students were of minority ethnic backgrounds compared with 1.6 per cent of the local population. This difference is due to the significant recruitment of international students from over 70 different countries, who come to the college.

Method of learner voice engagement

The college takes a co-ordinated approach to learner involvement across the organisation. This has developed from the idea of an inverted pyramid. The senior management team does not see itself at the top of the organisation. Rather, it is there to provide support to staff. In turn, learners draw the support they need from staff to engage in their learning.

The college has developed a number of measures to ensure that learners are motivated to get involved. For instance, the college asked the student union executive what needed to be improved and was told that new

students were often daunted by having to travel all over the campus to receive services. In response, the college agreed to set up a one-stop centre where students could find all they needed in one place.

The union has carried out a number of surveys. They first asked students about the quality of teaching and learning, what they most enjoyed about their college experience and what could make it better. The findings showed that learners felt they were most successful when they believed their teachers were confident, knew their subjects, used a range of teaching and learning styles and gave good feedback.

Staff have taken these findings on board. Many join students at regular open meetings of the college's quality forum, where quality issues are raised and discussed.

Learners' views are sought at every level, and students are even asked to observe classroom practice in order to drive improvements.

Focus of engagement

The college sees its students as customers who can go elsewhere if they are not satisfied with what the college provides for them. This has led to a customer-service approach, which puts learners' views as a top priority.

Level of success

The college's success at involving learners in the running of the institution has been recognised by the Learner Voice Awards. It is also referenced by the LSC in its handbook: Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy. readingroom:

www.lsc.gov.uk/publications/recommended/
Developing-a-Learner-Involvement-Strategy--
a-handbook-for-the-FE-Sector.htm

Visit the college website:
www.chichester.ac.uk

This case study is based on an article published by Peter Kingston, The Tables are Turned, Guardian, April 4, 2006:
education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/
0,,1745810,00.html

Video diaries demonstrate learner voice at Napier University, Edinburgh

Staff involved in a research project recorded student actors on a DVD to illustrate the experience of many first-year students. The DVD was used in staff training.

Context

Napier University is noted for a range of subject areas including timber engineering and transport studies, and in addition its journalism courses are considered to be of a high standard. In 2002 Napier achieved top grades in Accounting, Computing and Law in the Quality Assessment Agency's new Subject Reviews, outperforming all other new Scottish Universities as well as a number of traditional ones. During the last 2 years, Napier University Business School was rated best new business school in the United Kingdom by the Guardian in 2007.

Method of learner engagement

Project researchers used learner video diaries at the beginning of an internal staff conference Firm Foundations: equipping new students to succeed. The idea was that this would help staff better understand the experiences of first year students. The diaries were constructed from views gained through student surveys. They were acted out by students.

Using authentic comments taken from the current Student Satisfaction Survey, researchers wrote scripts for four student profiles: mature female, male school leaver, male direct entry student and male international student.

The scripts covered student attitudes to their experience at key times during the year including the first few days, first assessment and the end of the academic year.

Researchers worked with student film makers who then recruited appropriate fellow students as the four actors. They developed a DVD that captures and portrays real student views, but does not expose individuals.

Focus of engagement

The conference was focusing on the needs of students so that staff could intervene effectively and enable them to become successful learners.

Researchers felt that staff needed to hear the authentic voice of learners to offset any preconceived notions about the first year experience and to help staff empathise more with learners' perspectives.

Level of success

Part of the DVD (2 students) was played at the start of the staff conference and made an impact on participants. There was much discussion and debate about what the students had said. Most staff felt it had been a positive experience.

Many said that employing the student voice had made a difference to them. Comments included: "Without empirical evidence we're left with guess work and even if our guesses are good, we can't know all the ways that students experience their first year." "It was more immediate and effective in getting the message over than having a member of staff presenting anecdotal evidence."

Some said that it would make a difference to their practice because the DVD made it easier to think of the implications for teaching and learning.

This case study was taken from Hearing the Student Voice: Final report, The Higher Education Academy. Read it in full: www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/profdev/publications.htm

Interviewing learners in work-based learning at ProCo NW Ltd, Wigan

This provider is creating opportunities to enhance dialogue between staff and learners. The LSC has c ited this as an example of good practice in its handbook, Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy.

Context

ProCo NW Ltd (ProCo) is a limited company. It was established in October 2003 with the merger of two local training providers, Metropolitan Training and Vocation Station. ProCo is owned by Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) and the Wigan Economic Partnership. It provides apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and national vocational qualification (NVQ) training in construction, engineering, motor vehicle, business administration, hairdressing, health and social care, customer services and warehousing.

Method of learner voice engagement

This work-based learning provider uses its management information system to identify a sample of learners from each department. These learners are then interviewed by the quality manager about key processes. These include recruitment and initial assessment, induction, individual learning plans and progress reviews, off-the-job training, support and on-the-job training.

The quality manager reviews the learners' files before the interviews in order to highlight areas to ask about, but the interviews are not limited to the prompts used by the quality manager.

They provide an open opportunity to discuss any issues the learner wants to raise. A summary of the questions and answers goes to the management team.

Focus of engagement

ProCo NW Ltd, found that learners were just ticking boxes on their written questionnaires and not really engaged in the process of giving feedback. The provider felt that learners were getting tired of closed questions on a survey form. The idea was to create the opportunity to have a dialogue with learners.

Level of success

The provider has been able to probe more deeply into issues by using the interview approach.

For more information, read Developing a learner involvement strategy: a handbook for the further education sector (2007):
www.lsc.gov.uk/publications/recommended/ Developing-a-Learner-Involvement-Strategy-- a-handbook-for-the-FE-Sector.htm

Section 4: The use of digital technologies in learner voice initiatives

Contents

Many educational establishments across each sector are engaging in learner voice activities. Whether this has come about through policy drivers, such as the personalised learning agenda, or through learning from others' practice or, as many experts have claimed, through learners themselves 'voting with their feet' to not participate in any form of schooling, learner voice is, quite rightly, on most learning institutions' radar. However, few have yet to demonstrate true learner engagement – where all learners have the opportunity and, significantly, the motivation, to drive change. This is not to criticise those who have begun this journey since for many, if not all, tiny steps taken towards a grander picture of learner engagement maybe the best way forward.

In this section, we search for possible ways in which the process and methods used in learner voice activities may be enhanced using technologies that are already embedded in the informal lives of many young people and adults. Specifically, we ask the following questions: Are there benefits to using digital technologies in engaging learner voice that may enable institutions to move faster along this process of change? What role has technology played to date in learner voice initiatives? Furthermore, what is the potential for digital technologies to enhance existing learner voice practice?

4.1 Benefits of using digital technologies

Successful learner voice practice can be seen as two-fold: first, it should be learner-driven resulting in outcomes agreed through a dialogue with their educators (co-partnership); second, it should engage all learners, regardless of age, background, academic or emotional ability. So how can technology aid learner-driven engagement?

Make connections

The internet has revolutionised the ability of individuals to connect with people from different geographies and backgrounds online compared with the greater restrictions of face-to-face interactions. The vast amount of information that is now available to people, either through their laptops or mobile phones, is astonishing, with profiles of individuals and organisations available for anyone to communicate with and connect with in a non-intrusive manner. People with similar issues and concerns can now acknowledge one another, learn from each other and start communicating with one another, creating new networks. In addition, people are able to tag websites and key interests through Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds and social bookmarking.

Foster collaboration

New relationships have been fostered through the use of technologies. Hubs of individuals sharing stories, information and support have flourished, with groups meeting regularly over the internet in online discussion forums and online chat rooms that would never have been able to communicate and work together in the past. These new online networks and communities have the ability to cause great change in thinking and process due to the potential capability of digital technology to bring together people without prejudice from geography, background and to some extent financial cost.

Encourage communication

People's need to communicate, both on a personal and working level, has been highlighted through the prolific uptake of technologies such as computers for emailing and mobile phones for both texting and emailing. However, an even more exciting capability of technologies is their ability to allow events to happen in real time or asynchronously, depending on preference, without distance or cost restrictions. Live webcasting, video-conferencing and webchats allow users to speak and view information in real-time.

Provide a dynamic repository

A myriad of digital resources are available to users that allow them to not only download information (text, audio or visual) but also to upload their own content. The growing development of web 2.0 technologies such as wikis, blogs and podcasts are allowing users to generate content rather than just acting as observers. They allow users to interact with one another's content, making downloaded content accessible to others for comment or change.

4.2 Enhancing practice

If we are to position learners at the heart of successful practice, then it is sensible to consider how their informal digital cultures can be extended into more formal environments of learning.

The following section provides a summary of some of the changing ways in which technology might be used to promote learner voice:

Mobile devices and mobile phones

Mobile devices, such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and mobile phones, are very widely owned today. As well as being a common feature in the lives of most UK residents, particular functions of these devices make them helpful for communicating ideas and opinions through text, visual and audio functions. For example, the camera function is now more common than not, on even the most basic phone models. An interesting application of the camera is how the images are stored on the phone. Nokia phone software automatically stores images in chronological order with dates added. In addition, some of their phones allow the owners to add text to their images – which is then stored ready to be shared with others. Texting views on particular issues is, another example of how a common social use of phones may be used to engage learners compared with more traditional methods.

It is worth emphasising that the 'mobile' aspect of these devices is particularly desirable in learner voice, since it allows the learner to respond in 'real time' to issues they may be asked about as well as allowing them to raise interesting issues that arise for them at a particular time.

Thoughts may be captured and stored in a private space and shared when the owner feels the time and place is appropriate. This last point is critical for many learners as a lack of confidence may prevent them from sharing their thoughts – either text, audio or visual – until they have seen others share their views with positive outcomes.

The 'I Love Lewisham'[9] project illustrates how local communities can be given a voice and how local authorities can be made publicly and visibly accountable. Residents in the project use their mobile phones to take pictures of things they want action on, for example, graffiti or rubbish. The images are then forwarded to the council who then decide upon action to be taken.

Visual and audio

Some learning institutions have already displayed the potential use of visual and audio narratives (see the case study about Prince Andrew High School and others in Canada – Section 4) which can provide powerful insights into learners' thoughts through using media such as drama, music and even art to represent views, feelings or ideas. These open up new methods of dialogue between learners, their educators and their families.

Radiowaves[10], is an award-winning, on-demand internet-based radio station offering students the chance to create and publish their own work across a network of online radio and podcasting stations. Using text, audio or images, learners can choose in which mode they wish to express thoughts that are personal to them and affect the wider community. Once again, the use of digital technologies provides learners who are reticent in using more traditional conduits of communication with more familiar and comfortable modes of communication and expression.

Flickr[11] is a website that allows people to post, tag, store, search and make comments on other users' pictures that are shared. Collaboration through organising pictures can result in dialogue between users that can be captured and used to develop mutual interest areas among a wider community – providing a debating space for important issues.

Online communities and online spaces

Communicative, collaborative and community-building aspects of social software are building blocks which may be used to foster a learner voice culture, a more personalised approach to learning, and improved knowledge-sharing with others. The social nature of learning is reflected in the growing popularity of social software which focuses on collaboration and social interaction.

It is essential to point out that alongside the excitement of digital social tools are concerns regarding safety and security, these issues are addressed in the recent Byron Review.

The internet has provided space for online discussion forums and chat-rooms, messaging through email and online noticeboards, podcasts, weblogs and wikis and other tools classed as Web 2.0. These tools are able to allow 'real time' interactions to take place shortening the time between seeing, hearing or partaking in something and then capturing/sharing one's thoughts.

iBlogs (weblogs) are online personal diaries which allow readers to leave comments or even make links with other blog sites. iBlogs offer learners a space to share ideas and stories in a less intimidating environment than more common face-to-face alternatives. Importantly, iBlogs allow the owners to set their own agenda. Edublogs[12] offers specific blogs aimed at students and educators. Wikis are online sites that allow users to upload as well as download content; the best known site being the online encyclopaedia – Wikipedia[13]. Wikis rely on collaborative editing to ensure accuracy of content. There are other wikis designed on a much smaller scale and that allow for small groups to collaborate. These may be more accessible to learners who are unsure about sharing their thoughts and ideas and who may need to take more tentative steps before getting fully involved. However, with greater confidence, users can set up their own wikis so that they may collaborate and generate content on issues of specific interest to them. As with iBlogs, some learners are already making full use of such online applications. A very few learning institutions are tapping into this potentially rich source of intelligence to gauge a better understanding of their learners and, ideally, to allow issues and considerations raised to lead to further discussions in partnerships with educators.

Podcasts are digital media files that can be created or downloaded. These files are most commonly broadcast material downloaded from websites, for example, clips from radio. Podcast.com[14] is a website that contains thousands of podcasts on an array of subjects including education and technology. Elgg[15] is an online site that allows 'open source' access to social software tools such as wikis, iBlogs and podcasting combined specifically for educational use.

Similar to the 'I Love Lewisham' project, 'fixmystreet'[16] is a website for any UK resident with a concern to report regarding their local area. By entering a postcode, users are able to post problems through text or photos or even discuss problems through an online group. The website then posts each concern to the responsible council authority and importantly, reports back on any feedback – providing the user with an opportunity to see what effect their 'voice' has made.

Finally, 'surveymonkey'[17] is a website that allows you (educator or student) to create a bespoke online survey quickly and easily; collect responses, and analyse results. Used well, this tool could allow students to ask their own community about issues important to them.

To conclude, the very fact that these digital tools are not wholly linked with formal education makes them potentially attractive and powerful tools to engage the voice of disaffected learners. These tools provide a greater opportunity for learners to connect, communicate and collaborate whilst able to both download and upload content that is relevant to their lives and experiences.

4.3 Current learner voice practice involving technologies

The following case studies are divided into educational sectors. However, the methods used and, in some circumstances, the focus of the learner engagement are applicable to other sectors.

Primary

Using handheld technology to improve communication at Longwill School for Deaf Children, Birmingham

The Longwill School for Deaf Children is using mobile games devices to improve communication between learners and their families. This could be a model of practice for other learning institutions wishing to improve communication with under-represented learners and their families.

Context

Longwill School caters for learners with severe and profound hearing loss. Because of the nature of learners' special needs, attainment on entry is well below average. All learners have statements of special education need and several have additional special needs, including autism and behavioural difficulties. Learners come from the local area of Birmingham. Many are from socially deprived areas. Over half are eligible for free school meals and nearly three quarters come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority of learners have British Sign language (BSL) as their first language.

Method of learner voice engagement

Learners record videos of themselves and their peers using the gaming consoles (which are handheld devices with a camera). Educators are also encouraging learners' parents and siblings to record their own messages using this device. The idea is to improve the level of communication between young learners and everyone in their families.

The technology is also useful when it comes to bedtime stories. For many parents, sign language is a second language, and this can be limiting when reading bedtime stories to their children. Teachers can now video themselves signing bedtime stories which can be downloaded onto the console. Although these can also be used on a computer, it is much nicer to have a handheld device in bed for night time stories.

Learners also use the device to record their thinking. This is easier for them than taking notes in English since their first and most developed language is sign language.

Teachers have noticed an improvement in the quality of ideas and depths of thinking since taking this approach.

Focus of learner engagement

The aim is to improve home and school links between teachers, learners and their families. Teachers are able to show parents and siblings new sign vocabulary easily with this highly visual approach. It is also easier to involve families in school life by sharing a video of what their children have been learning.

Level of success

The students are very excited about using the technology and have found it easy to master.

Very soon teachers had the class recording videos of themselves and their classmates telling stories in British Sign Language.

Overall, the feedback has been extremely positive. One student enthused, "I'm very interested in the handheld devices. Mrs. Carter has been teaching us how to use them, and we have been taking photos and film with them. It is funny because you can see us smiling and laughing!"

The school has described this method of engagement as 'a very powerful tool to encourage better communication'.

Longwill School for Deaf Children:
www.longwill.bham.sch.uk/school.htm

Using film work to overcome literacy barriers at Frank Wise School, Banbury

Every learner at this special school has been involved in high profile local premieres of movies that they have created themselves. This has given them a voice beyond the boundaries of conventional literacy.

Context

Frank Wise School is a special school in North Oxfordshire for 101 learners aged 2 to 16 who have severe and complex learning difficulties. It has Investors in People status and was a Beacon School from 2000 to 2004. Since then, it has continued to work extensively with other schools and in 2007 was awarded specialist

school status for special educational needs (cognition and learning).

Method for learner voice engagement
Using video and DVD software (iMovie and iDVD) the school has showcased two successive biennial high profile premieres at the local cinema (and one two years earlier at the local arts centre, The Mill). This is not about learners using technology. It is about how technology makes it possible for them to get their achievements, thoughts and ideas noticed, respected and acted on by the community.

In the 2004 production, They hope it's all over, the pupils took a range of memorable sporting moments and went to venues such as Old Trafford and the indoor snowdome at Milton Keynes to recreate the events. Teachers' TV covered the making of the film in a documentary, Sporting heroes.

The 2006 production, Three Wise Men, was a tongue-in-cheek look at the history of music.

Every learner was involved in each of these productions. Equally importantly, they were part of the live event of the red carpet and paparazzi style premiere. This was attended by nearly 400 people.

Focus of learner engagement
For many years the school has used film to allow its student body to communicate their views and experiences of the world without having to overcome the barrier of conventional literacy. For learners with severe or profound learning difficulties, this opens a new door to communication.

Level of success
The three biennial premieres have had a tremendous impact on parents, carers and the students themselves, along with the local community. Not only has it helped to raise awareness of what the children can achieve among people who have seen the media coverage, but it has changed parental expectations. One parent, who had never taken her 14-year-old daughter to the cinema, described how she was stunned to discover that the young girl could sit through a film lasting nearly an hour with total absorption. Learners themselves, when compiling

their Leaver's Records of Achievement, always refer to the experience of seeing themselves featured on a full size cinema screen, and how proud they felt.

Visit the school's spin-off website to find out more, including BBC coverage of the film premieres:
www.parkroadict.co.uk/Site/School_Developments.html

Learners engage in multimedia project at Oldbury Court Primary School, Bristol
As part of the project 'What did you do today?' learners worked with a multimedia artist to learn how to use video, photography and animation in creating their own stories.

Context
Oldbury Court is located to the east of Bristol. It mainly serves a local authority housing estate to the west of the school. Over the past few years the proportion of children attending the school who are from ethnic minority groups and for whom English is not the first language has risen from broadly average to well above. Attainment on entry into Reception varies from group to group but is well below that expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

Method of learner voice engagement
The school used an extra classroom as a studio. A multimedia artist was based in the studio with a video camera and a computer. As part of the project, learners interviewed staff about their roles in the school. This interview-based activity gave learners a platform to ask questions that they might not otherwise have considered. This helped foster their speaking and listening skills.

The artist then helped learners produce the videos and animations that they had made. These productions combined learners' recorded commentary with images that had been filmed and photographed during a trip to the local docks.

They made all the work from the project into a DVD and showed this to the whole school during an assembly.

Focus of learner engagement
The aim was to use video and audio recordings to encourage a dialogue between educators and learners.

Level of success

This project gave learners an opportunity to improve their language and communication skills. It also gave the school community an opportunity to explore aspects of individual and group personalities.

This case study is based on an article in: Blueboard, Creative Partnerships:
www.cmsw.co.uk/cmsw-publications.html

Learners give feedback through blogs at Deepcar St John's Junior School, Sheffield

The success of a blog used for feedback in ICT lessons has spread throughout the school. A big benefit is that blogging has helped involve parents too.

Context

Deepcar St John's School is broadly similar to most junior schools nationally. The vast majority of pupils are White British and live locally. The school set out to find ways to enhance learner voice by using the technology to give feedback on lessons.

Method of learner voice engagement

This work began with the school's ICT co-ordinator creating a blog for ICT lessons. There was an easily accessible link so that learners could post a message whenever they wished, or when they were directed to do so. The system was used for feedback on lessons. For instance, the teacher would put the learning objective onto the blog at the start of the session. Learners would then use the blog to comment on how they felt the lesson had gone for them.

The school later held two ICT events, which were open to parents. Two or three children recorded the event on the blog. Parents at the event also added messages and it was felt that this would be a good way to give an overview of the events for those parents who couldn't attend. This blog has now been used to record other events, such as sports days.

Staff have now created a blog for each year group, so that learners can comment on lessons. Most staff members make use of this technology and the ICT co-ordinator has

now set up a blog for them as well. This is a place for educators to comment on work seen around the school in their roles as subject coordinators and class teachers. This blog is on a public system, but is solely for the use of school staff.

There is potential to use this blog as an information system to inform school governors and other visiting authorities.

Focus of learner voice engagement

The main objective of the project was to promote reflection by learners on their experiences in the classroom.

Level of success

This approach has helped promote a more active role for the young people as learners.

Setting up the blog was a relatively straightforward task and learners took to using it very easily. Educators have found using blogs a good way to establish learning levels for the lesson. These points can then be reviewed later in the lesson.

Two other schools have now expressed interested in piloting similar systems. The possibilities of inter-school communication are being considered, with children from one school commenting on messages posted on another school's blog.

All of the blogs are set up on learnerblogs.org, which offers a means of ensuring that any comments posted do not become open to public access. There is also the option to moderate all comments that are posted.

Deepcar St Johns Junior School:
deepcar-st-johns.sheffield.digitalbrain.com

Secondary

Using radio to air voices at Wey Valley School and Sports College, Dorset

Learners at this school plan and produce their own internet radio shows.

Context
Wey Valley is a large secondary school. Its learners come from a wide range of backgrounds, with a higher than average proportion from relatively disadvantaged circumstances. There is a growing number of learners whose first language is not English. The school became a specialist Sports College in 2003.

Method of learner voice engagement
A staff member from the school's media department worked with learners to help them set up their own internet radio station. Having worked on programmes for a local hospital radio, the learners had decided it was time to create a radio station for their own community—the school.

Those involved in the project had to find funding through grants and donations, buy equipment and train learners. After almost two years in development, Wey Valley Radio began in September 2006.

Wey Valley Radio hosts an array of shows. Learners and teachers put in requests for music, birthday announcements and so on. There are news and comedy items, film reviews and weather reports. There are also features on issues such as bullying and future careers, as well as topical issues such as sports. The radio station invites listeners to send in their views by text or by online voting via the website.

A core group of 15 learners makes up the broadcasting team. The project is open to all year groups. Learners can come in and out of the project whenever suits them, but regular commitment is rewarded with opportunities to present shows.

The station is split into two areas comprising a broadcast desk and a production desk. Each desk is set up in the same way as in a professional radio studio. The computer is packed with broadcast and audio editing software. The learners have access to four professional dictation machines which they use for interviews and vox pops. They venture into the corridors at lunch time and after school to collect recordings useful for their next broadcast. Learners also have three laptops which they can use to edit recordings. They are taught how to use the technology and are trained to develop their presenting and interviewing skills.

The learners have developed a basic schedule for all broadcasts. Between these set times, show producers plan their individual broadcasts.

Focus of learner engagement
The purpose of developing the radio station was to give learners a voice within the school. The idea was to offer activities that engaged the whole school while tackling issues such as bullying and racism. The station works with teachers to enhance learners' speaking and listening skills and develop independent thinking skills. It has also helped to forge better relationships all round.

Level of success
This project helps to ignite learners' creativity by giving them their own voice. It helps build their confidence and offers them a learning opportunity that starts in the classroom and stretches far beyond the school walls. Learners who have been difficult to engage in other aspects of school life have actively become involved with the radio station.

The station now supports curriculum delivery across all age ranges and abilities. It helps with areas such as transition and inclusion as well as with subjects such as English, drama and media literacy. The station also offers a real link with the community, including a chance to interact more with local issues.

Learners are now working towards a radio licence which has been devised by the media department. Gaining the licence involves mastering tasks such as scripting commercials, writing features, presenting a live show, researching news, marketing the station and even keeping the station tidy.

The project exists through donations and grants. For more information, visit:
www.weyvalleyradio.co.uk

Filming students performing their vision for learning: Prince Andrew High School, Templeton High School and Bloor Collegiate, Canada

The Canadian Education Association (CEA) and York University (Toronto) worked in partnership to engage learners by filming their vision of what school could look like 'if we got it right'.

Context

Imagine a School... was a dramatic performance created in 2006 by 27 high school learners from three urban centres across Canada (Toronto, Vancouver and Halifax). This live performance focused on schooling from the learner's perspective. It was a key component of a CEA symposium in 2006.

A DVD was produced which includes the performance and the background process to this work. The content is based on videotapes that the learners had made.

Method of learner voice engagement

Nine learners from each school took part; most were in Grade 12 (about age 17). The idea was to include voices that were not often heard, so the learners were chosen to form a diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, academic achievement and economic background.

Having established trust, collaboration and respect among the group through the initial gatherings, learners began putting drama pieces together. To encourage the learners to answer 'What could high schools look like if we got it right?' the drama work was focused around the theme 'articulation of voice'.

Key messages from the learners included wanting interesting, open-ended, relevant teaching. They were frustrated with teachers who told them to 'open their textbooks'. They also said that extracurricular work is important, and they felt teachers should be recognised publicly for the time they devote to this. They also said they often felt confused by the marks they received and wanted more flexibility in deciding how to represent what they were learning.

Focus of learner engagement

The project began as a way of investigating schooling from the perspective of learning, including voices from learners who were not often heard. The idea was to spark constructive conversations about the purpose and form of schooling for adolescent learners.

Level of success

Learners said that they had never felt so important. Being treated like professionals and being thanked for their work affected them. As the project progressed, educators began to notice that the learners were behaving differently — they smiled more, were more generous with others and took more interest in their school work.

Staff and senior managers from each of the three schools were involved. They watched the rehearsals and listened to the learners. One learner said it was 'pretty amazing' that these senior staff would take such an interest in them.

The experience was transformational in that the learners felt their voices were valued. Senior staff from each of the schools have made arrangements for the learners to speak to governors and senior staff in the future.

The DVD is now used in a variety of ways, including for staff professional development.

To order the Imagine a School DVDs, visit the CEA website: www.cea-ace.ca

Learners share their thoughts using e-blogs at Eastbourne Technology College

A small-scale pilot project has led to whole-school use of e-blogs to capture both teacher-directed and learner-directed views from the student body.

Context

Eastbourne Technology College is a smaller than average community comprehensive school. It has been a specialist technology college since 2000 and a training college since 2003. Most learners are White British with a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of learners entitled to free college meals is above average. The percentage of learners with special educational needs is also above average. A higher than average number of learners speak English as an additional language.

Method of learner voice engagement

Senior managers at Eastbourne Technology College wanted to find out if technology could further the learner voice work they were already practising through methods such as a school council, peer mediators, buddies, and learners participating in management meetings.

The senior managers set up an e-blogger over a four-week period. A group of learners was chosen to represent the school's diversity by age, gender and ability. The learners gave their views on a range of school topics such as teaching, learning and the school environment. They also gave their views on local and national issues. The learners had access to the blogs through the school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Focus of learner engagement

The senior management team wanted to explore ways of enhancing learner voice by using ICT. The college's learner voice co-ordinator provided a research and methodological framework for this work.

Level of success

The college is now looking in more depth at learner voice work as part of staff training.

Due to the success of this pilot, it has now gone school-wide and has expanded to include mentor forums. Each term, staff set a new series of topics; the mentor groups respond to these and also set up their own topics. The discussions held via the forums develop to form an open dialogue between learners and the new headteacher. These discussions are then printed in the school newsletter.

The local council is asking for learner views on a neighbourhood recreation park and this is a current topic of discussion.

The work has also refocused the student council, which uses the forum data to set its agenda, tackle issues such as lockers for learners, and discuss topics in assemblies.

Eastbourne Technology College:
www.etc-sch.com

Online student forum develops out of consultation at Spen Valley Sports College, West Yorkshire

Serendipitous. That is one way to describe the emergence of an online forum to engage student voice at this school, which arose out of a consultation about changes to the school day.

Context

Spen Valley Sports College is a smaller than average sized comprehensive school located near Huddersfield. It has a roll of about 800 students. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have a statement of special educational needs exceeds the national average. The small numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds are predominately of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is slightly above the national average. The school gained specialist status as a sports college in 2004.

Method of learner voice engagement

Spen Valley Sports College has a well-established Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which is supported by their local authority – Kirklees. Staff initially set up two online forums on the institution's VLE, within two communities; one for teachers and one for learners. Both communities were told that they were 'talking directly to the headteacher', who has a keen interest in the project.

Focus of learner engagement

Initially the online forum was set up to consult teachers and students on the possible changes to the school day.

Level of success

With some publicity this first online discussion saw over a quarter of the student body participate. This may not seem significant – but, with no previous examples of learners being asked to contribute, this is a good 'stepping stone' in this institution's journey of change. The head and teachers were so impressed with the uptake that the online forum is now being further developed in an attempt to engage more learners in helping to shape their school. New topics are being posted regularly and the relevant staff and learners are being invited to make further contributions. This initiative is also acting as an excellent

introduction to e-learning. Staff also see an opportunity to expand on this success by collaborating with other schools, using the same VLE in the local authority. This will include the use of discussion forums in joint projects.

Spen Valley Sports College:
www.kc4l.net/kc4l/schools/spenvalley

Learners use digital media to improve communication at Monks Park School, Bristol

As part of a project with four other schools, Monks Park School learners made a film about attendance. The aim was to improve communication within the school and create a welcoming environment for their peers.

Context
Monks Park School is a community comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. The school is average in size. In recent years, learners have transferred to Monks Park School following the closure of neighbouring schools; a relatively high number of learners have entered or left the school at times other than the beginning of Year 7. There is a specialist unit for learners with specific learning difficulties. The school gained specialist status in languages and humanities (English) in September 2005.

Method of learner voice engagement
The headteacher supported a group of Year 8 and Year 9 learners to work on this project with a view to making some form of school improvement. This work was facilitated by Ablaze, an organisation that aims to bring business and education together to improve aspirations. The young people involved were among those who had been disengaged in some way. They were not the ones who typically made their voices heard through, say, the school council.

The young people took part in a training day, where they learned the business methodology Six Sigma. The Six Sigma approach involves identifying a problem that can be measured, analysed and improved. As part of this approach, learners had to understand who their audience was and who needed to be influenced in order to bring about improvement. This process was facilitated by a member of staff.

The group began with the premise that digital media was a platform that could be used to make improvements in the school. Then they went through each step of the business process: define, measure, analyse, implement and control. As part of the first step, they stated a goal and developed a vision. They identified attendance as an important issue because many younger children were being bullied by older learners and therefore didn't like going to school. The group wanted the project to achieve the goal of improving communication, both between adults and learners and between older learners and younger ones. The measurable element of this problem was the low attendance rate.

As part of making the film, learners got in touch with their peers who were reluctant to go to school. These are the learners who are not typically consulted on their views and are considered to be hardest to reach by staff. During this project, however, the learners making the film visited their peers at home with their video cameras and interviewed them, asking why they weren't at school.

They created a digital film which gave these learners a voice that was heard by the rest of the school.

Focus of learner engagement
The aim was to improve the school by encouraging learners (the stakeholders in this instance) to take on a leadership role. Senior managers were committed to the idea of listening to what the young people had to say. The learners wanted to improve attendance by reducing bullying in the school.

Level of success
By encouraging learners to do the research, the school was able to get in touch with those learners who had generally been hardest to reach. In so doing, they were able to give a voice to learners who were not typically consulted.

The staff who facilitated this work were integral to its success by keeping the momentum going. The headteacher and senior managers were committed to the project and genuinely wanted to listen to what the learners had to say.

Attendance has improved at the school and, although the project cannot claim full credit for this, it was a contributing factor.

Future plans include developing a process whereby opportunities to learn to use the digital equipment in the school are available to all learners.

Find out more about Ablaze:
www.ablazebristol.org

Find out more about Six Sigma:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Sigma

Further education and higher education

Student voice has clout with bank

A student campaign using the social networking website Facebook has won its argument with a national bank on overdraft charges.

Context

The bank abandoned its plan to stop interest-free overdrafts for students leaving university during summer 2007. Thousands of students on Facebook had threatened to boycott the bank. The National Union of Students (NUS) said that using the social networking site was a useful tool in enabling the students' voices to be heard.

Method of learner voice engagement

The bank had planned to charge students leaving university 9.9 per cent APR on their overdrafts. Following the Facebook protest, the bank issued a statement saying it would freeze interest charging on graduates' overdrafts up to Đ1,500. It also said that it would be refunding any interest charged in August.

Focus of learner engagement

The NUS used Facebook as a means of contacting its members quickly and easily over the summer vacation. Setting up a group on the popular website also made it easier for the NUS to contact former members—those graduates who would be most affected.

Level of success

As a result of the Facebook campaign, the bank is going to rethink its overdraft policy for graduates. It is also meeting with the NUS to discuss what future accounts will look like.

For more information, read the BBC story:
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/6970570.stm

E-mentoring programme is planned at Keele University

Second year students will mentor first-year students via email, starting next September. This is based on evidence found by the University of Westminster as part of a similar project.

Context

Staff on the personal tutors' team, School of Psychology, Keele University are developing ways to encourage first-year students to take up offers of support. A peer-mentoring scheme is now planned, with 15 mentors already recruited for next year.

Students don't always want to approach staff with their concerns for a variety of reasons. The idea is to have an approach that is more informal, giving peer support as well as a quick response.

Method of learner engagement

The personal tutors' team began by asking student representatives about methods which might work well in a peer-mentoring scheme. The student reps said that second-year students would make good mentors as the memory of being a first-year student is still fresh in their minds.

The project team then recruited a group of 15 first-year students who had applied to take part as mentors for next year.

There will be a training session covering guidelines and basic counselling skills. The guidelines include rules such as the need to respond within 48 hours to a query. There will also be opportunities for mentors to meet the first-year students throughout the year on a one-to-one basis, if that is considered necessary.

Each mentor will have fifteen first-year students to support. Their first task will be to welcome the first-year students at induction. The new students will be given their mentor's contact details and email address. The mentor will send out a welcome email and that will begin the process.

The peer e-mentoring co-ordinators will meet regularly with the mentors as a group to discuss common areas of concern and to provide support to the students in their new role.

Focus of learner engagement

The e-mentoring system will offer first-year students general advice and support. Mentors will respond quickly to practical questions such as, 'Where can I get information about...?' and 'How do I hand in this piece of work?' The idea is to help first-years settle in as smoothly as possible.

The mentors do not have an academic role as there are already systems in place to support students in this area. However, a first year student might find themselves overwhelmed with their statistics course, for instance. The role of the mentor would be to reassure the new students that help is available and point them in the right direction.

The personal tutors' team felt that email could be a convenient tool for students and their peer mentors, offering a quick means of communication.

Level of success

The personal tutors' team have been exploring this idea over a period of time. This past year they collected baseline data from their current first-years on how they have adjusted to university life. At the end of the next academic year, they will interview the mentors and conduct focus groups and surveys with the first-year students to evaluate the work to date.

To find out more about the University of Westminster's programme, read Hixenbaugh, P and Dewart, H et al (2005) Peer e-mentoring: enhancement of the first year experience. Psychology Learning and Teaching, 5 (1). pp 8-14. ISSN 1475-7257

Using ICT to capture learner voice: JISC enquiry into learners' experiences of e-learning

JISC used learner voice strategies to capture personal stories of e-learning in order to develop teaching practice in further and higher education.

Context

JISC has funded two reports under its e-Learning programme: 'Learner experiences of e-learning project (LEX)' and 'Learner experiences of e-learning, exploring different subjects (Learner XP)'. These show how learners in further and higher education are using e-learning technology. JISC also used Xube Productions to produce five video clips of learners, exploring what makes an effective learner.

Method of learner voice engagement

These JISC-funded research projects used interviews based on an open-ended methodology, audio logs and online surveys to capture individual experiences of using technology to support learning. In the Learner XP project, learners were asked to provide regular audio-log diaries to demonstrate the different ways in which they were using the technology. Once the audio-log data was collected, a member of the research team met with a sample of learners and carried out a semi-structured interview to help contextualise the findings.

The use of audio logs entailed leaving a phone message on a server each time learners used some kind of technology to support their learning activities. This provided a means for JISC researchers to document 'in-situ' use of technology on a daily basis. The learners' experience with the technology could then be explored in more depth in the interviews. The online survey provided background data on the learners and the types of technology they tended to use and in which circumstances.

The LEX project used an approach known as Interview Plus. This involves using an artefact related to learning, such as a blog or part of an e-portfolio, to focus learners' recall. With this method, learners' feelings about what is important come to the foreground.

Based on this work, JISC produced a series of detailed case studies. The supporting video case studies give further

contextualisation of learners' experiences, with learners speaking to camera from their homes and study areas.

Focus of learner engagement

The key area of interest was to gauge the strategies effective e-learners were using. The work has also illustrated the scope of e-learning among further and higher education learners. In order to get the views of traditionally under-represented learners, the study explored feelings about e-learning among mature learners and those from overseas, alongside learners considered to be 'digital natives'.

Level of success

The studies discovered detail about how learners use technology. For instance, HE learners make far greater use of their own personal technologies and of public websites than of those provided by their institutions.

A further discovery highlights the growing disadvantage of FE learners who do not have access to a computer with a fast broadband connection and who cannot afford to buy personal technologies. JISC has published guides with recommendations based on phase one of the project. These include: Recommendations for managers in post-16 institutions (HE) and Recommendations for managers in post-16 institutions (FE). There are also guides for course designers, information technology managers and researchers.

Phase two of this project is still in progress. This explores learners' experiences of blended learning and of transition between stages of education, as well as disabled learners' experiences of learning with technology. These studies will report in 2009.

The two reports from the first phase, the video case studies and the guides can be found at:
www.jisc.ac.uk/elp_learneroutcomes

JISC has recently commissioned Ipsos Mori to explore learner expectations among prospective university entrants. Find out more at:
www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/publications/studentexpectations

Universities use voting systems to determine learners' level of understanding

The University of Strathclyde has pioneered the use of electronic voting systems in higher education. Now other universities are adopting this practice.

Context

The University of Strathclyde in Glasgow has an undergraduate population of some 14,500 learners. The Department of Mechanical Engineering at Strathclyde is one of the largest in the UK, with some 500 undergraduate and 80 postgraduate students. It developed the use of electronic voting systems, which have been highly successful. Word has now spread and this practice is being implemented by other universities.

Method of learner voice engagement

By using voting systems in which learners operate handheld devices, an educator can pose multiple-choice questions in a 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' format. Large numbers of learners can give an immediate response, creating a snapshot of the overall understanding of a group at any given time. The system also allows the learner to give quick and easy feedback without being named.

Learners' answers are communicated to the lecturer's computer by infra-red transmitter or radio frequency. The results can then be displayed on the lecturer's projection screen at the front of the lecture hall. This approach can encourage helpful discussion among learners. For instance, a lecturer may take a poll, present the results to learners and then get them to talk to their peers about what they put and why. This gives learners the opportunity to value someone else's knowledge–other than the lecturer. It also gives them the confidence that they can work through an answer and articulate their own views.

Focus of learner engagement

Initially, the University of Strathclyde's mechanical engineering department introduced these systems because first-year students were having trouble understanding the core curricular content. Also, attendance at lectures and overall retention figures were dropping. The department estimated it was losing almost

20 per cent of its intake over the first two years of the course because they were feeling de-motivated.

Level of success
Results from diagnostic tests of the initial system used by the mechanical engineering department showed raised standards. The retention problem was greatly reduced. Exit interviews with those leaving showed that lack of motivation is no longer cited as a cause.

Today these systems are used with first- and second-year undergraduates. They enable academics to pitch their lectures at the right level. Students at some universities, such as Wolverhampton, are surveyed at an introductory lecture, to see just how much they know at the beginning of the course. The real impact of the technology is being able to see lecturers adapt their teaching style to the learning style of the students.

There are plans to use these systems to get feedback from students at the end of a course. The idea is to ask constructive questions such as, 'Were you bored at any point?' or 'Did you follow this?' The feedback could be tremendous.

This case study is based on the following publications: Innovative Practice with E-learning: case studies promoting active learning, JISC, 2005:
www.elearning.ac.uk/innoprac/practitioner/strathclyde.html

A new electronic voting system in lectures is making a real difference, Independent, February 14, 2008:
www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher/a-new-electronic-voting-system-in-lectures-is-making-a-real-difference-781787.html

Section 5: Evidence of learner voice activity from public and third sector organisations

Contents

Education has possibly the greatest number of public and third sector organisations supporting it compared to any other area of civil life. And as learning institutions are developing their personalised learning agenda through learner voice engagement, there has been no shortage of activity amongst public bodies in supporting schools, colleges and universities to carry out this activity. In fact, these same organisations who are offering support regarding learner voice are themselves using learner voice to support and inform their own organisations' practice.

This section will provide examples of support and guidance on offer from public and third sector organisations, together with case studies of direct third sector involvement with learning institutions working together to engage learner voice and ultimately to shape policy and practice. This is not an exhaustive list, but it aims to provide the reader with a view of the type of activity public and third sector organisations are conducting in this area.

5.1 Who is involved and what part are they playing?

English Secondary Schools Association (ESSA)
ESSA is run by students, for students aged between 11 and 19. ESSA provides training, guidance and advice to support students and allow them to get actively involved in the decision-making processes. ESSA works in partnership with other organisations to bring the views of students to the attention of local, national and international policy-makers, as well as the media, in relation to educational issues. ESSA's Council is made up of 18 students who are elected by members of ESSA. The Council aims to ensure that the actions taken by ESSA are representative of the views of ESSA's student members. The ESSA website allows members to have their say through voting on opinion polls through to sending in messages on key issues.
www.studentvoice.co.uk

"Young people are not citizens in waiting. We are the here and now. In organising and educating each other we hold the potential to change a system in which we are not represented. Involving young people is vital to a future that works for everyone." Rowan Rheingans, aged 18

GTCE (General Teaching Council of England)
In April 2007, the GTCE gave the government the following advice with regards to personalised learning, recommending a 'pupil voice' approach: "dialogue with pupils which enables children and young people to play an active role in their learning, schooling and education, making their needs and interests known".

Importantly, the Council have recommended that educators receive support and learning opportunities to explore and develop areas of practice and policy, including learner voice activity, as 'action research'. This is a specific approach of continued professional development (CPD) that the GTCE through its Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA) are wishing to foster amongst the profession.
www.gtce.org.uk

Local Authorities
Many local authorities and their education and life-long learning departments and Children and Young People Services (CYPS) have youth councils or parliaments to inform their own practices through the learners' own perspective. Bristol CYPS, or example, have recently ventured into new practices to not only foster learner voice activity in order to shape education but, in particular, to engage with the voice of typically under-represented voices – learners who are disadvantaged and/or disaffected. Working with local charity ABLAZE, a number of Bristol's primary and secondary schools have been linked with local businesses in an innovative mentoring scheme that matches mentors with disadvantaged and disaffected learners in order to engage in a dialogue that aims to raise their aspirations. The mentors have been able to elicit the voices of

these vulnerable young people and act upon them – for example, through organising trips to see people or things of interest that would normally be difficult for these young people to access. Cotham School worked with ABLAZE[18] to put on a film festival whereby everyone in Year 10 was given the opportunity to 'voice' something of interest or importance to them and then have this publicly shown to all the school community. A significant number of the year group, including individuals and groups who had been hesitant to engage their voice through the usual modes, for example the school council, took part.

Worcestershire Children's Service has a number of initiatives under the title 'Child's Voice'. In an annual conference, learners are given the opportunity to talk to professionals. These conversations have been compiled and published on DVD to share with other practitioners in the local authority.

National Union of Students (NUS)
The National Union of Students have representatives on many sector-wide committees and are at the forefront of learner-driven policy and practice change at a national level in HE. Annually, the NUS carries out a National Student Survey of all third year undergraduates. About 180,000 students were surveyed last year on their views on their academic experience. The findings of the survey are then used to lever change in policy and practice through the committees that the NUS representatives are party to. As an organisation, the NUS is also informed by learner voice. Policy on various issues is decided by students and their representatives in all areas of the NUS's work, at their annual conference.
www.nusonline.co.uk

National Learners Panel (NLP)
Since November 2006, the National Learners Panel has been advising the government on how proposed changes in further education in England will affect learners. It is made up of volunteers involved in further education as learners, giving learners a voice at national level. By providing a learner's perspective on policies, proposals and initiatives, it aims to make a difference to learners' experience of further education - whether in work-based learning, studying at a college, taking an evening

class or in another form of adult learning. The panel is asked for its views on major issues affecting learners, and agrees a work plan setting out the issues members want to consider. The full panel meets four times a year in different cities around England. Panel members also get together in smaller groups to discuss areas they are especially interested in or where they feel they can make a particularly valuable contribution. Once the panel has looked at an issue, its views are passed on to ministers and other people in organisations dealing with further education.
www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/DG_068290

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
The QAA insists that HE institutions engage learner voice to improve practice. However, the QAA itself has also started consulting with students themselves, exploring their potential role as members of institutional audit panels. Students will gain a formal role in determining whether universities are meeting standards. The QAA wishes to add students to its audit teams, which examine universities and declare whether they have confidence in an institution's ability to manage standards.
www.qaa.ac.uk

Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)
The QIA aims to support the Learning and Skills Sector (LSS) through their 'Improvement Strategy', of which a particular aim is that "learners are actively engaged in the learning process, and the feedback they give on their learning or training experience allows teaching and learning to be tailored to meet their needs." An expectation of the QIA of its providers in the Learning and Skills Sector is that they carry out Customer Satisfaction Surveys to inform and shape practice. The QIA have an online discussion forum to allow interested stakeholders to have their say on the aims set out in their Improvement Strategy.
www.qia.org.uk

QCA (Qualification and Curriculum Authority)
The QCA are no strangers to working with both parents and learners, alongside schools, in informing their own practice. In a positive move to engage all learners

with their curriculum, they are providing them with an opportunity to shape it. QCA are planning to hold a series of events in 2008 that will explore with learners the 'Curriculum Big Picture'. QCA has developed a curriculum big picture to reinforce the concept of curriculum as the entire planned learning experience of a young person. This would include the lessons that they have during the school day, but it also recognises how much young people learn from the routines, the events, the extended school day and activities that take place out of school. Of interest, learners involved will be given the opportunity to share with their parents their ideas of what the curriculum should look like.
www.qca.org.uk

Schoolcouncil.org

Schoolcouncil.org is an educational charity that aims to support and provide guidance for student councils at primary, secondary and FE level. Schoolcouncil.org have a network of over 3000 learning institutions and 200 Local Authority staff, sharing ideas, celebrating success and supporting each other. They have produced extensive resources, as well as providing training for both educators and learners. On their website are online polls, chatboards and opinion boards for learners to engage with and express their views in a safe environment.
www.schoolcouncil.org.uk

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)

The SSAT have established themselves as a key provider for Specialist schools and Academies with regards to learner voice guidance. They have produced much documentation providing schools with key principles behind learner voice (see Section 6). They seek to demonstrate learner voice in practice by organising learner voice conferences and events which are facilitated and run by learners. In a bold statement to show that they themselves are an organisation informed by learners, they have recently employed two gap year students to work alongside their workforce in order to model the principles that they have set out for schools. Currently, they are exploring the possibility of an e-portal that would allow learner voice intelligence to be captured in one space for young people to communicate and share stories. This same space will then have public spaces

for partner organisations to view the information being passed between learners.
www.specialistschools.org.uk

TDA (Teacher Development Agency)

The TDA recently published findings from research that explored the views of 11-to 16-year-olds regarding their school experience, including views on teachers and support staff, extended school activity provision, and out of school opportunities (CitizenCard Voice, 2007). This survey has provided the TDA with a valuable database to plan future support and guidance for teacher training. With all the changes and initiatives within education, in particular the statutory school leaving age rising from 16 to 18, CitizenCard recognised the potential for its membership to be an important resource for organisations, such as the TDA, and in return providing its members with an opportunity to have a voice, and be heard.
www.tda.gov.uk

UNICEF Youth Voice

UNICEF UK Youth Voice is a network of young people, aged 11-18, who are committed to children's rights. By fundraising, campaigning, and telling it like it is, young people are encouraged and aided to use their voice to help other young people improve their lives across the world. Members of UNICEF's Youth Voice campaign and lobby the government; raise money for children in desperate need; and spread the word about children's rights. Every two months, Youth Voice sends members an e-newsletter to keep them up-to-date with all the latest opportunities to make a difference, including events.
www.unicef.org.uk/youthvoice

UK Youth Parliament (UKYP)

The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) enables young people to use their energy and passion to change the world for the better. Run by young people for young people, UKYP gives the young people of the UK between the age of 11 and 18, a voice which is heard and listened to by local and national government, providers of services for young people, and other agencies that have an interest in the views and needs of young people. Included in their methods of learner voice engagement are UKYP online

TV, online discussion forums and online surveys. As an organisation that is run by young people for young people the chosen methods of learner voice engagement are particularly significant – note the use of technology popular amongst young people out of school.
www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

5.2 How to make the best use of public and third sector organisations?

With so many organisations whose aims are to support, guide and even offer training for learning institutions with regard to developing successful learner voice practice, guidance on how best to use these organisations is necessary.

_ Identify organisations that work within your specific sector – the directory in section 6 of this report will do this for you.

_ Visit their website so that you are clear on what they have to offer.

_ Download any free resources that offer guidance on how to develop learner voice.

_ Choose no more than two organisations in the first instance – making sure one is actively informed or even run by learners themselves.

Contact key personnel (names and contact details on website) and arrange for them to visit you at your institution so that they can see the context in which you are working – and can provide guidance to fit your needs and strengths.

Section 6: Directory of references and resources

Contents

6.1 Research on learner voice

Carnegie Young People Initiative: Inspiring Schools, a literature review

This report explores existing research evidence on the impact of pupil participation. The report defines participation as pupils influencing decision-making processes, not just taking part. The aim of this work is to help schools develop pupil voice and participation strategies and inspire practitioners to consider the added value that pupil voice can bring.
Inspiring Schools: a literature review, Carnegie Young People Initiative, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, 2006.
cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

Carnegie Young People Initiative: Inspiring Schools, case studies for change

This report identifies case study schools that are operating in different contexts in England. The case studies do not necessarily highlight best practice, but rather, they focus on innovative and pioneering approaches to developing learner voice work. The report describes the work done by seven schools to try and embed learner voice approaches. The areas explored include power and trust relationships between educators and learners; community participation and leadership.
Inspiring Schools: case studies for change, Carnegie Young People Initiative, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, 2006.
cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

CEL: Leadership and the learner voice

Enhanced learner engagement can produce positive outcomes in learning, quality improvement and sustainable organisational change. This is the message from the six Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) research reports, which examine leadership and the learner voice in the UK learning and skills sector. The reports highlight the value of students' involvement in their own education and in the organisations where they study. The findings also reinforce the recommendations of UK policy makers who encourage providers to facilitate learner voice activities.
Leadership and the learner voice, CEL, 2007.
www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/default.aspx?Page=PubPractitionerProjects

General Teaching Council: summary of existing research

The General Teaching Council has published a summary of recent research on learner voice work.
The voice, role and participation of children and young people: summary of existing research, General Teaching Council for England, 2007.
www.gtce.org.uk/shared/contentlibs/126815/211152/Pupil_voice_research.pdf

Innovation Unit: Real decision-making? School councils in action

Large-scale surveys on learner voice provision suggest that the proportion of schools with a council has grown rapidly in recent years. Some findings suggest an increase from around 50 per cent in the mid-1990s to over 90 per cent today. Growth is particularly strong in primary schools. This report is the result of research commissioned by the government to look at what schools are currently doing to harness the views of their pupils.
Real decision-making? School councils in action, Innovation Unit, 2007.
www.innovation-unit.co.uk/about-us/publications/real-decision-making-school-councils-in-action.html

Higher Education Academy: Hearing the student voice

This report is based on case studies from a variety of universities where researchers have investigated ways of improving learner voice work. In most cases, the research has been based around staff professional development.
Hearing the student voice: final report, Higher Education Academy, 2007.
www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/profdev/publications.htm

6.2 Resources

Carnegie Young People Initiative: They help you get respect

This is a booklet and DVD package designed by the Participation Workers Network for England (PWNE). This is a tool for those who wish to improve the way they involve children and young people. The work draws on the experiences of children and young people and adult participation workers from all over England. It describes what participation work involves, explains why it is so valuable to children and young people – in their own words, and gives key tips for effective practice.

They help you get respect, Carnegie Young People Initiative, 2005.

cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/cypi/publications/they_help_you_get_respect

CEL: Recruiting and supporting student governors in FE

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) has published a guide for further education staff on how to recruit and develop student governors. The guide includes information on attracting potential student governors and electing them as well as supporting and training them once they are in post.

Recruiting and supporting student governors in further education and sixth-form colleges: a guide to effective practice, CEL, 2008.

www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/?Page=nomenuReadPressRelease&id=477

DCSF: Working together

This offers guidance on involving children and young people in decisions affecting all aspects of the life of the school. It includes examples of good practice for schools to use and adapt as they choose. It includes questions such as, 'What do we mean by pupil participation and what are the benefits?'

Working together: giving children and young people a say, DCSF, 2004.

publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DfES+0134+2004

Futurelab: Learner Voice

This handbook is for educators who wish to embed learner voice in their institutions. It explains why developing learner voice is important and suggests ideas for going about it. It also maps out specific examples of use of ICT.

Learner Voice, Futurelab, 2006.

www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/handbooks/learner_voice.pdf

General Teaching Council (GTC): pupil voice

The GTC has published an article in its newsletter on learner voice. It explains what it means and what pupils can achieve through this approach.

Pupil Voice, Teaching, GTC, January, 2008.

www.gtce.org.uk/newsfeatures/features/pupil_voice_mag_spring08

LSC: Developing a learner involvement strategy

The LSC has published a guide to help further education institutions develop strategies to involve learners. It is based on a consultation model of embedding learning involvement into the culture of the organisation.

Developing a learner involvement strategy: a handbook for the further education sector, LSC, 2007.

www.lsc.gov.uk/publications/recommended/Developing-a-Learner-Involvement-Strategy--a-handbook-for-the-FE-Sector.htm

NSPCC: Peer mediation in the UK

This guide defines peer mediation and explores the background to this approach. Based on a literature review, it explains the process and will show how schools can best go about this.

Peer mediation in the UK: a guide for schools, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 2004.

www.betterbehaviourscotland.gov.uk/knowledge/pupil_to_pupil/research/pmuk.aspx

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust: Introducing student voice

'Introducing student voice' is a training pack CD that provides guidance on how students and staff can work together to introduce student voice initiatives. The CD guides students and staff through a set of presentation

notes and slides, along with group exercises and word templates that can be personalised for every school.
Introducing student voice, SSAT, 2007 - Ð100.
https://secure.ssatrust.org.uk/eshop/default.aspx?mcid=1&scid=1&productid=662

School Councils UK guides

Based on their work with thousands of school councils, School Councils UK has produced a guide for primary aged pupils and a toolkit for their teachers. The materials offer advice to help primary teachers and pupils make their councils as effective as possible. This includes the 'School Councils for All' handbook, which offers guidance for special schools and pupils with special educational needs. The guides are published by the Innovation Unit.
www.innovation-unit.co.uk/about-us/publications/new-resources-for-primary-school-councils.html

TDA (Teacher Development Agency): CitizenCard Voice

The TDA recently published findings from research that explores the views of 11 to 16-year-olds regarding their school experience. This includes views on teachers and support staff, extended school activity provision, and out of school opportunities. This survey has provided the TDA with a valuable database to plan future support and guidance for teacher training.
CitizenCard Voice, TDA, 2007.
www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/s/studentvoice.pdf

6.3 Websites

Assessment and Qualification Alliance (AQA)

AQA is an awarding body that develops dialogues with stakeholder groups to ensure that its future strategy meets customer needs. Students are a key interest group. AQA meets periodically with ESSA (English Secondary Students Association) to discuss the future of examinations and assessment as part of this overall strategy.
www.aqa.org.uk

Associated Schools Project Network – ASPnet

Unesco has set up the Associated Schools Project Network to better prepare children and young people for the complexities of adult life. Associated schools promote Unesco's ideals by conducting pilot projects to this end. The organisation's Plan of Action (2004-2009) reinforces the four pillars of Learning for the 21st Century. These are: learning to know, to do, to be and to live together. Schools wishing to be involved can apply. Already there is a global network of 8,000 schools, offering the opportunity to work together beyond the classroom.
portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=7366&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Carnegie Young People Initiative

The Carnegie Young Peoples Initiative (CYPI) is a programme of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, set up to increase the influence children and young people have over decisions that affect them. The CYPI runs an England-wide network for practitioners seeking to improve the way they support children and young people in influencing decision-making. The organisation also funds similar networks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The site also has research reports identifying good practice from across the UK, Ireland and internationally. There is also a list of local, community-based, projects going on around the UK.
cypi.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

Centre for Excellence in Leadership

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership publishes practitioner reports, holds learner voice conferences and has set up the Learner Voice Awards. The awards are now in their second year. They recognise learner leadership and celebrate new forms of student representation across the system. The website has details.
www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/?Page=nomenuReadNews&id=354

Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning

This site has details of a research project, Consulting Pupils. Arising from this project is a series of newsletters devoted to developing learner voice work. There are also five publications produced by the project, plus a list of other publications on pupil voice by members of the project. If you are interested in taking part in collaborative work in this area, the site also has networking details.
www.consultingpupils.co.uk

Create

The Create research group at the University of Exeter has offered expertise and training to staff and learners in learner voice projects. This website offers a list of current projects, publications and events.
www.education.ex.ac.uk/projects.php?id=92

Creative Partnerships

Creative Partnerships is a creative learning programme, designed to develop the skills of young people across England and raise their aspirations. The organisation supports long-term partnerships between schools and creative professionals such as artists and designers. It has also supported learner voice projects. Creative Partnerships has worked with over 2,400 schools from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 in areas of deprivation across England.
www.creative-partnerships.com

Democratic Education

This site offers resources that can help schools develop a democratic approach, giving all members of the school a voice and a share in decision-making. A key principle of democratic education is pupil/student participation or learner voice. The site belongs to the Phoenix Education Trust, who runs projects that explore the idea of learners as decision-makers in education. The site has case studies too.
www.phoenixeducation.co.uk

Early Childhood Unit

This site has information on the Early Childhood Unit's current projects and the networks that it hosts. There is also an information gateway, which is a source of early childhood information for parents, practitioners and policy makers. For instance, the report, 'When are we having candyfloss?' shows the importance of listening to young children. There are also six leaflets, 'Listening as a way of life', which offer research information and ideas for good practice. The Early Childhood Unit is part of the National Children's Bureau.
www.ncb.org.uk

English Secondary Students Association (ESSA)

ESSA is run by students, for students aged 11 to 19. It supports young people to have a voice on issues that affect their lives at school or college. They are working to become the representative organisation for students in Key Stages 3-5 (year groups 7 to 13) throughout England. They provide support, training and advice to help students get involved in decision-making. They also work closely with students in other European countries. Students can become members and network with other students across England.
www.studentvoice.co.uk

Include Youth

This is an organisation based in Northern Ireland that offers practitioners information and support on working with disaffected young people. It helps schools set up peer mediation schemes. The site explains what mediation is, what happens during mediation and how young people can go about it.
www.includeyouth.org

Higher Education Academy

A potentially important development in learner voice has been the Academy of Higher Education. This was established in 2003 to help institutions provide the best possible learning experience for their students. A recent evaluation by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) (2008) found that the academy has achieved a positive impact across a number of its key areas of work. The site has information on the latest research, with a searchable literature review database.
www.heacademy.ac.uk

Investors in Pupils Award

The Investors in Pupils Award builds on the principles of the Investors in People idea. The concept is to empower pupils, increase motivation and contribute to raising achievement. The scheme helps pupils learn about the jobs of everyone in the school and how each person is involved in their education. It also helps them recognise the importance of relationships, teamwork and the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in their education.
www.investorsinpupils.co.uk

Learning to Lead

Learning to Lead is a training and consultancy organisation which helps institutions develop genuine student involvement. The last five years have been

dedicated to creating a model of school community council. The site has ideas and materials to help schools develop their learner voice.
www.learningtolead.org.uk

National Healthy School Programme

This website offers guidance for all schools, including healthy schools co-ordinators. There is also a tool to help schools conduct an audit to see where they need to improve. The site introduces the idea of national healthy school status and describes the benefits of becoming a healthy school. It describes what schools need to do to achieve this.
www.healthyschools.gov.uk

National Learners Panel (NLP)

The National Learner Panel advises the government on how proposed changes in further education in England will affect learners. Volunteer learners from further education sit on this panel and give learners a national voice. The panel aims to make a difference to learners' experience of further education - whether in work-based learning, studying at a college, taking an evening class or in another form of adult learning. The full panel meets four times a year in different cities around England. Panel members also get together in smaller groups to discuss particular areas of work.
www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/DG_068290

National Union of Students (NUS)

The NUS is at the forefront of learner-driven policy and practice change at a national level in further and higher education. The NUS carries out a National Student Survey of all third year undergraduates – about 180,000 students were surveyed last year on their views on their academic experience. The organisation uses the survey findings to lever change at policy and practice level. The site has a recent podcast on why learner voice is important.
www.nusonline.co.uk

National Youth Agency (NYA)

This site has information on what the NYA does and research that has been done with young people on issues such as offending.
www.nya.org.uk

Participation for Schools

This has information and case studies to help schools develop their practice. The site has resources to help schools encourage children to participate, including ideas on how to run collaborative sessions with young people. There are also training manuals and ways to evaluate progress. This site has been developed by Save the Children UK, Carnegie Young People Initiative, and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to encourage children to have a say in all aspects of their education.
www.participationforschools.org.uk

Participation Works

This site offers resources through a searchable database. It is an online gateway to find out more about children and young people's participation. The resources should help institutions involve young people in decision-making and improve the way practitioners and young people share information.
www.participationworks.org.uk/AboutUs/tabid/62/Default.aspx

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

The QAA works with higher education institutions to define academic standards and quality. The organisation strongly supports the higher education institutions engage learner voice to improve practice. The QAA also consults with students – exploring their potential role as members of institutional audit panels.
www.qaa.ac.uk

QCA (Qualification and Curriculum Authority) personal development website

The QCA works with both parents and learners, alongside schools, in informing their own practice. The QCA's personal development website has resources and case studies, which include information on how to put learner voice at the centre of the curriculum.
curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/personaldevelopment

Quality Improvement Agency

This website has a course representative's toolkit that has been developed to help course reps directly. It contains resources that cover the situations that course reps will experience, including getting started, engaging fellow

classmates and gathering learners' views on quality and the curriculum.
excellence.qia.org.uk/reps

Real Ideas Organisation
This organisation works with children, young people, teachers and creative professionals to encourage them to take decisions about their learning. This is a partnership of a variety of organisations that provide resources and events to help practitioners work with young people.
www.realideas.org

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)
The SSAT are a key provider for secondary schools regarding learner voice guidance. The SSAT organises learner voice conferences and events which are run by learners. They have also published for sale, 'Introducing student voice', a training pack CD that provides guidance on how students and staff can work together to introduce student voice initiatives. The CD guides students and staff through a set of presentation notes and slides, along with group exercises and word templates that can be personalised for every school. Watch the website for events.
www.specialistschools.org.uk

School Councils UK
Young people taking part in their education as decision-makers and partners in their schools: this is the vision of School Councils UK. The organisation is an independent charity which promotes effective structures for pupil participation in school. This website has resources to support schools with student voice and school council development, including toolkits, videos, posters and badges, to help schools set up councils. School Councils UK also offers training to teachers and learners. They also facilitate a national network of over 2,500 school councils to share ideas.
www.schoolcouncils.org

SoundOut
SoundOut works across the education system to promote meaningful student involvement in school improvement. They have developed a series of frameworks for meaningful involvement that include issues for schools to consider, the steps schools need to take and how

to evaluate progress. There is a library of articles and research on this topic. There are also research reports that have been led by students in data collection and analysis.
www.soundout.org

Unicef's Rights Respecting Schools
A Rights Respecting School teaches children and young people that they have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This website offers schools resources to help become a rights respecting school. The ethos created by this can pave the way to participation in the life of the community.
rrsa.unicef.org.uk

Unicef Youth Voice
This is a network of young people, aged 11-18, who are committed to children's rights. The site invites young people to join Unicef Youth Voice. It tells young people how they can support UNICEF's latest campaigns. This includes the born-free campaign, a global project to help children affected by HIV and AIDS. There are also competitions and special events.
www.unicef.org.uk/youthvoice

Young Children's Voices Networks
The Early Childhood Unit (ECU) has set up the Young Children's Voices Networks. These networks help adults who work with children to share ideas on how to better listen to young children. The aim is to produce a report by 2009, which shows the value of young children's participation in the delivery of early childhood services.
www.ncb.org.uk/Page.asp?originx_2764xh_146082190849 37u24n_20061172032f

6.4 Policy documents

Byron Review: safer children in a digital world
This independent review for the government reports on the effects of violent media on children and makes recommendations on how to empower children and young people, alongside their families, to make wise decisions and manage risk.
www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview

Children's Plan: building brighter futures

This sets out the government's plan of work for the next ten years. It is based on the principle that services need to be shaped by and responsive to children and young people. This gives children and young people a voice in determining the services that are provided for them. Other principles include that government needs to do more to back families and all children have the potential to succeed.

The Children's Plan: building brighter futures, DCSF, 2007.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan

Every Child Matters

The government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. As part of the government's Every Child Matters agenda, local authorities will involve children and young people in the process of finding out what works best and act on this. The government also states that when inspectors assess how local areas are doing with this, they will listen to the views of children and young people.

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

14-19 Education and Skills White Paper

A central focus of the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper is to re-motivate disengaged learners. The proposals aim to ensure that these students have more choice over where to learn. They should also benefit from a new programme for 14-16 year olds, based on Entry to Employment. Principles include devising ways to engage those learners who have been previously hard to reach.

14-19 Education and Skills White Paper, DCSF, 2005.

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills

Leitch Review on skills

This policy report recommends that to achieve a skills system that adds value, employers and individuals must have a strong voice through a demand-led system. The review sets out a vision that shows that the UK must urgently raise achievement at all levels of skills. Responsibility for achieving ambitions must be shared between government, employers and individuals.

Prosperity for all in the global economy - world-class skills, HM Treasury, December, 2006.

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review

Ofsted

Ofsted has announced that inspectors will look for evidence that providers have a learner involvement strategy and that they can show how learners are helping to improve provision. Ofsted has also said that further education college governing bodies will be expected to have at least two learner governors. Inspectors will also be looking for signs of more personalised services for learners and the impact of these. Positive outcomes will include increased learner motivation, satisfaction, progression, and success, with more participation and greater improvement from under-represented groups.

ofstednews.ofsted.gov.uk/article/257

Foster Review

This review calls for putting the 'user' at the centre of policy and practice. It argues that turning the idea of learner focus into action will involve strengthening learner advocacy at national, local and college level. As part of its vision for further education, the review stresses that colleges will offer an environment, facilities and culture that are welcoming to all learners and take provision out into the community. Colleges will also regularly collect and act on learner and employer feedback.

Realising the potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges, Sir Andrew Foster, DCSF, 2005

www.dcsf.gov.uk/furthereducation/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.view&CategoryID=20

2020 Vision, the Gilbert Review

This report argues that pupil voice work has the potential to contribute to all aspects of developing learning. It points out that reflective schools see pupil voice as far more than establishing a school council. For instance, they encourage pupils to be learning resources for one another, helping their peers to learn. They also suggest that good practice involves inviting pupils to work with teachers in curriculum teams to review schemes of work

and develop plans for improving learning and teaching. Schools should also ask pupils to provide feedback on particular lessons, either through general surveys or by training them as observers of lessons. Pupils should also be involved in the selection process for new members of staff. The report presents a vision for personalising teaching and learning for children and young people aged 5 to 16 and makes recommendations for the delivery of that vision.

2020 Vision: Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group, Christine Gilbert, DCSF, 2006.
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Footnotes

1   www.soundout.org/quotes.html

2   www.soundout.org/quotes.html

3   www.soundout.org/quotes.html

4   www.healthyschools.gov.uk

5   As quoted from:
    www.gtce.org.uk/gtcpublications/gtcmagazine_spring08

6   We have replaced the word 'school' with 'learning community'.

7   The Learner Voice Awards recognise learner leadership and
    celebrate new forms of student representation across the
    system.
    www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/?Page=LearnerVoice

8   The National Learner Panel was set up by the Quality
    Improvement Agency (QIA) to ensure that learners could
    influence government policy nationally. Panel members are
    part-time, independent volunteers. Panel members are drawn
    from across the further education sector, including learners at
    college and in work-based learning. Members' ages range from
    17 to 67.
    www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/
    DG_068290

9   www.lovelewisham.org

10 www.radiowaves.co.uk

11 www.flickr.com

12 www.edublogs.org

13 www.wikipedia.org

14 www.podcast.com

15 www.elgg.org

16 www.fixmystreet.com

17 www.surveymonkey.com

18 www.ablazebristol.org

About Futurelab

Futurelab is passionate about transforming the way people learn. Tapping into the huge potential offered by digital and other technologies, we are developing innovative learning resources and practices that support new approaches to education for the 21st century.

Working in partnership with industry, policy and practice, Futurelab:

_ incubates new ideas, taking them from the lab to the classroom

_ offers hard evidence and practical advice to support the design and use of innovative learning tools

_ communicates the latest thinking and practice in educational ICT

_ provides the space for experimentation and the exchange of ideas between the creative, technology and education sectors.

A not-for-profit organisation, Futurelab is committed to sharing the lessons learnt from our research and development in order to inform positive change to educational policy and practice.