Appendix 1: Learning with others: Graham Lloyd

Figure 32 ***Graham in 2005 watching the student researchers first draft presentation***
Graham is here giving his own time to support the work of the researchers. He is demonstrating his capacity to value and recognise the other.

In this enquiry I have talked of the shared space with others, including practitioner-researchers. Here I seek to share the relationship I hold with Graham Lloyd as Deputy Headteacher at my current school. He has been instrumental in providing the space and developing listeners for student-led research through his unending support.

Graham is a practitioner-researcher working at Bishop Wordsworth's School and a student of Jack Whitehead at the University of Bath. Prior to joining the school, I read Graham's enquiry entitled:

"*How do I/we help students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming?"* (Lloyd, 2003)

At that time, I was excited at the prospect of sharing our enquiries and of working together in co-reflection given our shared localized context. It was significant to me that Graham was the first colleague to introduce himself to me upon my arrival in September, and the first to offer support. He offered in this gesture the possibility of a shared space between us as researchers.

Despite our shared passion for enquiry however, it was only in passing each other in the staffroom that we would briefly comment on our research. Without the two key elements of time and space, we were unable to share our enquiries in any depth. As I said to Jack Whitehead in October 2004:

"*We are like ships passing in the night...Our depth of co-enquiry extends only to "Which Module are you on now?" or "Have you decided on the focus for you next enquiry yet?"..In short there is no forum for the sharing of our enquiries, and we therefore seem to be unwilling to organize one for ourselves. It is almost as if we are waiting for a facilitator before we can begin to share our embodied knowledge as practitioner-researchers."(e-mail, 2004)*

Following Jack's suggestion that this was an opportunity not to be wasted, I suggested to Graham that we "*share our latest writing*". Prompted by Jack's words Graham and I duly promised to share our reflections on each other's enquiries. What excited me about Graham's writing was the localized context of his enquiry. I *wanted* to explore this with him. The first assignment I very much connected with; in that it was bringing in the self to the enquiry and that it contained a narrative explanation of events that I enjoyed. I could sense Graham's motivation behind the text, and feel the energy that this enquiry had given to him.

Graham's description of events working with several underachieving students was a pleasure for me to read as he described:

"*At the end of the session, one of the five boys I had been supporting came up and shook my hand and thanked me for everything I had done for him in the past year. The words that he used which struck me the most were, "thanks for putting up with me". I had spoken to his mother regularly over the twelve months and she indicated that he felt I was supportive towards him, but this conversation for me was to demonstrate my educational influence in this situation.*" (Lloyd, 2003, p.10)

In Graham's writings, I recognise a style that demanded the agreement of the reader of the text, similar in approach to the style of my husband. In Graham's sentences, there is no room for negotiation about his claims to knowledge. He does not seek to persuade the reader, but rather expects their commitment to his words. Examples of this are included in Graham's master's assignment:

"*The evolving nature of pastoral care in education: a critical literature review of four articles.*" (Lloyd, 2004):

"*At Bishop Wordsworth's School I have introduced change and had to manage different staff relationships in order to achieve the desired outcome to the process.*" (Lloyd, 2004, p.9)

"*At Bishop Wordsworth's School I have implemented strategic change in the Middle School pastoral system through the greater involvement of parents in mentoring their son's progress and appropriate use of external agencies to help support the boys.*" (Lloyd, 2004, p.13)

With regards this style of writing, I quote Gubert et al. (2000) in their reflections of how the "*pen is mightier than the sword*":

"*His pen's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim...In this respect the pen is truly mightier than its phallic counterpart the sword...as the author of an enduring text the writer engages the attention of the future in exactly the same way that of a king "owns" the homage to the past. No sword-wielding general could rule so long or possess so vast a kingdom.*" (Gubert et al., 2000, pp.6-7)

Graham later shows a different side to his writing, one in which he begins to open up to the reader in sharing problematic events. He is quick to acknowledge his failings in terms of methodology that he uses and to connect with his inner self within his research. He does not recount a smooth story of self. In this way he writes:

"I had decided to record this meeting via a web cam connected to my laptop in order to have easy access to the images to reflect my unseen reactions to our conversation..I found I was unable to record the actual meeting due to feedback from the mains supply in my office." (Lloyd, 2003, p.5)

This type of writing I compare to Coleridge's "*The other side of the Mirror*", in which Gubert et al. (2000) akin to:

"*looking long enough, looking hard enough, she would see an enraged prisoner: herself":*

"I sat before my glass one day,
And conjured up a vision bare,
Unlike the aspects glad and gay,
That ernst were found reflected there-

The vision of a woman, wild
With more than womanly despair""
(Coleridge, 1898 in Gubert et al, 2000, p.15)

It would appear there is a duality in the way Graham communicates to his reader, combining certainty in his statements of how past events have been achieved, whilst also looking within himself to show the embodiment of his own living energy.

Graham, in response to these comments, announced his frustration at having to conform to rigid criteria that did not provide the opportunity for more engagement of the self within his writing. He explained, that whilst completing some of the taught modules for his Master's degree at the University of Bath, he was given a writing frame to which he needed to adhere. In Chapter two of "*Educational Leadership and Management*" (Wallace & Poulson, 2003, pp.59-62) he was instructed to follow a given structure of a dissertation or thesis: a Chapter-by-Chapter outline using prescribed formula.

Graham responds to my comments:

"When I looked through your writing, I firstly looked at the part about me"
"I recognise that I have these two sides to me..You talked about a masculine and feminine side in your response to my assignments. I feel that this masculinity comes as a result of being restricted by criteria and needing to fit into a mode of writing..It is not having the space to write as you may wish that leaves me almost afraid to bring the "self" into my work. When completing the portfolio (Master's) units with Jack (Whitehead), I have been "allowed" almost to write as I should wish to write..and this is where my "feminine" style, as you refer to it, comes into its own" (November 2004, in the Bishop Wordsworth's staff room)

After this discussion Graham shared his latest writing with me. Upon reading this, I felt the tension that Graham had described in bringing his "self" to his enquiry. The

use of “I” was infrequent, and I came out of the enquiry uncertain about the motivation behind this enquiry:

“*The school leadership group has identified, through the school’s strategic Development Plan 2003-2004, the need for an expansion and formalization of activities that could be structured into a “House” system*”.” (Lloyd, 2004, p.2)

The school leadership group shows a shared motivation for this work, yet no-one appears to be taking responsibility for its development. I wanted Graham to state how much he was part of this motivation, and what had motivated him into becoming the change agent in this enquiry. Graham is a committed professional to the pastoral system at Bishop Wordsworth’s School, and what I learnt first about him was the extent of his compassion in his previous role as Head of Middle School. I find myself wanting Graham to write in such a way that he is singing from the rooftops about this passion that he holds, showing the reader how he is translating this into action research.

In response to this, Graham commented:

“This may now be a little flat, no pun intended. You have to attend rehearsals and sing in the chorus before you can have a solo role! (Thoughts like this happen when you have a 45-minute car journey.) Hopefully next year I can link up with Jack to do my dissertation, which may enable me to 'sing up'.”
*(*Lloyd, November 2004 in www.jackwhitehead/roller*)*

Graham shows the lone nature of his life of enquiry. Whilst I had the support around me of the teacher-researcher group at Westwood St Thomas I was not alone in my development. There were educational conversations on the development of research every day in the classroom and in the staffroom, even if the practitioner-researchers were considered “*slightly different*” by some of our colleagues. I recognise myself within Graham, that had I not been in this environment, I would not hold the shared values that I have today with the practitioner- and student researchers. I look forward wholeheartedly towards Graham’s dissertation in which he can at last explore what he feels passionate about.

"Research needs criticism to improve. But of course, if criticism is based on ignorance, on a partial reading of the evidence, or on a "straw man" constructed from a distorted version of our own argument, then it is rightly resented."
(Mortimore, 1999, p.13)

Graham and I share a passion for student involvement in their learning. With regards this commitment, Graham and I appeared to be lone crusaders in 2004. Colleagues working at the school mainly shared the opinion that "asking the boys" would lead to a stream of negative comments related to individual teachers, and that there would be a loss of the sense of control amongst teaching staff. The student body were on the whole, a passive yet positive body, an aspect that was viewed as a strength of the school. I was now asking to move this student body to active engagement and to give them space in which to support the development of their school through opening up their conscious awareness of the processes around them.

In conversation with Graham, he offered the following advice on trying to break down the barriers of fear that accompanied creating hearers for the student voice:

"*Start small, within your own practice. That way no-one can be affected by your actions expect yourself…Gradually people pick up on things that you are doing, hear about good work which isn't devastating to what the school is doing. I ask for my students to feedback, I am able to come outside of my role as Head of Middle School and become a shadow of myself, still Graham, but Graham without the baggage that I carry with my role...I can become a classroom teacher trying to improve practice*"
(November 2004, in conversation in his office)

Graham has developed his passion about the voice of the other through his work in Africa. He has become an empathic practitioner who responds to others' needs. He has lived outside of the system that Bishop Wordsworth's School represents, and has life experiences that allow him to see the system in which he is working more clearly as well as the barriers that this system represents.. In this I connect with Graham, as I believe that my work abroad and in socially disadvantaged schools has allowed me to develop my own sense of empathic awareness. I maintain however that this sharpness of vision dulls over time, as we assimilate into the school in which we find ourselves. The knowledge gained from the past begins to lose the sense of nearness that it once held. Now outside of the shared space in which we gained this perspective, we no longer enjoy the contact with those individuals and those

experiences that allowed us to revel in the new knowledge and understanding we gained as a result.

Graham commented upon how his time spent in Africa had altered his outlook: "*When I think of the problems here, they are nothing, absolutely nothing. When you are in contact with boys..and girls for whom AIDS is a daily threat, you ask them "Why didn't you use a condom?", and they reply that on top of finding food and work and money on a daily basis, that AIDS just isn't that big a deal. So, when I now consider the problems which are brought to me here..they don't even come into comparison." (November 2004, in conversation)*

In May 2005, Graham and I were able to work more collaboratively in our enquiries. In return for Graham observing the trial presentation by the student-researcher group, I interviewed a sample of his Year 10 class, in order to establish the effects of using "*assessment for learning*" (DfES, 2004) in Design Technology to increase awareness and performance. The Qualifications and Curriculum Alliance (QCA) identify involving students in their education as one of the founding principles behind this initiative:

"Research has shown that pupils will achieve more if they are fully engaged in their own learning process. This means that if pupils know what they need to learn and why, and then actively assess their understanding, gaps in their own knowledge and areas they need to work on, they will achieve more than if they sit passively in a classroom working through exercises with no real comprehension either of the learning intention of the exercise or of why it might be important." (QCA, 2006)

After the trial presentation, Graham and I sat and talked. Our focus was directed towards the role of the student voice in the school. The students had left and we still remained there. It was one of those rare times in school life that we allowed ourselves the time to openly discuss what mattered to us without a sideways glance towards the clock. We ventured into a shared space.

I met four students from Graham's class on a Wednesday lunchtime. The first realization for me in this situation was that I was seeing the students here in the same role as at Westwood St. Thomas as they moved towards active members of their community.

These four articulate young men were very encouraging in their response to Graham's work. They provided comments such as:

"I think it was an effective way (of working). It showed us areas in which we could improve. I could see, oh he's got a better mark than me, so what can I do to get my standards up to his."

"I think it's better when you mark it (coursework) with your peers, because you get more feedback and what each individual person thinks the mark should be instead of just one individual. It gives you more of an idea of how well you have done."

"I know, I, for one have nicked other peoples' ideas, that they have got good marks for.. ..If you borrow the ideas then you can get full marks as well."

"I've been really involved in my own work. That might seem slightly odd, but it's quite useful to see it as other people see it, so that you can know your own work."

The day after the interview with the boys, I saw Graham in the staff room. I gave him the positive responses from the boys about the work that he was carrying out with them, and his face lit up. I return to Jack Whitehead's notion of *work well done*, as I felt that for a Senior Manger such as Graham, there was little opportunity in which he was told that he was doing something well. Even at that level, I feel that we still seek reassurance, and I felt very pleased to have been able to supply this acknowledgement of his good work.

In his first few weeks as Assistant Headteacher in September 2005, I felt that Graham was clearly in that hinterland recognised by my husband as the transition to Senior Level Management. On the outside, he looked a very contented individual, taking the time to talk to colleagues and to patrol the school cite. There was a smile on his face, although the fact that he was considering what to do in his new role was etched behind his smile. There was also a glint in his eyes that spoke of changes to come and apple carts to be upset: all in the name of improvement of course!

In Graham, I knew that I had an ally in the process of student-led research and also in the process of developing hearers for the student voice. I felt renewed hope for bringing about a culture for learning with the student researchers through intergenerational research.

Appendix 2: The student researchers' methodology

In Chapters 6 and 7 I have referred to the methodology employed and developed by the student researchers. Within this Appendix I would like to exemplify these methodological tools and state how the decision was reached to utilise them in the course of the students' enquiry. This appendix is intended to serve as a summary of the data tools established by the researchers during their research over the span of the four years at my current school. Not all these tools were developed for the same enquiry; instead they have each served at different points in the course of the researchers' work and been re-employed or adapted as the students have needed to use these tools.

I believe that these methodological tools have therefore been used in a responsive way by the student researchers, as they have developed and utilised different methodology at various points in their enquiry.

Key concerns to the students when developing these tools were the following points:

- To check the claims they were making, the researchers sought to establish three different ways of collecting data about the same issue for each enquiry
- These three ways needed to cover a wide range of students and stakeholders and also needed to include both quantitative and qualitative data
- When the students had established their claims about an enquiry, they sought to validate these with the stakeholders they had involved. This involved peer group assemblies and student learning forums alongside sending the teachers and Leadership team a copy of their findings prior to their presentation
- All materials remained the property of the school and thus confidential within the school itself

I now describe to you the methodological tools employed in the following order:

1. Triangulation
2. Learning Diaries
3. The video camera as a living witness
4. Weblogs
5. Web-based snapshots (Carnegie Foundation)
6. E-based opinion polls

7. Interviews
8. Peer group assemblies
9. Student learning forums

Triangulation

The students see triangulation as gaining three different viewpoints about the same point related to learning within the school. For example, when working with the school stakeholders, they feel that it is important to gain the opinions of students, teachers and the Leadership team. This is in order to substantiate the claims to learning that they make through gaining feedback from a variety of sources.

As an example, they are therefore hearing about the use of lesson objectives in the following three ways: as a learning feature through the eyes of the students as recipients, through the classroom teacher as “giver” and through the Leadership team as observer of this process (through classroom observations made through the bi-annual Departmental reviews). Alongside these three “eyes” they have also employed the video camera within lessons from the students’ eye view in order to substantiate the viewpoints made.

Learning diaries

As part of their research on effective learning in the classroom, the students wanted to develop a methodology that would serve to gauge the students’ view of the learning within a lesson compared with the teacher’s own view. In order to do this, they developed a “learning diary” given to a sample of students (5) within 3 different teaching groups within a subject area. The sample students then needed to complete the diary each lesson over a two-week period, supplying details of what they thought the learning objective of the lesson was, alongside how they felt they had progressed in their own learning that particular lesson.

The teacher’s learning diary asked him or her to record the same details. At the end of the two week period, the diaries were exchanged between teachers and students. This evidence was then used to support the student researchers subsequently conducting interviews with the teachers involved in this methodological approach.

The diaries proved very successful in allowing both teachers and students to "see" the lesson from a different perspective. At first, some students in the sample were anxious that they should record what the teacher wanted to read. Giving the diaries anonymity however allowed the students more ownership over the process and the student researchers pressed the fact that there was no right or wrong answer.

In order to analyse the teachers' and students' responses in the diaries, the students looked at keywords /synonyms between the two sets of examples. Through this approach, they were able to conclude to what extent the two viewpoints matched or disagreed with each other. They recorded these key details over a two-week period.

The comments from the students involved in the sample were recorded by one of the student researchers after he had discussed the use of the learning diaries with one of the sample groups:

"*I never really saw the links before between the lessons..I would go in almost "blind" and not sure of how one related to the next."*

"It really made me think about what I had learned as a result of a lesson..at first I thought that in some lessons it would be zero..but I realised that this was often me not wanting to think about my learning, but about breaktime instead."

"I can't go into a lesson now without thinking of that learning diary in front of me...once you start to do that...you can't stop thinking. I come out really frustrated if I didn't know if I had learnt anything."

(comments recorded in October 2005 by a second-generation researcher working with three Year 8 students)

<u>The video camera as a living witness</u>

After trying to record two sample lessons using a video recorder on a tripod in the corner of the room, the student researchers were increasingly frustrated that the students "acted up" in front of the camera and that the camera felt like an intrusion, outside of the lesson itself.

They looked to develop a technique of working with the camera in which it would be part of the lesson itself; an insider that looked through the “students’ eyes in the room:

“With regard to (b) how to manage an equitable process for allocating students who elected to operate the camcorders as part of the classroom observations., the second aspect, advisors indicated that enlisting students to undertake video-recording of classroom experience, using a camcorder, in order to obtain a students’ eye view was likely to prove very popular.” (Bragg, 2007, p.9)

They then asked a sample student to hold the video camera throughout a lesson to record it. This recorded the classroom talk as a whole group alongside the collaborative work in class. It also showed the student’s written work and the visual and kinaesthetic learning activities within the lesson.

Of the lessons filmed in this way, the student researchers perceived that only some of these provided a good evidence base to share with the teachers involved. Others they felt could not be used given the amount of “playing up to the camera” displayed by some students within the room.

In order to analyse the video evidence, the students first viewed the videos together as a group and noted down what learning techniques were being applied i.e. note-taking, group discussion, whole-class feedback etc. They also noted what they perceived as key learning statements from both teachers and students.

This evidence they then compared to the learning techniques described by the teachers and students through the reference to the learning diaries and interview notes.

One crucial decision was to use one of the lessons filmed as evidence, despite some negative comments being clearly recorded during the lesson. The researchers felt that to omit this evidence would falsify the essence of the lesson and would mean that they were pre-selecting the parts to use themselves instead of offering the whole recording as the evidence for others to view.

The confidentiality issues linked to this sort of evidence were discussed alongside this methodological choice. The students decided that the ownership of the video

belonged to the teacher whose lesson had been recorded. They also recognised that this material could not be shown in a public domain, due to the identification of students and teacher within the classroom. However, where they wished to use extracts of the video to use on the teacher-training days to present their findings, they asked permission from both the teacher and students involved.

Web-logs

One of the major difficulties with discussing and advancing the students' research was trying to get everyone involved together physically at the same time and in the same space. This was particularly poignant given the movement of the first generation onto Higher Education and the distance between the school and the HE researcher, who could only visit at specific points during the project.

Jack Whitehead (University of Bath) therefore developed a weblog that could be accessed between the group members only, so that there was an online forum through which to communicate more regularly. This link is no longer live, although was accessed via: www.jackwhitehead/roller

Although this weblog was initially successful, the level of blogs recorded began to diminish after only several weeks of the weblog being available. The students commented that by the time they had logged on and recorded their comments, they had already seen each other and the research had moved forward again. The weblog was therefore continuously out of date.

The student researchers also commented that face-to-face communication was really valued by them much more. They felt they achieved much more through this medium. The group therefore began to meet on alternating days so that members with other commitments could attend as often as possible. Although it has never been possible to have everyone present all the time through this method, the group has been increasingly effective at talking to absent members and informing them of what has occurred and the next steps to be taken.

My role in this was to create the space for them to meet on a weekly basis and to remind each member of the meetings. This was crucial in that the days kept revolving and therefore each member needed prompting so as not to forget.

Web-based snapshots

Through the guidance of the HE researcher working with the group, they looked to develop a web-based method that would allow them to record what they had achieved and to make this available for a wider audience.

They therefore approached the Headteacher with a view to having a link to their work on the school's website page. The Headteacher readily agreed and the students now have a page as part of the school's website, in which the link to their research presentations, their comments, updates on the research projects can be found.

The website address of this page is:

http://www.bws.wilts.sch.uk/extracurric/Student%20Research/student_research.htm

The researchers developed, as part of this webspace recording of their work, KEEP Toolkits provided by the Carnegie Foundation to summarise completed research projects. This was done through the support of the H.E. Researcher. These they hope to share with other student researchers interested in developing research led by students within other schools, as well as providing the group with a method of recording "*what has been*" particularly in the light of older generations moving on out of the school and newer generations joining. The web-based snapshots bring together video, image and word to document the journey that the student researchers have undertaken.

E-based opinion polls

The group realised that the sampling of students they had undertaken would not be sufficient in gauging opinion from the student body, and that the results would therefore not fairly represent the viewpoints of their peers. They subsequently sought to use the school's intranet service as a forum in which students could record their opinions on the research issues they were involved in.

Currently, the students are developing their next poll for the intranet cite. They ask tutor groups from different year groups to go into the ICT suites and use a tutorial time to complete the poll, so that students have a specific time dedicated to recording their views. They felt that asking tutor groups to do this was vital in not leaving

participation to chance. The cooperation of both the tutors and the ICT staff has been vital in developing this methodology and the students have felt extremely well supported in this. Using tutorial time gave the poll an official feeling, as if this was something to be taken seriously. The student researchers provided each tutor involved with a statement to read out before attempting to complete the poll. This was so as to remind the students that their views on this were being taken seriously and therefore to treat the poll with due consideration.
One of the major difficulties of developing this methodology was however in the design of the statements that they were asking as then providing suitable evidence on which to part-base their findings. They sought to develop statements that could be responded to with “I agree” “I disagree” and “I neither agree nor disagree” or a scaled response from 1 “*I strongly disagree*” to 5 “*I strongly agree*”. They found that this was the simplest response type to analyse afterwards. It would also give them quantitative data that they could then expand upon with their other methodology.

At first they asked student to include written comments in an additional field in relation to some statements. They however found that this generated too much material for them to include in their evidence base, and they subsequently decided to discontinue these additional comments within the poll. They wished to use the student interviews, video evidence and the learning diaries as expanded evidence of what had come out of the poll itself.

In order to analyse the results emerging from the opinion polls, the students totalled the number of responses from each statement in the relevant categories. This provided them with an overview of their peers’ opinions on areas such as the following during their enquiry linked to lesson objectives in 2005-2006. Some examples of responses collected are shown below:

- The teacher makes me aware of what I am going to learn in each lesson (78% agree 15% neither agree nor disagree 7% disagree)
- In the majority of my lessons, I write down what I am expected to learn (30% agree 20% neither agree nor disagree 50% disagree)
- The teacher indicates how this lesson links to the previous work in the majority of lessons (65% agree 10% neither agree nor disagree 25% disagree)

- At the beginning of a unit of work, I am made aware of what I am going to learn in this unit (59% agree 24% neither agree nor disagree 17% disagree)

The main advantage of recording this type of data, according to the students, was the chance to have some numerical data that supported their subsequent work with the interviews, lesson videos and the learning diaries.

It provided them with a starting point for the interviews with both teachers and students and also gave them the opportunity to canvas a wide range of their peers in a relatively simple way.

The researchers however agreed that it was impossible to get these statements exactly “right” or to stop any one of their peers from entering false answers. In certain enquiries, they therefore needed to omit statements when their peers complained about their ambiguity.

Interviews

Following collection of their data sources such as the online opinion polls, the learning diaries and the video evidence, the student researchers sought to explore their findings with interviews of a sample of students from across the school years and teaching groups.

For each school-wide enquiry they selected six students from Key Stage 3, a further six from Key Stage 4 and a further six from Key Stage 5. They did this via asking the relevant Year heads for a list of names selected at random that would encompass a range of tutor groups and interests.

The first interviews that the researchers conducted were on the whole not successful in their own admission. This was because the students, although having prepared questions in advance to ask each of the three groups, were not prepared to record the answers in a systematic way or to develop answers that needed fuller explanations.

They felt frustrated at the lack of evidence with which they emerged from the interviews and asked the sample of students to return again the following week when

they could conduct the interviews in what they hoped would be a more effective manner.

This time I suggested that the researchers needed to look much more engaged and interested when addressing their interviewees. The researchers also assigned roles to scribes, observers and interviewers, so that they could record and analyse their evidence more effectively afterwards. They did not however look to create transcripts of the interviews, as they felt that this was too time-consuming a process, given the limited time and resources they had to conduct their enquiry.

The second round of interviews proved therefore much more successful in the researchers' eyes. The students hoped that by having two scribes present, a good range of opinions expressed would be recorded as evidence. I recorded the following comments by the student researchers following one of the second-round interviews in 2006:

"That went much better..I didn't just stick to the list of questions we had...I asked for a bit more when I felt that it needed it."

"I'm glad there were two of us to write down the responses...just me by myself wouldn't have worked..I will have missed bits."

"They seems much more relaxed than the first time round...they knew what to expect and didn't seem as nervous...their answers were therefore a lot better

Peer group assemblies

Once the student researchers had established their findings, they then returned to their participants to check that these claims were an accurate picture of what had been recorded. They sought to do this through the medium of year group assemblies, in which they presented their findings and then invited students from that year group to attend a learning forum to further discuss the results.

When presenting their findings, the intergenerational nature of the group proved key in giving the boys the confidence to present to otherwise unknown year groups. During one of the assemblies, the students invited comments and questions from the floor once they had finished. One of the key developments here were the comments

related to *"opening of the students' eyes*" to what was occurring in lessons, yet things that they may not have considered previously. One such comment stated (December 2006):

"I didn't realise there was so much planning involved..I thought they (the teachers) just turned up!"

The researchers were also subjected to a difficult situation during the Year 11 assembly, after which some students in the audience took this as an opportunity to comment on teachers' performance:

"I don't get any of that from Mr. X..I don't think he's done that all year-do we get to tell teachers that they should all be doing this now?" (December 2006)

The researchers responded thus:

"*One of our golden rules is that we don't name individuals..it isn't a fair way of doing things...not everyone does what we have shown you here..this is about the best ways of doing things in lessons that students like you have told us about..we hope through this that more people will do more of the same..take on these ideas."*

This statement I believe shows how well the researchers had developed an ethical sense of working, and recognised clearly where the boundaries lay in what was acceptable and what was not. Re-affirming this expectation under such difficult circumstances was courageous in my opinion.

Following the assembly, the researchers then invited members of the year group to attend a student learning forum the following week to discuss their results. The students interested had their names recorded and were subsequently given a copy of the main findings of the research presented to them. The researchers then asked the interested students to discuss these findings with their peers in their tutor groups in order to field a greater range of opinion.

<u>Student learning forums</u>

As stated in the point above, the student researchers sought to verify their findings before presenting them to the staff of the school, by inviting members of the student

body following the whole-year assemblies. Numbers varied from six in one year group to two in another, yet the researchers felt that any opportunity to evaluate what they were saying was useful. Asking those interested to first canvas opinion from their own tutor groups was crucial in gauging a wider range of opinion than simply those volunteers. The flaw with this method however was that only certain students within the tutor groups were asked their opinions and that therefore the full profile of any one year group could not truly be represented.
The learning forums proved a worthwhile event, with again the researchers dividing roles between them into scribes, speakers and observers. They invited comment in turn on each of their findings presented in the assemblies and then sought to add or modify this comment if there was strong enough evidence to do so.

The venue for these forums was important. When I moved these from a noisy classroom at lunchtime near the school yard to the school's conference room and added refreshments, the events proved much more successful in terms of numbers attending and the quality of the discussion.

Appendix 3: The value of Students-as-researchers to the school

In November 2005 I discussed with Stringer[24] the need for SaR work (Student as Researcher) to hold economic value for the school. Providing this evidence I felt would secure the long-term future of SaR work alongside the intergenerational approach offered in this enquiry. In an electronic mail he highlighted:

[24] Ernie Stringer is a researcher with whom I established contact through the H.E. Researcher involved in this enquiry. She provided a point of contact between us, as we shared an interest in promoting the student voice through SaR work. We both realised that this type of work needed to show value for money in economic terms, in order that it could secure a long-term future in schools.

As a contributor to SAGE, he is described in the following way:

"After an early career as primary teacher and school principal, Ernie spent many years as lecturer in teacher education at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia. From the mid-eighties he worked collaboratively with Aboriginal staff and members of the community Curtin's Centre for Aboriginal Studies to develop a wide variety of innovative and highly successful education and community development programs and consultative services. Their activities with government departments, community-based agencies, business corporations and local governments assisted may people to work more effectively in Aboriginal contexts. In recent years, as visiting professor at universities in New Mexico and Texas, he taught action research to graduate students and engaged in projects with African American, Hispanic and other community and neighborhood groups. As a UNICEF consultant from 2002-2005 he engaged in a major project that assisted development of schools in East Timor. He is author of the texts "Action Research (Sage 1999)," "Action Research in Education (Pearson 2004)," "Action Research in Health" (with Bill Genat, Pearson 2004), and "Action Research in Human Services" (with Rosalie Dwyer, Pearson 2005). He is a member of the editorial board of the Action Research Journal and is President of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association" (retrieved from www.paulchapmanpublishing.co.uk/authorDetails.nav on 12.01.08

"Keep up your good work. It will be sometime difficult as it goes against the grain of convention, but is highly productive if you can carry it through. Generally, I find much action research in the classroom is highly simplistic, with people's expectations merely serving to ingrain the conventional wisdom of a mechanistic "teaching strategy inputs leading to higher test score outputs." Education is much more complex than that, and if all we had to do was apply an appropriate teaching strategy to achieve higher test scores it would have been done decades ago. Apart from the reality that we cannot expect "increased test scores" ad infinitum, education is a far more human activity than the factory-production process now being promoted under the banner of testing regimes. The research in business, industry and the community indicates that the corporate world and families want a more sophisticated approach to education that provides well balanced individuals who have extended capacities of creativity, initiative, independence and other similar qualities that a test-driven education is not able to provide" (May 2005)

Stringer (2004, p.23) refers to students as:

"...*the primary stakeholders in any educational institution*"(Stringer, 2004, p.23)

It is the primary reason why any educational institution exists, and it is the provision for these individuals within the institution that is the school's primary role. In promoting student research as adding value to any educational institution, I ask how this is taking place. As well as students and teachers asking *"What is in it for me?"* the institution itself has the right to ask the same question. Student research must respond to the UK current political climate of schools providing self-evaluated evidence as well.

"*While it is clear from raw examination results if students are achieving above or below the expected level, it is not obvious which schools have helped students to make more progress from one stage of their education to the next. The progress schools help individuals make relative to their different starting points is usually referred to as* value added. *Value added measures are intended to allow comparisons between schools with different student intakes"* (DfES, 2005)

Within this self-evaluation framework, much importance is placed on how the school *adds value* to students in terms of their academic performance alongside their

creative and emotional intelligence. The Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF 2005) talks of "*entrepreneurship*" skills being developed amongst young people, equipping each individual with life skills for the future.

In order to show how student-led research provides value-added, I wanted to consider the impact on students' academic performance. This is in terms of the students' increased awareness of learning alongside the enhanced classroom experience as a result of sharing best practice. In developing an empathic and equalitarian way of working between school, teacher and student, I believe that dialogue opens up that supports learning in the classroom. In 2001, Hannam tested this following hypothesis:

"In schools that are already taking "participation and responsible action" seriously for significant numbers of students of the full range of academic ability, an improvement in attainment would be found across the full range of GCSE Grades though not necessarily mainly at the Higher Grades. If the hypothesis proved accurate this might well be in part at least, a consequence of higher self-esteem and a greater sense of ownership and empowerment" (Hannam, 2001, p.3)

In his conclusions, based on an extended study across twelve schools, he states:

'Involvement in student participative activities brings real benefits to relationships between students and teachers which can in turn enhance attainment."
(Hannam, 2001, p.8).

Later studies also provide similar evidence of increased attainment through participation by students in their school life. In 2006 Holmes concluded that:

"Student participation ensures that schools meet students' needs at all levels, and in doing so it raises their ability and their desire to learn, directly contributing to a raise in attainment." (Holmes, 2006, p.44)

Trafford, referring back to Hannam's (2001) work, argues that:

"The evidence is now overwhelming. When schools behave in a democratic way with their students, they become better schools. They are happier, more productive, more effective. Exam results are better. There are reduced levels of alienation and

truancy. The whole process is happier for everyone – and the results improve too. It's a win-win arrangement.

To embark on anything new, most of us need to be able to answer the question, 'What's in it for me?' What's in school democracy for teachers, for students, for schools – for everyone – it's a better experience for everyone.

As I wrote at the start, I set out on the democratic path as a matter of principal. But in trying to persuade schools, school leaders and policy makers that it is the right course for them to take, we can now demonstrate beyond doubt that democratic schools are also improved schools." (Trafford, 2003, p.12)

I believe that this enquiry shows that student research can provide a forum for teachers to consider and relate to what constitutes best practice. In providing this forum, those who have the capacity to listen to the student voice are able to evolve their classroom practice so that students can in turn best learn. As Hannam, Trafford and Holmes consider, so I consider how the school can learn to provide better learning opportunities through student-led research.

Developing students' capacity to consider their own learning also allows them to become more aware as learners. The assemblies, student forums and discussion with the student council, led by the student researchers, have all served to bring this about. Students are able subsequently to share this knowledge with the people charged with supporting their route to academic success.

At the end of the first year of the student researchers' work, after the students had researched into classroom practice within French, it was noticeable that three of the research group were ranked first, second and third in their end of year examinations within this subject area. Whilst I do not claim that this was a direct result of the research they undertook, I refer to the students' comments at that time:

"Doing this (research) has really made me think about how I learn-how we learn as a group-within French. As we worked with you, and you took our ideas on board, I was really aware of what we were learning and how. This should be our next step-explaining what this research is to our year group, so that they can then fully understand what is happening around them. It makes the classroom a different place." (second-generation researcher June 2004)

The researchers' awareness of classroom practice was further highlighted in choosing their second stage enquiry. When deciding on the focus for this whole school research, the group quickly decided that assessment practice would be a theme relevant to all subject areas and all students within the school. This motivation on their behalf came out of a sense of frustration that good assessment practice was not consistent throughout the school and that as students their assessment *diet*, although varied, did not provide them with consistency. Their hope was to provide a forum through which good practice could be disseminated, and through which good assessment practice could be promoted between departments. This suggestion was strongly supported by the Headteacher.

Chatwin (2004) talks of Middle Leaders being key with regards improving classroom practice. In this second-phase enquiry, the students looked towards Middle Leaders as the key figures who could bring about changes to assessment practice:

"Heads of Departments are in the forefront of decision making because their foresight is such that they can see what's needed to make the school better..they implement the idea, they share the idea and then it is seen as successful and therefore the Head thinks, this is really working, will it work across the school" and that's how it becomes school policy" (Chatwin, 2004, p.14)

The students were asking Middle Leaders to influence their Department's assessment practice. There was a sense of bottom-up influence, in which the students themselves were the agents for change, asking those with the power to change practice to communicate with each other:

"When we did the objectives-based research into Mrs. Riding's French lessons, it was obvious that the results did not apply to every teacher..I saw some of their eyes glaze over when we presented our findings. Yet, afterwards there was a flurry of objectives in our lessons...everyone seemed to be doing it. Now if we can research an area that is relevant to everyone.. .hopefully our research can have even more influence on other teachers."
(second generation student researcher's comments in May 2005)

As already mentioned, the recent political agenda has seen schools evaluating themselves through a self-evaluation framework. The evidence schools provide

about their own progress and achievements are used by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSted) during the school inspection process

"*We believe that you (the school) are best placed to recognise your own strengths and weaknesses. This is why we have a system that allows you to demonstrate that you can not only diagnose where your strengths and weaknesses are, but more crucially, do something about improving and developing them.*
The self-evaluation form serves as the main document when planning the inspection, and is crucial in evaluating the quality of leadership and management and your capacity to improve."(OfSted, 2007, p.1)

The Headteacher of Kingdown Community School in Wiltshire, in an address to aspiring senior managers about the national self-evaluation framework, talked about the importance of:

"*Measuring what we value, not valuing what we can measure.*" (Address, November 2005)

This statement captured for me what the student researchers are trying to achieve through their research: valuing learning. They are trying to capture best practice learning within the shared space of the classrooms, studios, workshops and corridors. I remember first arriving at the school on my interview day, and immediately sensing an environment that promoted learning. This was through overheard conversations between students travelling to lessons, seeing students and teachers participating together in lessons that I visited (despite some of the most appalling buildings and classrooms that I had ever seen). This is an impression that I could not tangibly measure: it was a *value* that I could sense being lived out around me.

Co practitioner-researchers at the school have also tried to define what the school values. In a recent Master's level assignment, in which my colleague and co-researcher Graham Lloyd was focussing upon the impact of the 14-19 curriculum proposals, he made the following statement:

"*The students at Bishop Wordsworth's School have a rounded education and are given, by the nature of the school, the additional skills universities and employers look for in people. These are further enhanced by success in extracurricular activities*

such as BAYS (Bishop's Association of Young Scientists) and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme plus numerous opportunities to compete in a variety of sports at regional and national levels." (Lloyd, 2005, p.12)

By stating that these opportunities are enhancing the education provided by the school, Graham stakes his claim on the value of a "*rounded education*" that he believes the school to offer.

As the school looks to identify what it values through the self-evaluation framework, dialogue about what is valued throughout the school is imperative. Within this dialogue I believe that students have a central role in this through working as researchers and through their role as classroom learners. This work allows the students to work in an entrepreneurial way: co-creating knowledge to be shared amongst the stakeholders in the school:

"What's this all for?"

I ask you now to reconsider the question that my colleague posed to the students during their initial research presentation. I believe that I have answered this in considering how their intergenerational work can allow a school to measure and enhance the learning valued within it.

I am writing at an exciting time. The research group has just presented their latest enquiry findings to the staff, and have engaged in dialogue with these staff to further enhance teachers' understanding of what it is to learn as a student. The students are now looking at the impact evidence of their enquiry for the school, moving their work forward with support of the CARA2 (Creative Partnerships) bursary of which they are in receipt. They have also received recognition of the importance of their research through the OfSted inspection that took place at the school in December 2006 and have now set-up a student-learning forum based as a base in which they can test their claims to knowledge.

The boundaries between teacher, researcher and student-researcher have evolved through enquiring together. This research has seen students move from the position

of *active participants* to *active researchers* (Kellett, 2005)[25]. Gunter et al (2007) acknowledge three ways in which young people are engaged in research: *consulting pupils, pupils engaged in school self evaluation and students-as-researchers* (p.7) I see these as stages of development of the pupil voice within a school; a journey to be undertaken. As trust of the student voice develops, so schools move through the stages to a more integrated way of working and learning with students. The students with whom I have worked do not look to recreate social science theory. They do not look to be trained to reproduce another's way of working. They look instead to respond in a creative way to methodological and ethical issues. They seek to form relationships of trust with others within the school that allows them to enquire. These relationships allow living standards of judgement to emerge between the research participants that reflect the individual nature of the enquiry undertaken. They respect validity and rigour, asking that their participants and peers respond to their emerging findings, asking that their enquiry bring "*capacity building and value for people*" (Furlong and Oancea, 2006).

A new sense of respect and understanding has developed between teacher and student, as the students conceptualise the intricacies of lesson planning and delivery and what this entails for a teacher. They also seek to conceptualise their own learning alongside this, considering what good learning means to them. Teachers have moved from a position of accepting students working as researchers within their school to engaging with them as co-enquirers about learning. Teachers seek answers to questions they have about classroom practice through the students' eyes. Policy is moving forward, embracing what can be learnt from engaging with students:

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[25] This is the position that students held within previous research I have engaged with. Although students were invited to be involved, it was I as an adult researcher who invited them into the research. I asked for their views and consulted them, yet the research was my own motivation and not a shared enterprise:

"By including the students' voice within the research, this has allowed me insider knowledge into their perceptions of learning. This inclusion has allowed the research to be tailored towards the needs of the students, and has produced dialogue of an informative and insightful nature between teacher and student. I would credit the use of students as co researchers in any further research that I undertake with regards to my own education practice."
(Collins, 2003, p.8)

I now disagree with my earlier statement "*this inclusion has allowed the research to be tailor made towards the needs of the students*" as the perception of these needs was undertaken by myself as principal researcher. In 2003 I was already acknowledging a different relationship between teacher and student as the result of research, although the learning resulting from this dialogue supported teacher more than student. There existed, as Kellett (2007) suggests, an unequal power relation in this context.

"There is a sense of a shared journey of learning between teacher and student, in which the teacher enjoys the perspective of learning about themselves through the eyes of students. The students perceive the sensitivity of a teacher as a human being." (comments by the H.E. Researcher immediately after the students' presentation in October 2006)

This heightened awareness was most noticeable in the conversations held between the students immediately after their presentation. When one student began to mention teachers by name and their reactions to the presentation, the others reinforced their expectation that naming individuals was not part of the shared standards of judgement that the group embraced. The students have begun to redefine boundaries to engage creatively with their school. They have come to an understanding of where their research would best benefit to the school, shown through their selection of research themes and the way in which they first seek approval from the Leadership Team before engaging with this enquiry. They have given themselves licence to enjoy their research as children play, asking how they can make the *possible probable* (Whitehead, Joan, 2004), yet remain within a framework that represents their developing shared values.

One of these values is the use of humour with research participants. I earlier stated how individuals could only employ humour when trust has been established between those sharing space in their pursuit of knowledge. The use of humour in the student researchers' presentation highlighted this movement forward towards a relationship of shared trust with teachers in which humour could be used.

Alongside humour, another shared value emerging strongly between the group is the development of "we" alongside "I":

""What do we want to call ourselves for the (school) website (link)? We are researchers…"(second generation researcher)
"I don't consider myself a researcher. I have acted as the project manager: this should be my "title"" (third generation researcher)
"But, it's not about <u>you</u> alone, it's about us and what <u>we</u> are...<u>we</u> are a research team" (second generation researcher)"
(conversation recorded between two of the student researchers in October 2006)

The individual researcher remains an agent of change and action within the process, moving the research forward. Each individual assumes different roles at different times: leader, critical friend or scribe. These roles interchange and evolve alongside the needs of the enquiry, yet can also bring conflict between those students of different generations who wish to always retain a certain role within the group. This tension is highlighted above by the insistence of one member of the group to hold onto a certain role, when in fact this was a temporary role that supported the group through their second phase.

This tension has been inevitable as part of the evolvement of the group to include a new generation. The original members have needed to adapt to the new dynamics, and some have been reluctant to evolve. This has been part of the *living* dynamic, in which the incoming generation has responded to the need to fit into the established group dynamics. As with my colleagues and I within the Department, they have needed to first establish relationships of trust before beginning to establish their own role within the group.

As the group needs to breathe as a living, organic entity responding to its environment, so the way in which the group works has evolved with flexibility and resourcefulness. A shared set of living educational standards have emerged in terms of the methodological choices that the group makes, the consideration of ethics with research participants and the power relations that exist between the researchers, research participants and the school:

"As a question-raising discipline, philosophy is appropriate to guide children's natural inquisitiveness through the educational process. It encourages intellectual resourcefulness and flexibility which can enable children and teachers alike to cope with the disconnectedness and fragmentization of existing curricula. It can help develop sound reasoning and ethics." (Lipman, M., 1977, abstract)