

## Chapter 9 My emergent living theory and contribution to knowledge

I look now to consider the wider impact of this enquiry by responding to the key questions that I asked at the beginning of this narrative account. In doing so I look to clarify my own living educational theory that has emerged through this enquiry and to understand the contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes.

1. *What is the significance of this enquiry in offering shared living standards of judgment as motivation to enquire?*
2. *Does intergenerational student-led enquiry provide a platform for enhanced, sustainable research in schools?*
3. *How does the methodological approach that I employ support my claims to knowledge?*

### **1. What is the significance of this enquiry in offering shared living standards of judgment as motivation to enquire?**

These shared living standards are no better demonstrated than by focussing on an example shared by my husband and me. This demonstrates how we both look to share the quality of relationship in the personal within the professional, albeit through different interpretations. My husband defines this standard in the following way:

*“The re-creation of the quality of relationship that I have had with others in my personal life within the professional domain (living myself through others).”*  
(Riding, S., 2006, p.1)

As I too seek to re-create the quality of the personal in the professional, I look to both live myself *with* and *through* others. I live *with* my husband in the personal and *with* the intergenerational student researchers in the professional. I seek to draw upon the motivation given to me by this living standard of judgment. This standard is one example that energises me and asks that I recognise the contribution that others can make. Sharing this standard with my husband gives me the courage to seek to live this out. This is a strength that I may not have on my own.

I also live *through* others in the sense of sharing these energizing standards as a motivational way of being in the professional. I look for the students, the teachers and the school with whom I work to each recognise the contribution that the other can make. Through this a dialogue has emerged between them that supports learning and is understood and owned by all involved.

I talk of the generalizability of this account in an inclusional sense. Through this account, I have shown the love and pleasure I gain from working with significant others in relationships of trust and shared motivation. The boundaries between us are fluid and dynamic. Emerging from a difficult transition year in a new post, in which narratives of ruin record my journey of learning, I have learned to embrace a *clean* space with others. This is a space in which the complexity and misunderstanding of before is cleared, as the pleasure of sharing living educational standards of judgement is embraced. In the complicated nature of a shared life, I offer this as a refreshing approach to the professional life that I and others choose to lead. I believe that I can and do choose this life within the society that I belong to. Reflecting upon how and why these choices are made is something worthy of enquiry.

I offer this thesis as an original contribution to knowledge in the context of how the relationships shared between us evolve into agreed ways of being. These standards, by which we choose to live, are grounded in the shared values and experiences between individuals. These standards are energising; they give me the motivation to go forth into the professional and seek to live these out. Simon and I are both writing the same thesis in the context of how the quality of relationship that we hold gives us energy to live out these standards in the professional. Our enquiries merge at many points, sharing living boundaries that evolve over time. Our enquiries also challenge each other's viewpoint in a creative way, as the standard exemplified above demonstrates.

I referred earlier to Gorman's Quantum Cloud XV (2003) as symbolizing the evolving nature of the networks in which we live and the boundaries that we share. In the centre of this living entity, I would place two beings in order to represent the relationship shared between my husband and I as the foundation from which our professional lives emerge. Whilst others join us in the creation and extension of these living shared boundaries, we remain constant as the grounding point for each other in the standards that we embrace. We each bring to and take from this shared life.

As Simon looks to bring the quality of relationship gained from our shared life into his work with teacher-researchers, I look to embrace this within student-led research. We are both creatively challenging the system within which we work, asking it to accept a way of working that communicates in a different way. We are both asking the social formation of the school to grow and evolve in new understanding as networks build between individuals in dynamic relationships of trust. Simon looks for his school to embrace practitioner-researchers whilst I look for my school to embrace intergenerational student researchers. This undertaking has led to the creation of a shared language that is owned and understood by all involved, whether teacher-student, teacher-teacher or student-student.

The relationship and standards that Simon and I hold are generative in their nature. We have moved from a position of son/daughter, to husband/wife and mother/father. We subsequently carry emergent living standards that reflect these experiences and we carry these into our professional relationship. We learn *from* our life with others and we give this learning *to* others through our professional lives and through procreation in our roles as parents. We are both learning that the dialectic can positively respond to the system within which we work.

Vasilyuk talks of the relationship between energy and motivation, meaning and values:

*“Equally problematic are the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although it is obvious that in fact there are certain links: we know how ‘energetically’ a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics.”*

*(Vasilyuk, 1991, pp. 63-64 in Whitehead, 2007, p.2)*

Vasilyuk acknowledges how a person can act energetically when positively motivated, when there is meaning to his/her work and when he/she is living out his/her values. Through shared trust and faith, a dialogue emerges that creates excitement about learning. There is a dynamic, living quality to this learning that

evolves into relationally dynamic standards of judgement. Each person revels in the connections of understanding made:

*“In answering the question “How do you understand what happens?” I answer that the way I understand what happens is intimately related to the logics I use. In developing my understandings I draw insights from propositional and dialectical theories. My understandings are continuing to evolve as I focus on developing values-based and relationally dynamic standards of judgment for my theory of educational knowledge.” (Whitehead, 2007, p.2)*

Therefore as I joined my current school, I carried with me the values from the Westwood St. Thomas practitioner-researcher group<sup>23</sup> of recognising and valuing the other. I sought to build similar relationships of trust with others and to create living educational space in which shared learning was the motivation.

Within this first year in post, many mistakes were made. I class as a mistake something which did not reach a positive outcome, something which if done again would be done differently. Accepting these “mistakes” as learning opportunities, and recognising what I can gain from embracing my enemy as a potential friend, has allowed me to embrace the pleasure found in a flow of knowledge between participants. My husband Simon acknowledges the role of mistakes in a similar vein:

*“Through my ability to use the action-research cycle (this) allows me to actively reflect on my practice... I am able to improve what I am doing and not be afraid to make mistakes, providing I can learn something from them.” (Riding, S., 2008, p.137)*

Johnson asks: “*Are you happy?*” (2005). This is in regard to teachers living out their professional lives. I believe that the simplicity of embracing the *happiness* in our shared lives leads to fulfilment. It is the simplicity of clearing the space in which we find ourselves to acknowledge our pleasure in what we do. It is not allowing mistakes to provoke ongoing feelings of guilt and wretchedness, but as learning opportunities. In this way I recognise that living enquiry in a loving way with significant others affords me pleasure and a *pleasurable* way of being.

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<sup>23</sup> I have talked of Westwood St. Thomas Upper School as my former school in which the development of an in-house practitioner-researcher group was very significant in shaping the values that I hold today.

*“I feel energized as people share their stories of their learning as they seek to live more fully the values they recognize as carrying hope for the future of humanity and their own. Given the daily stories of killings, violence, abuse, corruption and dishonesty in the media, from around our world, I feel hope in the stories of individuals who are seeking to live lives that are characterized by hope, love, care, justice, compassion, pleasure, passion, enquiry, learning and knowledge-creation.”*  
(Whitehead, 2007, p.2)

This way of being gives me courage, drawing upon the strength of my shared life. I no longer need to hide behind the impersonal in my account or in my professional life. I take ownership of the learning acknowledged here and the pleasure that I gain from it. My professional life brings pleasure to the personal and vice versa. Contact with others allows this to be possible, as pleasure is for me a shared emotion. I have added to Kincheloe’s (2003) comment below (shown in brackets) to show the understanding that I have gained:

*“As enquirers grow passionate about what they know, they develop a deeper relationship (with others). Such a relationship produces (a shared knowledge) that initiates a synergistic cycle—a cycle which grants them more insight into the issue being investigated.”* (Kincheloe, 2003, p.65)

## **2. Does intergenerational student-led enquiry provide a platform for enhanced, sustainable research in schools?**

The student researchers are knowledge creators. They have moved through and beyond the role of students as active researchers as identified by Kellett (2005a) in her paper *“Children as active researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century?”* They do not perceive generic prescriptive types of student research as reflecting their way of working; they use instead a responsive way of working in which they engage with their school. They have shown *methodological inventiveness* (Dadds & Hart, 2001) and a developing sense of ethics and shared values in their life of enquiry. They are demonstrating their capacity to generate knowledge with their school in the webspace that they have created:

[http://www.bws.wilts.sch.uk/extracurric/Student%20Research/student\\_research.htm](http://www.bws.wilts.sch.uk/extracurric/Student%20Research/student_research.htm)

Intergenerational student-led research is a *possible* way of working within any school. Making this *probable* has been the motivation of the student researchers with whom I have learned. The old leading the young and vice versa, each member with a unique viewpoint, adds to the richness of the experience for all. I believe, as Ruddock & Flutter (1994) demonstrate, that committed individuals are capable of bringing about a change in the social formation of the school. The acceptance of this change becomes *probable* through the emergence of shared language between the students, Headteacher, senior leaders and teachers within the school. The support of these key figures changes the focus of the student-led research from small-scale to whole-school and opens the possibility of dialogue between school stakeholders about this.

Dialogue about student-led research is opened up through hard work on the students' behalf. Although as teacher advocate I can provide resources and space for the group to meet, in the reality of the school day I cannot offer more. The students have shown my colleagues and me the value of enjoying the process from the *outside-in* (Rayner, 2005) as we stand on the sidelines outside the research process, but most importantly from the *inside-out* (Rayner, 2005) for those who are ready to begin this dialogue with students.

Rayner (2007) talks of *path-finding and path-following*. I however see the student researchers' work as path-creating, in which established paths did not best support the school in learning about itself. Through this, I mean the processes in place within the school for the student body to contribute to knowledge did not allow for open dialogue between teacher, student and school. The students needed to work creatively to open up new avenues and ways of working. In order to do this, they invited the school stakeholders into this creation process in order to work creatively with rather than against the prevailing wind.

The intergenerational way in which the student-research has developed has been a natural and logical process, in which the research group has been able to draw upon a wide body of experiences and viewpoints. Each generation has joined the group to give it new motivation and direction, whilst allowing the work of the researchers to become sustainable in the social formation of the school. In this way, the workload between researchers has been manageable with different researchers able to commit at different points in the enquiry. Established researchers have been excited about communicating their work to the new generations coming in, and listening themselves to new ideas and perspectives.

Intergenerational practice is an area of research for the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), which claims the following benefits of this approach:

*“Interest in intergeneration practice and what it can achieve has grown amongst practitioners and policymakers in the UK and Europe since the 1990s as the outcomes can contribute towards achieving the goals of many government policies... For example, there is some literature which suggests that intergenerational practice may be effective in achieving outcomes such as reducing ageism and stereotyping between generations and achieving some Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for children and young people.” (NFER, 2007, p.1)*

Intergenerational research extends not only between the students themselves but also to the practitioner researchers and H.E. Researchers working alongside them. This has allowed the enquiry to take into account different perspectives from the wider academic field alongside those “*at the chalkface*”. Each participant brings something different to the enquiry and each subsequently takes something different away. In an e-mail I received from Shane, one of the first-generation researchers, in October 2006, he stated:

*“Hi from London! It’s strange being the new boy again. Say hello to the research group from me-it’s strange not to be a part of them anymore... I’m only in my first term here, but already I want to get involved with the Students’ Union as I can see that there is little communication between us (the ones who pay loads of money to be here!) and them. So here I go again-third time lucky!”* (electronic mail, October 2007)

Whilst the space created by the research group remains intact, the group participants and emerging values continue to evolve. This has been felt most strongly in the methodology employed by the researchers as they learn from past experience. They are now able to select a methodology and an ethical framework that they see as most appropriate to the research they are undertaking, whilst seeking new ways to research in order to respond to their enquiry. Their ethical framework includes the right of participants to choose whether to be named or remain anonymous. It also includes keeping their report visible to participants as it emerges. Social validation of their claims is therefore made through systematic sharing of the enquiry with their participants and in the public format of the school’s website.

The dynamic energy of the group I believe is only possible through the intergenerational nature of the participants. This is its strength and its lifeblood and is the only true way in which student-led research can have a sustained impact upon the social formation of the school. It brings life-affirming energy to their life of enquiry

I believe that this enquiry offers generic principles about the development of intergenerational student-led research. These are not intended as a model to be carried over identically into new practice situations, but they are intended to act as elements to consider in the development of sustained dialogue about learning between teacher, student and the school:

- For student-led research to occur, there needs to be a teacher-advocate in place who is willing to offer the students the time and space to enquire
- Beginning student-led enquiry within the classroom practice of a sympathetic teacher will act as a springboard for wider reaching enquiries to take place
- The support of the Headteacher and the school's Leadership team is vital if the students' work is to be embedded within the school
- The language of communication used by the students, teachers and the school needs to be understood and owned by the entire group i.e. grounded in lived-out experience
- Working with an academic researcher from outside of the school allows the research process to have an objective viewpoint and critique. It also allows the localised research to connect to the current debate on students-as-researchers
- Evolving one generation of researchers into an intergenerational approach is a logical sequence for their work to be sustained over time
- Systematically sharing the enquiry's findings with the school stakeholders allows these to be further validated i.e. keeping their report visible
- The ethical framework employed by the group needs to be identified at the outset of the enquiries undertaken. This should however respond to the wish of certain participants to withdraw their consent or want their work to be recognised and named as the enquiries continue
- Communicating the research findings with student peers is an invaluable validation process and facilitates oft-forgotten dialogue between student-student of different cohorts



- The roles undertaken by the student participants needs to be re-established as new generations join the group alongside clarification of the ethical framework that the group employ

### ***3. How does the methodological approach that I employ support my claims to knowledge?***

Dadds and Hart (2002) talk of methodological choice as:

*“...a fundamentally important aspect of the quality of the research and, by implication, the quality of the outcomes.”* (Dadds & Hart, 2002, p.166)

They also perceive that:

*“...traditional empirical research (is) just one of the viable and valid methodologies available to practitioners, alongside many others which have already been created and others which will, inevitably, be created.”* (Dadds & Hart, 2002, p.167)

A living theory approach to my methodology has allowed me to create a personal signature in response to this enquiry. As I have gained more experience as a researcher, I have wanted to take more ownership over the methodological approach employed. I have seen the living contradiction that I am in not being able to live out my shared standards of judgment in the professional, and have sought to overcome this. As I seek to understand my own living theory, it has been important that the methodology I employ can respond to this task. A living theory approach has allowed me to write from the perspective of “I” whilst acknowledging and respecting the participants’ role within this enquiry. I have chosen to take the responsibility for sharing this enquiry with you and therefore responsibility for the quality and rigour of the research itself. Responsive methodological choices have allowed me to reflect the living nature of the enquiry and the need to respond in different ways at different times, so that the richness of data collected can be fully embraced.

Through this account, the energy that my shared living standards of judgment bring into my professional life has been explored, leading me to recognise the other in the contribution that students can make. The accounts, observations and audio-visual support a living, breathing account of a shared dialogue emerging between student, teacher and the school. The purpose of incorporating audio-visual data is to sustain

the connection to a particular event and allow the reader to connect to that event directly. Audio-visual allows the subtleties of the expression and values and energy to be lived out:

*“(I feel) a connection with the energy and values within and between the individuals shown on these clips. Probably because I know the majority of individuals within the clips I feel a strong resonance with the values and understandings being expressed in each others’ living space and through the educational boundaries of each clip.”*  
(Whitehead, 2007, p.3)

I believe that it has been important to reflect upon the meaning of each clip to the enquiry, so that my own and other’s reflections of it are carried alongside.

Responding to each account, observation and audio-visual inclusion has been carried out in a responsive way. I have sought to embrace the richness of the data offered, rather than limit it to a pre-set list of criteria. Although I have responded systematically to each data source, the reflection has not been carried out in an identical way. This has been part of creating my unique living theory methodology that best fits the needs of the enquiry. I have drawn upon my experience as a researcher and upon wider literature in order to build a methodology that does justice to this enquiry. I am creating my own jigsaw, using pieces that I have previously employed such as living action research, whilst adding new approaches such as accounts. I do not pretend to adopt any approach wholesale, but rather to tailor it to this enquiry’s needs. Such an approach does not weaken the quality or reliability of this account; rather I believe that it strengthens the appropriateness and fitness for purpose of the methodology employed.

I now consider the rigour employed in this living theory methodological approach, in order to see how a reflexive methodology can still be rigorous in its undertaking. As stated earlier I wish the account to be rigorous both in terms of what has occurred and the claims to knowledge that it makes. I therefore intend to refer to Winter’s (1989) six key criteria for rigour as a test of this, embracing this theory to validate my own claims.

In the first of Winter’s criteria for rigour, *reflexive*, I have shown that the norms of practitioner-researchers working with student researchers are being challenged and expectations altered as a result of practice. In the second, *dialectic critique*, I

describe to you how I am living with creative tension in the contradiction that I recognise myself to be. Kok (1991) responds to this criterion in the following way:

*“In applying this principle, the researcher should be able to identify the contradictions not just within herself but also in the conversations with her collaborators and others such as her students and document them. She should also be able to trace in parallel her own educational development alongside the development of the conversations from uncertainty, contradiction to resolution and transformation” (Kok, 1991, p.58)*

Through the narratives that I have shared with you in this account, I have identified the living contradiction that I was in my first year in post. I have projected a path back towards these events alongside considering the voices and reflections made at the time. This parallel allows me to see my own life from the *outside, looking-in* (Rayner, 2005) alongside the *inside, looking-out* (Rayner, 2005). Including the voice of the other within these narratives has supported this perspective and has allowed me to transform my own understanding of how I have acted or reacted within a given context.

In the third criterion supplied by Winter (1989), *risk*, I describe to you the willingness that I show both in the work with the student researchers and in the position of risk that I have placed myself at various points in this enquiry. I have experienced failure and I have learned to transform this into a position where I want to learn from this and risk again. Never so is this more evident than the persistence to value the student voice within the school, particularly after the experience of such negative feedback in my first year in post.

Kok (1991) in response to *plural structure* proposed by Winter (1989) states:

*“Although I agree with Winter’s idea of a plural structure and his arguments for it, I am concerned that the presentation should not be a disjoint collage of events but rather it should have the characteristic of a montage – a combination of accounts each with its own distinctive feature but without being confusing because of the disparity in form and style of writing. Even if the report is in the nature of a “plural text” it should still fulfil the requirements of conciseness, clarity, and coherence.” (Kok, 1991, p.6)*

This account embraces a multi-voiced text, with reflections and comments included from the key participants. These I have sought to include as a way of presenting a panoramic view of the same event, in that their voice combines with my own to reflect the same event. I offer through this a dialogic perspective of reflection that allows my reader to decide on the truth value of the account I offer through the perspectives given.

I have already discussed the importance of Winter's (1989) fifth criterion, *multiple resource*, within this section, as I refer to the inclusion of multimedia within the text. Finally, in the sixth criterion he offers *theory practice transformation*. I am creating here my own *living theory* (Whitehead, 1995) in which I embrace the shared standards that I seek to live out with others. These come from and into the relationship with my husband and allow me to understand the motivation and energy that I have for what I do. None so more is this evident than in working with intergenerational student researchers as a way to value the other.

Winter's criteria have allowed me to contextualise the rigour within this account and have asked me to consider if the claims I make to rigour can be upheld. Alongside these criteria, the role of the other is most significant in asking that an account is rigorous. Although, as principal narrator, I can state that this account fulfils the criteria exemplified above, I need my co-participants and co-researchers to uphold these claims I make. Rigour is not a lone enterprise, but rather one that is shared in the account of an enquiry.

From this enquiry I carry away the importance of a responsive methodological approach. The approach I employ is fit for purpose and appropriate in this context. It has been developed whilst being mindful of validity, triangulation and reliability. Through producing an I-account, I believe that I take responsibility for producing an enquiry that can satisfy rigour. In this enquiry I have employed my own methodological inventiveness to connect approach with outcomes.



**Figure 30** *Image January 2007 Simon, Sophia and I on our third day as a family. Nearly three years on from the image of our wedding. I hope that this image shows the hope we continue to share for the future of humanity.*

My words should not be the ones that end this enquiry but the students' own. I have been able to gain much pleasure from working with these individuals in our shared space, asking that intergenerational student-led research be promoted and accepted by the school. They are the lifeblood of this enquiry and have shown beyond all expectation how they can work with a school to change its social formation.

*These are the words of the second-generation researchers summarizing their contribution to original knowledge:*

*We are writing this in order to persuade other schools, researchers and students that different year groups of students working together to produce research is worthwhile. We believe that any school can undertake student-led research, but that each school will do this differently. However, we believe that there are numerous things that we have learnt as a result of our work that it would be useful to share.*



**Figure 31 The second generation researchers**

*This is the second time that I refer to this image and for me it is a powerful image that captured a moment of pleasure in shared enquiry.*

*Throughout our time as researchers we have worked together with a wide range of people, and we have learned the importance of doing this. This has been important in making our research successful, as it means that we learn from and with these other groups. We believe that without one of the groups the whole research process would be compromised.*

*As an example of the strength that others have brought to our project, the two sixth formers who became both our mentors and useful allies in supporting our research. We all agree that they were very helpful in the "terrifying" presentations to the staff, giving us the confidence to be able to do this. It is true that as we have continued to research, we have become more experienced and the presentations of our findings now seem less daunting, but in those early days their experience and knowledge helped us tremendously.*

*The role of (the H.E. Researcher) who has worked with us has also been crucial in supporting our work. She helped us to discover what we wanted to do, why we were doing it and how we thought we should approach it. At first, the whole project seemed very strange and confusing, but after working with her we were able to find a direction to move in and how to move towards it.*

*(Our Headteacher) has been a really important part of what we have been able to achieve. He has given us a sense of pride in our work, and has shown us the he*

*supports what we are doing. We were all really proud to receive his commendations in front of the whole school recently. Without him and (the Deputy Headteacher) we wouldn't have come this far.*

*Our research has not been uneventful, and we have met many problems along the way-some students dropping out or losing interest, problems between some individuals who liked to "hog the limelight" during meetings, and finding times to meet when we could all be there. This last point proved especially difficult, as we have done this research largely in our own time. Lunchtimes huddled with sandwiches whilst trying to ignore the noise from the football games outside. Mrs. Riding talks of "space" that we share, and we also think of having peace in a room when we need to talk without shouting!*

*Asking other years groups to get involved has been crucial. Shane and Alex have now left the school, and without the Year 11 students (third generation) who we asked to become involved, we would have very little "manpower" left. In the future we hope to take more of a backseat and to mentor other students as Shane and Alex (first generation) did with us-this helps the research to be fresh and brings in new ideas.*

*The other main problem that we have encountered is working with teachers and our school in a way that they and we find acceptable. We do not name teachers in our research and we do not fire criticism at some teachers directly. We need to encourage them to work with us, and not turn them against us. However, only good feedback is of little use, and by sharing examples of classroom learning that is going well alongside "general" examples of what pupils don't find as useful, we hope to make our research more useful overall. If someone says to us "well done" we haven't actually learnt anything. We are open about what we are doing, and share our research as we go along. We believe that if any teacher strongly objects to a statement, then we need to discuss it with them instead of simply deleting it. This has been really difficult, and takes a lot of courage, yet we think we have gained more respect from teachers as a result. Before we put any material onto the KEEP Toolkit (Carnegie Foundation) or school website, we check with the people involved first. This has been really important with other pupils as well as with teachers, as they have a chance to say no.*

*We know that we can't expect everyone to support what we are doing, and this will no doubt be the same in any school. We had to show some teachers that this was worthwhile. We will always remember the question "What's all this for?" after our first presentation. At first we were really disappointed at her reaction, but then it gave us more energy to answer it by asking her to work with us.*

*We have always considered the impact that our research has had upon our school: Have we really made a difference? At the end of our first project, the results were at first not very dramatic in our eyes. It was clear to us that some teachers had listened and had started to introduce some of our ideas in to their lessons. We felt real pride when seeing them using our ideas! However, we later discovered that most of the teachers in our school supported us: not necessarily introducing our ideas into their lessons, but giving us positive feedback about how this had made them think again as teachers.*

*Encouraged by this support, we want to share our work with a wider audience. We have now set up our own section on the extra-curricular part of our school website, expressing our ideas and thoughts in a way that is easily accessible to anyone (school, teachers or students) interested in student-based research as a way forward. This website has been made possible through the (H.E. Researcher) with whom we have worked. The website address is the following:*

[http://www.bws.wilts.sch.uk/extracurric/Student%20Research/student\\_research.htm](http://www.bws.wilts.sch.uk/extracurric/Student%20Research/student_research.htm)

*We strongly recommend including a wide range of year groups within any student-led research group. This means that there is a wider basis of opinion and that the research methodology can be distributed more evenly, as well as giving us access to a wider range of teachers with whom we can work.*

*Most importantly, this work asks that our teachers listen. Although we find presenting our findings nerve racking, knowing that we have a captive audience is a real boost. For our latest project we used a "big fish" picture to show what we meant by the "big picture" of learning. This got us a laugh, and we think that even if this is all a teacher takes away with them from our presentation, it is still something that we have achieved.*



*We have noticed quite a big change in some of our lessons as a result of working with teachers in this way. This was an excellent result that shows even though we are students we can still make a difference to the classroom. For example, some teachers now use a black background on the interactive whiteboard, making it easier for us to see. We now see more teachers moving around the classroom to help us with work instead of sitting at the front. More teachers now write up objectives for us to help us know what we should be learning. We have also noticed that more teachers are telling us what is coming up and why-the big picture again-so that we are not being led in the dark. We hope that this evidence shows that we have made a difference-to our teachers and importantly to other pupils. These ideas all came from them when we asked them what really helped them to learn.*

*We believe that this type of research can take place in any type of school. It is very easy to do and such a simple and effective idea that we can see a bright future for it even in the most difficult of circumstances. The fact that the Ofsted inspectors interviewed us and came to watch our assemblies in December (2006) shows us that this work is important to the school. In the future we want to extend the current website describing our research to include guidance for other students wanting to do similar work.*

*All you need for effective student-led research are keen pupils and a teacher (or teachers!) willing to speak up for you and give you the time and energy that you need to do research. It always helps when they supply biscuits. This research takes commitment and energy, yet every step is new and all the time everyone will be learning new things. We believe that through our work, things are changing. Other pupils are thinking about what they do in the classroom that really helps them to learn. This is being shared with teachers, and teachers are taking these ideas on board in their lessons. We hope that by doing this, we are helping our school as well.*

(paper written in response to this enquiry by Harry Jenkins, Chris McNulty and Paddy Flood (2), December 2006)