

# Consulting Pupils About Teaching and Learning

Network grant holder: Jean Rudduck, Madeline Arnot, Michael Fielding, John MacBeath, Donald McIntyre, Kate Myers and Diane Reay

## Aims:

- To understand the process whereby consultation and participation can enhance pupils' engagement and achievement
- To understand the conditions in which consultation and participation can be effectively developed
- To support teachers who want to develop ways of consulting pupils and increasing opportunities for participation
- To ensure that the growing interest in pupil consultation is grounded in worthwhile and defensible principles and practices
- To integrate a theory of teaching, learning and attainment with a theory of pupil consultation and participation.

## Significance:

During the lifetime of the project (2001-2003) there has been a rapid growth of interest in pupil perspectives and participation and there is now a widespread recognition that young people have something worthwhile to say about their school experiences. Policy makers are thinking differently about the contribution of young people to today's and tomorrow's world: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child included children's right to be heard as one of its four basic principles; pupil participation is invoked as a central commitment within citizenship education, within school leadership programmes and within initiatives that support the development of schools as learning communities.

## Framework for enquiry:

Our starting point was the observation that schools have changed less over the last 20 years or so than young people have changed. Consultation, within a broader framework of participation, was seen as a possible way of transforming the conditions of learning in schools in ways that better match young people's capabilities.

## Publications:

- A three book series for teachers: *Consulting Pupils: A Toolkit for Teachers* MacBeath, J., Demetriou, H., Rudduck, J. and Myers, K. (2003) Cambridge: Pearson

*Students as Researchers: Making a Difference* Fielding, M. & Bragg, S. (2003) Cambridge: Pearson

*Consultation in the Classroom: Developing Dialogue about Teaching & Learning* Arnot, M., McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. & Reay, D. (2003) Cambridge: Pearson

## Approach:

The Network Project was designed as a research and development initiative. We worked closely with 48 primary and secondary schools in 6 constituent projects: two were researcher-led, the agenda being set by the project team; in three the teams worked in partnership with teachers experienced in consulting pupils; one was designed to support teachers and schools in developing and evaluating their own initiatives. Data were gathered through individual and group interviews and discussions and through questionnaires and observation. The 6 projects:

- How teachers respond to pupils' ideas on improving teaching and learning (Donald McIntyre, David Pedder)
- How the social conditions of learning in the classroom affect the identity and participation of different groups of pupils (Madeleine Arnot, Diane Reay, Beth Wang)
- Ways of consulting pupils about teaching and learning (John MacBeath, Kate Myers, Helen Demetriou)
- Pupil perspectives and participation: starting and sustaining the process (Michael Fielding, Sara Bragg)
- The potential of pupils to act as (co)researchers into the process of teaching and learning (Michael Fielding, Sara Bragg)
- Breaking new ground: innovative initiatives involving pupil consultation and participation (Julia Flutter)

A nation-wide Network of almost 300 schools was also established as a way of communicating with - and within - a larger group of interested practitioners.

## Realising the potential:

The potential of consulting pupils can be limited by the conditions in which it is practised; key issues are inclusiveness, authenticity and time/space. The following questions are worth asking:

- Whose voices are heard in the acoustic of the school?
- Is there any danger of creating a 'pupil voice elite'?
- Do all pupils feel able to speak without fear of recrimination?
- Are pupils enabled to talk about teaching as well as about learning?

## Additional publications:

*Consulting Pupils, Improving Schools* Rudduck, J. & Flutter, J. (2003) London: Continuum.

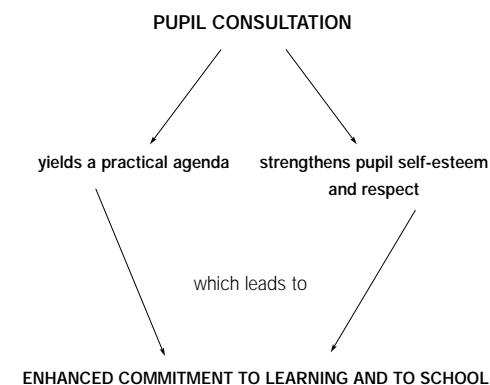
*Consulting Pupils: What's in it for Schools?* Flutter, J. & Rudduck, J. (2004) London: RoutledgeFalmer.

*Fielding, M. (ed) (2001) Forum 43, 2 (Special edition on Pupil Voice).*

*Improving Learning through consultation:* RoutledgeFalmer. An analytic overview will be published in the TLRP Series.

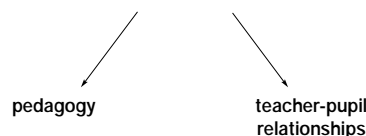
## Defining the potential:

This is how we think it works:



which is sustained by  
**transformation of teachers' knowledge of pupils**  
 (greater awareness of pupils' insight and capacity for constructive analysis)

which in turn leads to positive changes in



- Are teachers implicitly legitimating only compliant and comfortable comment?
- Are the topics for consultation ones that pupils consider important?
- Are they selected and framed by teachers?
- Is diversity of view among pupils recognised and respected?
- Are pupils' comments and suggestions always fed back to the working group?
- Where action recommended by pupils cannot be taken are the reasons discussed with pupils?

## What's in it for pupils?

- A stronger sense of membership and of being more included in the school's purposes – the organisational dimension
- A stronger sense of respect and self-worth so that pupils feel positive about themselves – the personal dimension
- A stronger sense of self-as-learner so that pupils are better able to manage their own learning – the pedagogic dimension
- A stronger sense of agency so that pupils see it as worthwhile to contribute to improvements in teaching and learning and wider school matters – the political dimension.

## What's in it for teachers?

- A deeper insight into young people's capabilities
- The capacity to see the familiar from a different angle
- A practical agenda for improvement
- A renewed sense of excitement in teaching.

## What's in it for schools?

- A practical agenda for change that pupils can identify with
- Greater pupil engagement with school and learning
- A more partnership oriented relationship with teachers
- A sound basis for developing democratic principles and practices
- A more inclusive approach to self-evaluation
- Developing the capacity of the school as a learning organisation.

A key idea emerging from the data, 'communicative competence', will be explored in our book for the TLRP's Gateway series.

## Network team:

University of Cambridge: Jean Rudduck (co-ordinator), Madeleine Arnot, Helen Demetriou, Julia Flutter, John MacBeath, Donald McIntyre, Kate Myers, Dave Pedder, Beth Wang.  
 University of Sussex: Michael Fielding, Sara Bragg.

King's College, London: Diane Reay.  
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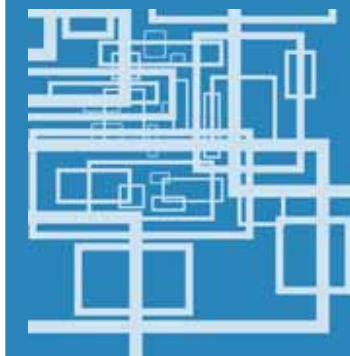


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## Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP involves over 30 research teams with contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Work began in 2000 and will continue to 2008/9.

**Learning:** TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK.

**Outcomes:** TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes, including the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

**Lifecourse:** TLRP supports projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

**Enrichment:** TLRP commits to user engagement at all stages of research. It promotes research across disciplines, methodologies and sectors, and supports national and international co-operation.

**Expertise:** TLRP works to enhance capacity for all forms of research on teaching and learning, and for research-informed policy and practice.

**Improvement:** TLRP develops the knowledge base on teaching and learning and policy and practice in the UK.

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