

Press release from the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme

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Consulting pupils can improve learning

Asking pupils what they think about school is one of the most effective ways of improving education, according to research just completed by a project in the UK's biggest education research initiative, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Jean Rudduck of Cambridge University, co-ordinator of the three-year research project, said: 'Pupils have a lot to say about teaching and learning. They make the most of opportunities to offer ideas to improve learning. Being able to talk about learning and teaching - and being taken seriously - helps pupils develop a stronger sense of self-worth. They feel more included in the school's purposes. For the teachers, consulting pupils can improve understanding of how they engage and disengage at school and help build more open and communicative relationships.'

Professor Rudduck and her team worked with 48 primary and secondary schools in England, Scotland and Wales.

Jean Rudduck said: 'There is an increasing emphasis on citizenship skills being taught at school. When pupils are consulted, their planning and communication skills improve and they take more responsibility for their actions. Consultation can also help teachers and pupils achieve a more collaborative learning culture in the classroom and the whole school.'

Consultation gives a voice to pupils whose views are not usually heard. Pupils who are disengaged or disruptive in class can often give constructive accounts of what makes them switch off. Teachers can use such insights to improve learning in the classroom.

Consultation also helps teachers to learn from and about their pupils. It helps them see teaching and learning from a new angle, and to see capabilities in their pupils which were not apparent before. Teachers are often surprised by their pupils' competence in taking on new roles and responsibilities, as mentors, teachers and even researchers.

The research shows that teachers welcome the richness, the positive nature, the insightfulness and the good sense of pupil ideas. Teachers can make direct use of pupils' suggestions to plan their teaching in ways that motivate pupils and enhance classroom learning.

Professor Rudduck said: 'Pupil consultation is not easy. Teachers, pupils, governors and parents all have to be convinced that it has something to offer. Our work has pointed to ways of supporting teachers who want to consult their pupils more effectively.'

Local education authorities are interested in pupil consultation and some are offering strong encouragement. Bedfordshire LEA has established a pupil voice support service, led by the former deputy head of a school which the TLRP researchers have worked closely with. West Sussex has shown interest in pupil voice and a new initiative is being launched soon in East Sussex. The National College for School Leadership is also offering strong support to teachers interested in developing pupil consultation through its Networked Learning Communities Programme.

The project's publications (see note) have been designed to support teachers in finding out for themselves how involving pupils through consultation can strengthen learning.

Parallel work is going on in other countries and the project has links with researchers and teachers in continental Europe and North America.

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Note: five of the project's six books will be available by **early March** 2004:

- **Arnot, M., McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Reay, D. (2004) *Consultation in the Classroom: Developing Dialogue about Teaching and Learning* (Pearson Publishing, Cambridge, www.pearsonpublishing.co.uk).**

- **Fielding, M. and Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference* (Pearson Publishing, Cambridge).**
- **MacBeath, J., Demetriou, H., Rudduck, J. and Myers, K. (2003) *Consulting Pupils – A Toolkit for Teachers* (Pearson Publishing, Cambridge).**
- **Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2004) *Giving Pupils a Voice: How to Improve Your School* (Continuum Press).**
- **Flutter, J. and Rudduck, J. (2004) *Consulting Pupils: What's in it for Schools?* (RoutledgeFalmer)**

The project team was Professor Jean Rudduck (coordinator), Professor Madeleine Arnot, Dr Sara Bragg, Nick Brown, Nichola Daily (secretary), Dr Helen Demetriou, Dr Michael Fielding, Julia Flutter, Professor John Macbeath, Professor Donald McIntyre, Professor Kate Myers, Dr David Pedder, Professor Diane Reay and Beth Wang. They were based at Cambridge and Sussex Universities and King's College, London.

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme is a £26 million programme funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and by government education departments in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Its director, Professor Andrew Pollard, is based at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. More at: www.tlrp.org

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