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EDITORIAL

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The recurring theme of voice

Over many years we have been developing our ideas about 'voice' within CANTARNET, as you will see if you browse through the back catalogue of editions of the Enquirer (CANTARNET, 2005). We have been fortunate to hear a number of key speakers offering different perspectives that have filtered into our learning and practice. Now we find that 'student voice' is in high fashion. There is excellent and powerful work happening in schools, particularly within networks such as the National College for School Leadership's Networked Learning Communities where students run network conferences, participate in school decision making and support one another's learning. The 'Learning School' website (Learning School, 2005) shows a group of students from many different countries travelling the world to evaluate classrooms and present to international audiences. These examples defy us time and again to discount young people's ideas. There are really no boundaries to the potential for involving young people in leading their own learning, other than the limitations in our own minds.

This edition of The Enquirer draws together some of the ideas and themes from our last CANTARNET conference, our 25th, on The Learner's Voice, where following a Keynote Address by Dr. Linden West of Canterbury Christ Church University College we enjoyed a series of workshops led by staff and students from the Faculty of Education, summed up by Dr. Caroline Lodge from University of London Institute of Education, who is our external examiner for the MA programme around which CANTARNET is based. Our aim for this conference was to *problematise* the notion of voice, to move further in our understanding and challenge ourselves about our understandings within our research and leadership of school improvement. In this Editorial, I offer some initial thoughts. The other articles capture our discussion, very much representing 'thinking in progress'.

Engagement, learning, connection

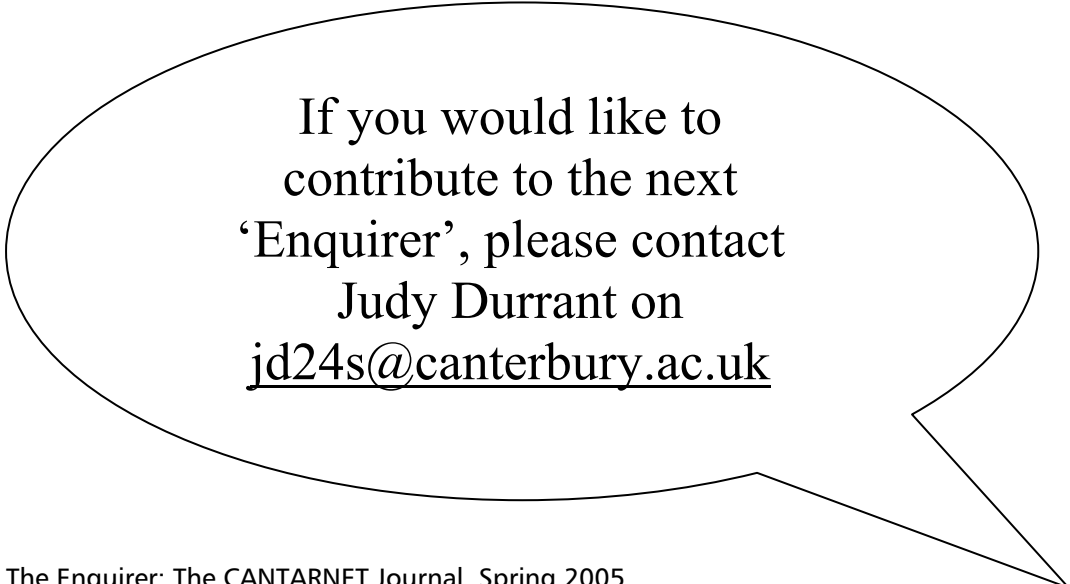
Voice is the key to the engagement and involvement of different groups in school improvement. Providing information as a sound basis for change is one justification for building people's ideas and opinions into the discussion and decision making. In addition, it raises awareness, demonstrates that people to have a stake in the change and encourages ownership. Giving voice is *not about questionnaires*. It generates energy and enthusiasm, develops self-confidence and self-

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'The Learner's Voice', 20th November, 2004.*

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efficacy and improves relationships. It values people and helps to transform school cultures. As John MacBeath found in his research on self-evaluation,

"... 'stakeholders' in schools welcome discussion and clarification of priorities as challenging, empowering and important in the context of their own school's development. [Discussion] was experienced by adults and young people as empowering and words like 'uplifting', 'challenging', 'fun' and 'exciting' were frequently used to describe the process."

(MacBeath, 1999:23)

This is not, then, a sterile exercise in finding out what people think about things but a process of engagement, learning and connection.

A 'pedagogy of voice' in learning communities

The inclusion agenda in schools and in society is founded upon principles of social participation, social integration and power that build human and social capital amongst communities (Ranson, 2000). An inclusive society supports the development of human agency which involves people having control over their own lives and the ability to help to shape the contexts within which they live and work. These ideas are central to CANTARNET and to the Masters programme in School Development around which the network is based. Voice is not simply about the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it is about having the power to influence change. Ranson argues that in order to foster learning between a multitude of voices engaged in multilayered activity, as in schools, there is a need for "procedures and traditions of conversation and dialogue, translation and negotiation" in order to meet the challenge of reaching "...shared understanding and agreement - a common voice - about the learning process, its purposes, beliefs and activities" (2000:266). He defines the creation of a learning community to include reflexive questioning of the existing community of practice, leading to dialogue so as to transform current practice and *design the future together*. Ranson argues that a 'pedagogy of voice' is needed that enables learners to explore self and identity, develop self-understanding and self-respect and improve agency, capability and potential. Agency and active participation is crucial in shaping both communities and the processes in which people are engaged.

Teacher voices: let's talk

If we want to enable many different voices to be heard, not just those of students, an important attribute is openness that enables people to develop their understandings of one another, both to challenge and be challenged. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) point out that there is an important tension between vision and voice in school improvement. They argue that while vision is widely agreed to be essential in developing consistency and confidence amongst a community, there are some who would argue that the key to teachers' construction and reconstruction of professional purposes and priorities, making the connections between individual and collective growth, is their articulation of voice. Obviously a balance is needed, since

"...A world of voice without vision is a world reduced to chaotic babble, where all voices are valid and there is no means to arbitrate between them, reconcile them or draw them together. This is... a world from which community and authority have disappeared. It is a world where the authority of voice has supplanted the voice of authority to an excessive degree."

(Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992:5)

This is difficult territory for schools. They need have confidence in their own values and purposes and to develop ways of working that celebrate the diversity of humanity, are inclusive of everyone's

needs and promote learning for all. This requires knowledge about the complex relationships between student, professional and organisational learning and about processes of change. This learning and change depends ultimately on teachers, supported by their headteachers, drawing on a web of internal and external support.

But are teachers the missing voices?

Some research conducted by CELSI (Centre for Education Leadership and School Improvement) for the General Teaching Council involved asking experienced teachers about their professional lives and motivation. One teacher explained why she responded to the invitation to take part in the research: "I wanted the voice of an older, more experienced teacher to be heard. Sometimes it's only the loudest voices that are heard." (Kelly, 2005:12). Another said, "No-one gives you a platform on which to speak about the research or other work you have done... But you can bring these things to bear in the classroom, if you're allowed to get on with it." (Kelly, 2005:12) It is disturbing that enthusiastic and experienced teachers (for these were the criteria for selection of interviewees), who are involved in leading important development work in their school, providing various kinds of support for colleagues, dealing with complex multi-agency working and community links, are doing this quietly, just 'getting on with it'. Teachers like those interviewed for this research are holding the work of schools together and pushing the boundaries of learning and improvement. How much more could we learn from them if there were opportunities to hear their voices? And what is the long-term effect on the profession if these teachers feel marginalised and unheard?

Voice as the power to change things

Where schools want to build capacity for learning, leadership and improvement, and aspire to become learning communities, they cannot ignore these messages. Occasional consultation is not sufficient. Where we talk about 'the school', we must ensure that this means 'the individuals in the school', not just the headteacher, an elite group or those with the most powerful voices. This means including not only students but teachers and other stakeholders in "collegial decision making" (Frost and Durrant, 2003:2). In order to do this, people need to acquire judgement and sensitivity through conversation and dialogue, leading towards mutual accountability and responsibility for one another's development. Schools need to take account of this argument in supporting shared leadership, while teachers can use these ideas powerfully in their leadership of change.

So here is our challenge for our research, leadership and practice, in our interactions with colleagues and students. Voice is not just about listening, it is about the power to change things. Are we prepared for this to happen?

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The Learner's Voice Making space? Challenging spaces?

Dr.Linden West, Canterbury Christ Church University College

reported by Judy Durrant

Linden began by referring to the community that is CANTARNET and its links with research and practitioner communities, noting its inclusivity in that people can *belong* as both practitioners and researchers. How do we strengthen the research dimension to involve us in scholarship, enquiry and questioning? There are tensions around the questions 'What counts as research?' and 'Who is the researcher?'

He raised important questions for us about conflicting or ambiguous agendas, drawing on his own autobiography as a researcher conducting longitudinal studies through which people explore their lives and experiences. We need to be aware of the 'language of voice', of giving people agency in research.

The researcher has to create a space and a relationship. The story is not simply told, but experimented with and interpreted and thought about. So research becomes a kind of 'learning space'. This highlights the difference between a 'report' and a story'.

Researchers need to be aware of their power. Is the respondent saying what the researcher wants to hear? What is the researcher's role in the creation of knowledge? What can and cannot be said? What is easy to say and what is difficult? All this is worked out through the tissue of our relationships.

In schools there is anxiety about projecting 'success', therefore it is more difficult to talk about things that might be thought 'less successful'. We may need to build up a more inclusive picture about what evidence counts.

We need to exercise care where there are dominant agendas, that we do not edit and interpret voices to fit in with what we want to say.

Linden concluded with a moving account of a woman who, through her art, forced the listener / onlooker to reconceptualise her story. He left us with these challenges from Shulamit Reihartz on the concept of voice:

- To hear what people have to say, we have to go into their space, or a safe space.
- Then we have to enable the person to speak and be able to listen by understanding who we are in relation to each other.
- Then we have to be willing to listen, even if it violates our expectations or threatens our interests.

"If you want to tell it like it is, you have to hear it like it is"

After hearing Linden's presentation, I read his book 'Beyond Fragments'. I warmly recommend it, both for its fascinating stories and for the exploration of the way in which the research relationships developed through conversations over time. It's in CCCUC library & bookshop.

Continuing our Sicilian links, we are delighted to publish this case study of development work by Giuseppe Micciche, head teacher of a school in Mazzarino. CELSI worked with Giuseppe's network of schools in May 2004, Giuseppe visited our CANTARNET conference in November 2004 and Robin Precey of CELSI is currently leading a headteachers' exchange visit for leadership learning and research. In January Giuseppe presented this paper at the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Conference (ICSEI) in Barcelona as part of a CELSI symposium.

ISTITUTO STATALE DI ISTRUZIONE SECONDARIA
SUPERIORE "CARLO MARIA CARAFA"

MAZZARINO



***AN EXAMPLE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ACTIVE
CITIZENSHIP BY ENGAGING STUDENTS
IN TAKING ON RESPONSIBILITY***

Talk presented to ICSEI conference, Barcelona, 4th January 2005
as part of CELSI symposium

**'Evaluation, evidence and school improvement:
how do we make effective links?'**

by Giuseppe Micciché, School Principal

Istituto Carlo Maria Carafa

The Carafa school is located in Mazzarino (Caltanissetta) in the heart of Sicily. It is a secondary school (13-19 years old) that includes different curriculum pathways (classical studies, pre-primary teaching and social work, technical-vocational pathways in commerce and surveying). There are about 600 students, 62 teachers and 8 administrative staff members and 8 caretakers. Mazzarino is an agricultural based town that has about 12,000 inhabitants. The school is aware of the importance of links between the schools' activities, the curriculum and the wider world.

The Annual "Ritual" of the "Assembly" or "Occupation"

Usually in Italy at the end of the year (November or December), students are absent for

some days from school, advancing political reasons, for example the finance bill in Parliament (cutting back on education costs), the financial support to private schools, the new School Reform, etc.. But, in fact, they get into a habit of simply not going to school or, worse still, they occupy the building through sit-ins.

Then they organise what they call a "permanent assembly" or self-management of the school's activities. In this case, most of the students spend the whole morning in the school, taking part in rare debates on specific problems or playing cards. Often, we play on the words assembly/occupation, because it is a little bit different: occupation could be seen as a public property occupation with liability, meaning it must be reported to the police and it is punishable by the law, otherwise an assembly is more tolerated.

Principals are in difficulty because they are powerless as they watch their school being invaded by the students, who don't pay attention to what he and the teachers say to persuade them to return into the classrooms. There is nothing left for principals to do other than wait for these "assemblies" to end.

This year, in many schools the problem is getting worse, in the sense that there have been a lot of acts of vandalism with damages in many schools. And every year, we are witnesses to what we call "the occupation for the Financial bill". The parents' position is reduced to a weary disapproval and this unloads the burden of the problems onto the principals to solve them.

Political approach, parallel leadership

From an *instrumental* protest to a sense of responsibility and citizenship of students. Against this background of general powerlessness, everyone tries to apply different strategies to avoid these absences. Generally, people are just more and more resigned to the inevitability of the matter.

The Carafa school, last year, encouraged the students into engagement and negotiations integrated within a wider project that involved the whole community, called "Manifesto to generate quality in the environment". The project was based on the contribution that everyone (the authorities, public and private bodies, schools and the students) could give to improve the quality of the environment, by exploring practical ways that schools can

follow to grow as a part of the community and the ways in which the wider community could support schools.

Generally, if students are involved in the decisional processes, this enhances their feeling of ownership and leadership. The school has already experimented these experiences. For example, at the beginning of the year, every teacher presents his/her work plan ideas to the students to submit them to a negotiation. This practise, called "*patto educativo*" or educational contract, gets the students more involved and motivated.

As far as the student protest ritual was concerned, the aim was to move the sterile protest onto a table of discussion and negotiation, creating a space in which all the members of the school could discuss important matters together and with the community to which they belong. This was done to enhance the school's capacity to gain and retain the involvement of young people in social and political processes and, also, to encourage and improve the development of mutual trust. Thus, we have invited the students to transform an *instrumental* protest into positive behaviour oriented towards a stronger sense of responsibility and citizenship. In this way rather than being simply just another school subject, "citizenship" becomes a key activity of the curriculum.

The negotiations table or “arena of delivery”

The students have been called to give their contribution. It has been requested from them to give something of their own and so far it has surely been the absence package that is consumed at the end of the year. The Carafa school has encouraged sites for student engagement. In particular, a negotiation “table“ was created with them. This engaged all of them in helping to create a more effective and better school.

The Carafa school has moved to renew knowledge and improve the **quality** of the learning and the teaching process, by listening to students regarding the educational processes, in which they could have a direct leading role,

- to create well being,
- to share with them the aims and objectives of their lessons,
- to make them aware of explicit assessment criteria,

- to involve them in the decisions regarding the purchase of school equipment.

By allocating the decision processes differently, the students are transformed into effective *decision makers* in the educational processes (educational agreement).

Strengths We have Identified

We have:

- ◆ developed spaces and practices within and between our organisation, creating the best conditions in which young people and adults can engage with each other, respectfully looking at the distinctive standpoints of each perspective and using them as a source for development;
- ◆ contrasted unproductive conflict by sharing practices that encourage our sense of responsibility (we have, already, stipulated a shared set of school rules with the students that has involved all the members of the community);
- ◆ decreased the students' absences (2002: 24 days; 2003: 15 days; 2004: 7 days);
- ◆ improved the school's atmosphere and generated the value that we call "fiducia" "trust", that should be one of the most important aims that schools must attain. What makes the difference is **trust!**

Areas for Development

- ◆ To use forms and structures that can link the student leaders to the whole student body, creating an improved sense of responsibility and of identity. Often in other circumstances the students as a whole are isolated from the student council that operates by law in all Italian secondary schools;
- ◆ It is important to use a public space more frequently in which young people and adults can, as mutual partners, develop their school and discuss matters that concern them;
- ◆ Students' involvement must not become merely the instrumental pre-occupation of school improvement, but a matter of active citizenship;
- ◆ Teachers should engage more with their students during educational activities.

SPERO DI NON AVER FRAINTESO IL SENS O DEGLI ULTIMI 2 PUNTI, CHE RISULTAVANO PIUTTOSTO OSCURI IN INGLESE.

**STUDENT VOICES: WHY LISTEN?
A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Report by workshop leader Robin Precey

The workshop was about trying to clarify the answer(s) to the question “*Why?*”. In so doing it should guide proper responses to other questions such as “*How?*”, “*What?*”, “*When?*”, “*Where?*” In trying to answer this question we were drilling into the very heart of education...what is it and what is it for?

SCENE SETTING

“Student voice” is a popular concept at present, as represented in the bibliography at the end of this section.

The term “Student Voice” covers a *range of activities* including:

- a) reflection – discussion – dialogue – action
- b) students as data source – students as active respondents – students as co-researchers
– students as researchers
- c) peer support systems (buddying, mentoring, tutoring, circle time)
- d) encouraging students to articulate their views and see through change (school councils, students on governing bodies, students on staff appointment panels, students as researchers)
- e) students as overt leaders (lead-learners, student-led learning walks)

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Activity

In pairs we took the statements on cards, read them on their own and then tried, through discussion, to come to a consensus as to whether each pair agreed, disagreed or were undecided about them. Some cards were deliberately blank for us to write our own statements on them that we believe to be true. By the end of the time allowed we placed them on the grid provided.

Statement cards had the following captions:

- When we talk about student voice it’s always the same sort of youngsters about whom we are talking – the brighter, more articulate, conforming and presentable ones. They don’t represent the views of the majority of students.
- There is a link between students being able to express their views to adults in the school who hear them and examination and test results.

- Student voice is really about school meals, the state of the toilets and, occasionally, charity work.
- As a result of listening to the students' views we take practical action to respond to them.
- The students are trained in how to express their points of view.
- The students' views are considered as important as those of staff and/or parents/carers.
- Students' views are sought on a very regular basis and this is built into most ways in which we work.
- There are at least formal 6 ways in which students do express their views in my school.
- It makes sense to seek student views so we can be seen to respond to keep them motivated and help improve their behaviour.
- Student voice is important because it helping students develop their democratic skills.
- It's the senior members of staff who generally are the ones who organize the ways in which student voice is listened to.

First we considered the cards in relation to this statement:

“We have student voice today because of these reasons”

Then we did the exercise again using the heading:

“We should have student voice for these reasons”

We then discussed the **similarities** and **differences** between the two grids.

DISCUSSION

Why are we listening to student voices?

Is it about performativity, getting better behaved students? Better test results? Foucauldian furtherance of governmentality imposed on students? Condescending? Manipulative?

Some would argue that the notions of “choice” and “voice” in the neo-liberal approach is illusory, aimed at increasing compliance and control. It is part of user-consumer power idea in other public services - “customisation”

Sarah Bragg (2003) writing about students as researchers, appreciates the ambivalence and its positive if constrained potential. She argues that we need to listen to student voices. There are gains made but prices paid.

We used Michael Fielding's framework for evaluating the conditions for student voice (Fielding, 2004, forthcoming)

<p>Speaking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Who</u> is allowed to speak? • <u>To whom</u> are they allowed to speak? • <u>What</u> are they allowed to speak about? • What <u>language</u> is encouraged / allowed?
<p>Listening</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Who</u> is listening? • <u>Why</u> are they listening? • <u>How</u> are they listening?
<p>Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the skills of dialogue <u>encouraged and supported</u> through training or other appropriate means? • Are those skills understood, developed and practised within the <u>context of democratic values and dispositions</u>? • Are those skills themselves <u>transformed</u> by those values and dispositions?
<p>Attitudes & Dispositions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do those involved <u>regard each other</u>? • To what degree are the <u>principle of equal value</u> and the <u>dispositions of care</u> felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?
<p>Systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>How often</u> does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur? • Who <u>decides</u>? • How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or <u>relate to other organisational arrangements</u> (particularly those involving adults)?
<p>Organisational Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the <u>cultural norms and values</u> of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? • Do the <u>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</u> demonstrate values supportive of student voice?
<p>Spaces & the Making of Meaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Where</u> are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place? • Who <u>controls</u> them? • What <u>values</u> shape their being and their use?

Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What <u>action</u> is taken?• Who feels <u>responsible</u>? • <u>What happens</u> if aspirations and good intentions are not realised?
The Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need <u>new structures</u>? • Do we need <u>new ways of relating to each other</u>?

ISSUES RAISED IN THE SESSION

- Even if we listen and hear our actions are often weak and inconsistent in response to student voice
- We also need to inform students of the actions or non-actions taken
- There is not one student voice but rather a chorus (sometimes discordant). How do we respond to this?
- Should the voice of the teacher (the professional) have more weight? The general feeling of the group seemed to be “yes”.
- But surely we as professionals have an advocacy role for our students?
- Who draws the boundaries for discussions?
- Why is student voice suddenly being pushed by government as an initiative?
- Are real issues emerging for this approach or is reality hidden?
- Should student voice not be re-labelled “student participation”?
- Surely it is the one-to-one relationships that count and that we should be focused on rather than groups e.g. student councils
- The distinction between formal and informal processes is important. Is the latter being more significant in terms of school cultures?

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CANTARNET CONFERENCE 25th NOVEMBER 2004

Learning dialogues for teachers and students
A Case Study of School Change

Ruth Waller

Ruth is headteacher of St. Paul's Church of England Primary School, St. Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex, a large Primary School in an Education Action Zone. She initially became involved in research to support development of speaking and listening in the Foundation stage, as part of her Masters degree. The project identified pupil voice as a focus for further development. This was corroborated by the school's self-evaluation exercise and is endorsed by current research on the value of student voice in school improvement. After reading about recent projects and exploring available materials and tools, Ruth designed a questionnaire to explore pupils' ideas and experiences about their learning, but she was worried about being swamped in increasing mountains of data and about how to instigate whole school change.

At a staff meeting Ruth invited comments from teachers. Year teams wanted to customise the language and content of the instrument for their own year. Ruth allowed them time, realising data would be far more complex and less comparable but taking this risk in order to involve staff. Comparison of the adapted questionnaires led to further refinement and by this time the teachers were becoming very interested in what they might discover. The whole staff agreed to administer the survey themselves and the year heads undertook to collate responses, which again they each did in their own way.

Ruth's staff had a high degree of ownership of this messy data and began to identify emerging issues, some authenticated by their own experience and some presenting new questions and challenges. These changed from Reception to Year 6, for example there was a serious issue of decreasing confidence as learners over time. Year teams tackled issues raised for their groups, while Ruth constructed an overview of whole school issues. She revitalised the School Council to deal with immediate practical issues; students from Years R-6 were involved in an experiment to find the best writing implements, as children had said they found their pens difficult to use. The school adopted the preferred tools (ball point pens) straight away.

All teachers have become engaged in, and enthusiastic about, the process of enquiry that has generated dialogue with their pupils about learning. Some have developed this further to follow their own lines of enquiry. The value and power of the process has taken them by surprise. This collaboration has encouraged them to share and develop other ideas within and between teams. The school has become committed to involvement of pupils in their own learning, and is now challenged about the extent to which pupils can genuinely exercise influence over curriculum and pedagogy. They will carry these convictions and new ways of working into a new school initiative in which the Foundation Stage curriculum is to be delivered through the arts.

Ruth completed her Masters Degree last term.

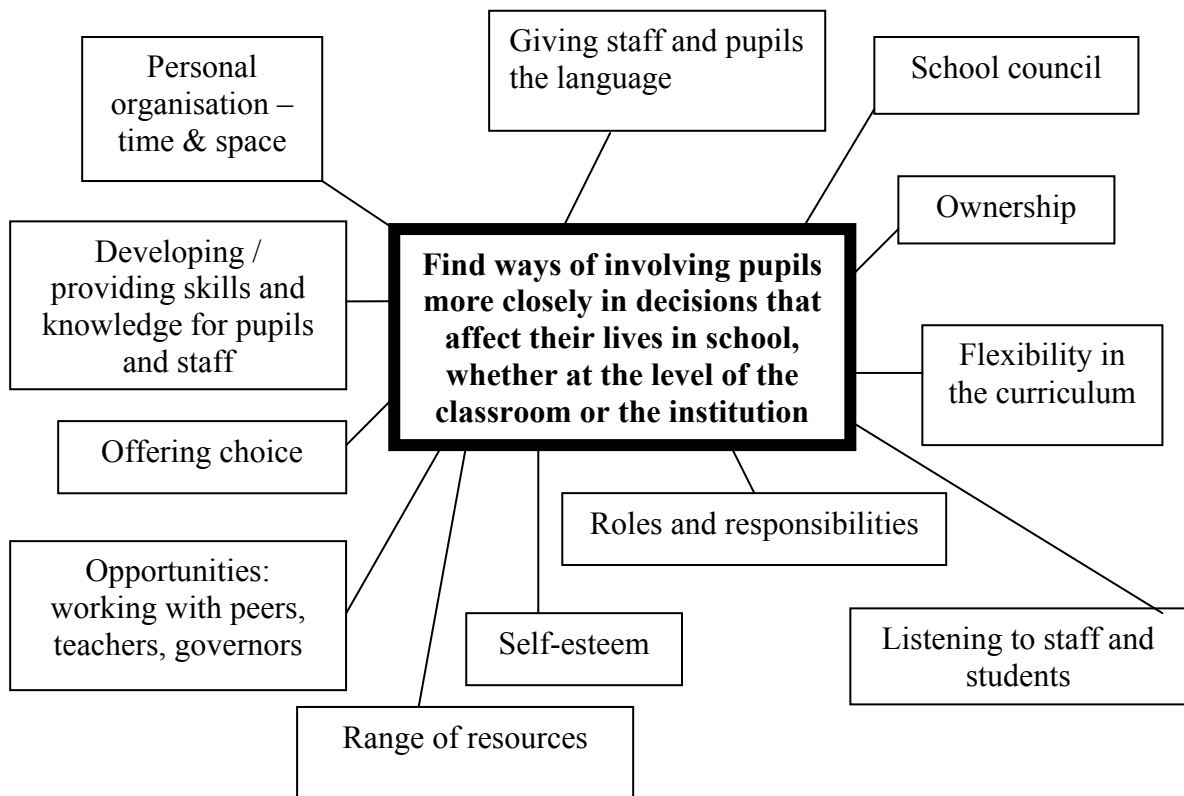
Involving Students in their learning: sharing and evaluating strategies

Workshop led by Dr. Gary Holden, Borden Grammar School

Gary began by presenting us with a real-life ethical dilemma: a teacher wants to involve students from years 7-13 in evaluating the practice of Newly Qualified Teachers. We discussed the knotty ethical dilemmas involved and concluded that while there may be some value in student observations and feedback to teachers, giving unlimited rein to student voice is not always appropriate or helpful and has to be approached with care.

Gary gave each of two groups a statement representing a challenge to schools and asked us to build a response from our experience and research. The groups included academic, teacher, headteacher and Local Education Authority Advisor perspectives. The resulting diagrams are presented below. They provide plenty of food for thought and also demonstrate the power of this apparently simple exercise.

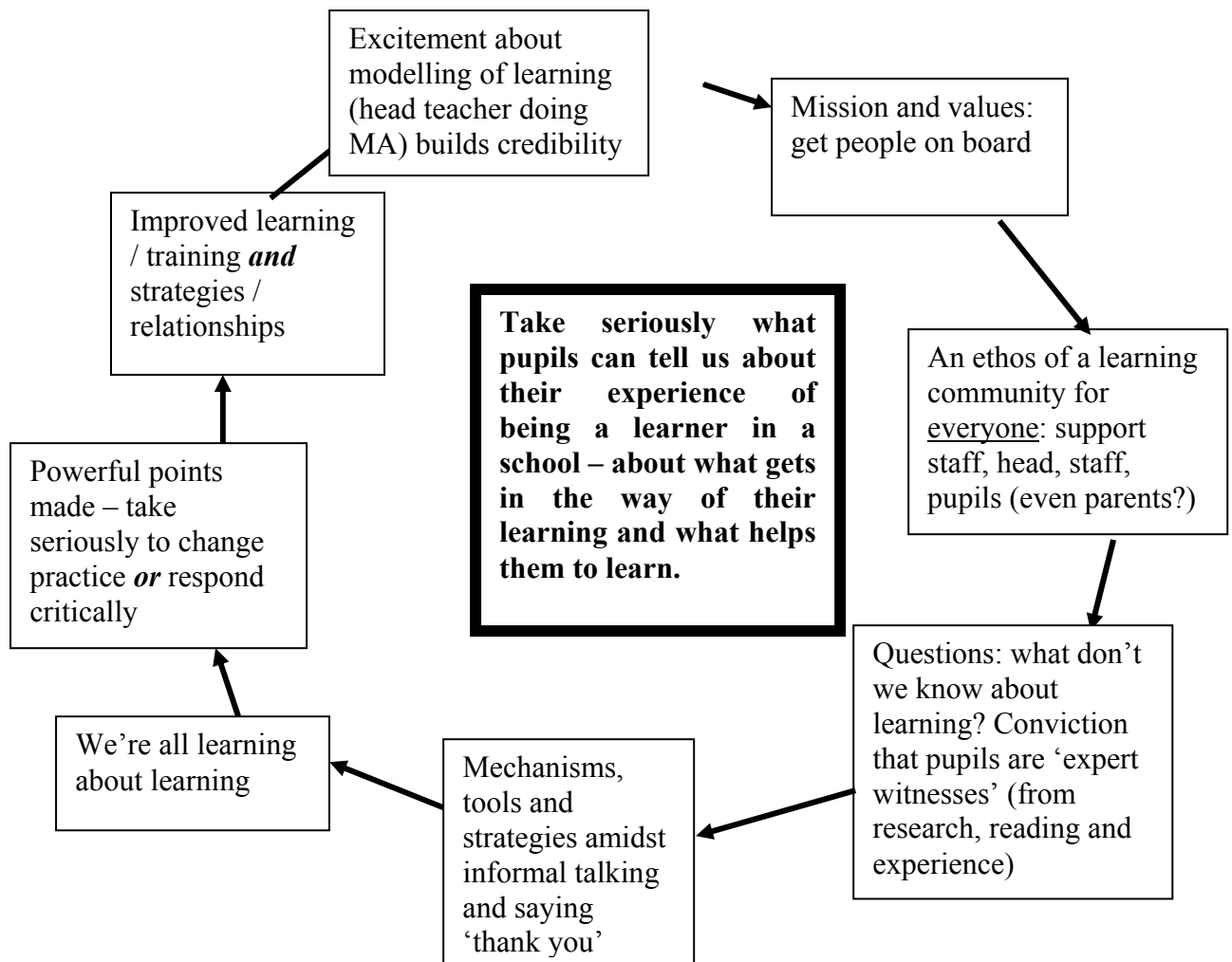
Group One's Diagram:



Group Two's Diagram

This group decided to focus on the process used by Ruth Waller from St. Paul's Church of England Primary School, St. Leonards-on-Sea. Ruth had already led a workshop earlier in the morning based on her enquiry-based development work as a head teacher wanting to develop pupil voice in her school (see previous article for her story).

Ruth began with the excitement of modelling learning herself through her MA. As she described the stages in the process through which she led her school, this came full-circle to the point where all staff were engaged in learning with and from their pupils, modelling learning for each other.





Canterbury Christ Church
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CANTARNET and CELSI

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CANTARNET is 'Canterbury Action Research Network'.

It was established in 1996 to provide a network of support for teachers engaged in inquiry-based school development work. This is based around a school-based MA programme in School Development but has drawn in many others interested in such work. We hold three conferences a year at which we publish this journal, now in its 26th edition, and have a website with contacts list for those wishing to make links with others working on similar themes for development.

CANTARNET has pioneered an approach that is being developed more widely within our Faculty of Education to establish a 'Community of Masters' to support all those working on Masters programmes.

Schools can become affiliated to CANTARNET for a small annual fee, which entitles *all members of staff* to attend conferences. Individual membership is also available. Please contact Angela Barker in the CELSI office at Canterbury Christ Church University College, 01227 782318, email: a.barker@cant.ac.uk for more details.

CELSI (Centre for Education Leadership and School Improvement)

This is a Department of the Faculty of Education, within which CANTARNET operates. Brian Lowe is currently acting director. CELSI is involved in a wide range of work, regionally, nationally and internationally, in partnership with schools, Local Education Authorities and other agencies.

If you are interested in knowing more about CELSI or about becoming a CELSI Project Associate, please contact Alun Davies, Tel: 01227 782497, email: acd1@cant.ac.uk, or visit the websites:

CANTARNET (Canterbury Action Research Network):

<http://education-resources.cant.ac.uk/cantarnet/>

CELSI:

<http://education.cant.ac.uk/Centre-for-Education-Leadership-and-School-Improvement/>

Summing up of the CANTARNET conference on The Learner's Voice, 24th November 2004

Caroline Lodge offered her perspective on the morning's activity, drawing on her own doctoral research and publication (Carnell and Lodge, 2001). She began by affirming the extent to which schools are under pressure and that pressure is communicated to teachers and then to students.

She left us with three questions to ask:

On what shall we consult pupils?

Comfort issues are not the heart of it – this is rather tokenistic. What is the real agenda?

What is it possible to say?

What are pupils allowed to talk about? Do we need to enable pupils to change the agenda?

By what means can we raise up student voices?

Through research? Through schools? Through teachers and teacher research? We need to learn how to do it through development of relationships.

Pupils as well as teachers need to learn and they need supportive, adaptable structures and frameworks. How can we allay teachers' fears?

It is useful to think in terms of stories – "Tell me a story" invites people's lived experience.

We need to be aware of power relationships and the notion of legitimacy - who gets to speak? It is important to encourage plurality - there is a danger of the tyranny of the majority.

Finally we come back to the *purpose*. Do we listen to student voices for teachers' benefit? For the benefit of the learners themselves? For OfSTED? To engender compliance?

We must be careful to problematise models like Hart's ladder of participation (as discussed in Ruth's workshop): some activities under the banner of pupil voice might do more harm than good, some activities might be cosmetic or tokenistic.

**How subversive can learners' voices be?
Will they be able to change anything?**

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