

LEARNING TO BE ENGAGED CITIZENS

The Action Research Account of a Pilot Project
designed to lay the foundations for a larger Programme

by John Bazalgette



The Grubb Institute of Behavioural Studies Ltd © 2007

Cloudesley Street, London N1 0HU

Tel: +44 (0)20 7278 8061 Fax: +44 (0)20 7278 0728 Email: info@grubb.org.uk

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Section 1 Disillusioned, apathetic, or just don't know how to engage? An action research project

1.1 The action-research context

Action research has been defined as 'the study of a social situation carried out by those involved in that situation in order to improve both their practice and the quality of their understanding' (Winter and Munn-Giddings 2001:8).¹ The programme of which this pilot project is a part is truly an action research project in that sense. To understand and assess its significance it is necessary to take account of the wider context within which it takes place.

1.2 The electoral context: evidence of lacking a feeling of belonging?

There are grounds to be concerned about the low turn out at British general and local elections, especially by young people. But this may not be a case of apathy or even lack of information, but of understanding about how to engage with structures. This could be thought of as an *emotional* issue rather than an intellectual one.

A range of enquiries and initiatives now exist which profile this question including the Electoral Commission's study of the 2001 election² and the most recent general enquiry by the Commission chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy which reported in February 2006.³

The Electoral Commission's study took particular account of the turnout of 18-24 year olds which was markedly lower than other age groups. This continued a trend from previous elections. There are various possible reasons proposed as to why this disengagement from politics might be the case, including disillusion, apathy and alienation. These 'reasons' are frequently picked up in the popular press. But the Commission particularly points out that the MORI Survey data, on which the Commission's report was based, suggests a different perspective.

¹ Winter R and Munn-Giddings C (2001) – **A handbook for Action Research in Health and Social Care** – Routledge UK

² The Electoral Commission (2004) **Political engagement among young people: an update** - available on the Commission's website.

³ **Power to the People: an independent Inquiry into Britain's democracy** (on www.powerinquiry.org/report/)

1.3 What if the issue is that young people feel powerless in the electoral process?

The Electoral Commission's evidence indicates that young voters are particularly keen on a sense of participation, 'of having a say', despite their not voting. The Commission are adamant that 'apathy' is not the problem. Their report *Political engagement among young people: an update* says:

*Though they have well-formed opinions on, and are well able to discuss issues ... They have little patience with political debate, which seems to them to occupy a parallel universe to the one they inhabit. **It should not be assumed that this group are 'apathetic'** . They have strong opinions, and often feel passionately about public service delivery issues that impact their life and work. However, they do not make the connection between their personal dissatisfaction with a particular aspect of public life, and participating in the traditional political processes as a way of expressing that dissatisfaction, or seeking a solution to these problems.⁴*

Would the issue be more helpfully addressed if it were defined in terms of building on the desire to 'have a say'? It is all very well to have a voice: it is another thing to have something important to say and to know how to get it taken seriously. This is a matter of having the passion, the knowledge **and** the ability to take part.⁵

Besides worrying about elections, could it be that electoral behaviour is a particular manifestation of young people's *under-developed capacity to engage with complex organisations*? What if this is one particular form of not knowing how to belong and work through the normal democratic structures by which one is connected? If it is, it raises questions about the preparation provided in school and how that influences what kinds of citizens young people are able to be in every aspect of their lives.

While these are concerns in the UK, the concern about participation by young people is shared internationally. For example, Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC (1989)⁶ require that children should be informed and consulted about activities that affect their lives. The same issues apply at this level but now

⁴ *Op. cit.* page 10 (Commission emphasis)

⁵ *The point about apathy is also debunked by Baroness Kennedy's Power Commission, though they relate the issue to the whole population.*

⁶ *United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.*

children can be thought of as citizens of the world, not simply citizens of a particular nation state.⁷

While low voting rates by young people weaken our democracy as a whole, young people's difficulty with engaging with structures can have consequences in other areas of life.

1.4 The political context: belonging by statute or in experience?

What is now evident in British society is a convergence of interests and approaches to enable children to experience their connectedness with the wider society, - learning to be citizens - to learn from that experience and to apply it in their later lives. This is one of the five components of '*Personalised Learning*' which lie at the heart of the drive of current government policy.⁸

The range of the government's innovations and approaches to leadership by pupils and students currently adopted in schools is extensive. The Education Act of 2002 calls for the provision of greater pupil participation in the decisions regarding how they learn and achieve, as well as becoming much more involved in how the school is run, for example helping to interview new members of staff or contributing to decisions on school meals. The Act goes on to say '*School Councils have a vital role to play in promoting schools as strong community institutions*'.⁹

Recent initiatives encourage the teaching of citizenship in the classroom. There are many other examples of the government's concern about the involvement of children and young people in their futures.¹⁰

At the same time the initiatives concerning pupil and student participation taken by schools of their own accord to involve pupils and students is wide ranging: there are over 680 websites devoted to it. These range between descriptions of prefect systems, school councils and other variations on

⁷ See also the debate begun in July 2006 in the Spanish newspaper *El Pais*.

⁸ See the speech by David Milliband MP, Minister of State for School Standards 18 May 2004, '*Choice and Voice in Personalised Learning*'.

⁹ The spirit continues in that this intention is quoted in the White Paper *Higher Standards for All* (2005) paras 5.24 and 5.25.

¹⁰ See for example: ***Every Child Matters*** (2003), ***Listening to Learn*** (2003), ***Working Together: Giving children and young people a say*** (2004), DfES guidance about participation and handbooks for use in schools, the creation of the need2know.co.uk youth portal and wide direct consultation with children and young people. Lesson plans in citizenship are available on line from websites like the Chalkface Project. The DfES is funding a four year longitudinal study by NFER into Active Citizenship.

participation which are running in primary and secondary schools across the country.

Research into these examples tends to show that those children who take part in such programmes make good progress in school. This results from growing self-esteem, motivation, sense of ownership, improved attendance, enhanced attainment and feelings of empowerment.¹¹

So what do these initiatives produce for the other, uninvolved, students - those who are not prefects or elected to the School Council? These may be people who for various reasons are not able to be involved in these ways or not willing (for example, through living too far from school or needing to look after younger siblings while their parents work). How do they come to experience connectedness with the whole?

If the overall culture of the school changes to become more inclusive in a corporate sense, then they may also benefit: however if it remains largely elitist, apparently benefiting the few, then they may not.

1.5 The social context: the significance of belonging

Fulfilled human life at every level depends less on individualism and more on understanding one's wider belonging or connectedness.¹² The birth of a child requires a male and a female to connect and, if the baby is to make a successful beginning in the world, to stay connected; bringing that child up to adulthood takes place within a family - the child's first experience of belonging. During the earliest years the child learns about its connectedness, principally through the persons she/he is connected with - mother, father, siblings and the wider family. As John Bowlby, one of the most influential thinkers about the impact of early life experiences on later development and behaviour, put it:

No variables have more far-reaching effects on personality development than a child's experiences within the family. Starting during his first months in his relation to both parents, he builds up working models of

¹¹ See for example the work of Derry Hannam of the Phoenix Education Trust, funded as part of an ESRC project 'Consulting pupils about teaching and learning' presented to a seminar 'Pupil Voice and Democracy' in Cambridge 15 October 2001. Available through: ederry@demo51.freeserve.co.uk

¹² There are many sound sources on which to base this thinking. One of the most widely referred to is the work of John Bowlby on Attachment while Sue Gerhardt links internal and external processes of attachment psychologically and neurologically (S Gerhardt 2004 - **Why Love Matters** - Brunner-Routledge).

*how attachment figures are likely to behave towards him in any of a variety of situations, and on those models are based all his expectations, and therefore all his plans, for the rest of his life.*¹³

Taking that further, the 'shape' of the individual's connectedness goes beyond simple awareness of persons and develops through both awareness and the sense of belonging to more and more complex assemblies. This involves learning to use increasingly sophisticated 'working models' to think with: these aid the use of abstractions about the 'system' within which one is connected. First comes *'family'*, then perhaps *'play group'*, then *'class'* in infant, junior and secondary school.

Secondary schools are organised into *'forms'*, *'tutor groups'*, *'sets'*, *'years'* and in the *'school as a whole'*. These potentially provide good places to learn to think in these kinds of abstractions.

These wider and wider models of connectedness provide the basis for thinking about one's identity, both as being simply one's own self and also as a member of the wider community - hopefully an active member. Understanding oneself in one's different roles in *systems* calls for an understanding of those systems – what they are for, the resources they provide (including the human resources), the processes in which the resources are mobilised, and how those processes are structured so that those resources are used effectively. Systems exist in contexts, and understanding the different contexts enables the person to frame how they see themselves in their roles, both as participants in those wider connections and also as their own unique selves.

Without such an understanding of one's connectedness issues about behaviour and decision-making that affect others are potentially unintelligible. If one's focus is solely on an individual, the sense of the wholeness of the family or the school may be experienced as a threat. Being part of a fragmented whole - a dysfunctionally broken family or a malfunctioning school - contributes to a sense of being a fragmented self.

As the person enters working environments and belongs to other social enterprises a basic understanding of one's connectedness becomes essential to one's own functioning and to the healthy functioning of the whole. This applies whether the setting is one of *work*, *clubs* and *societies*, a *marriage* and beginning a *new family*, or *society* as a functioning whole. Without that sense of wider belonging, individualism mobilises drives and intentions that tend to fragment wholeness and create unhealthy states for persons, for organisations and institutions, and for society.

¹³ J Bowlby (1976) **Attachment and Loss** - Hogarth Press (p.369)

The consequence of fragmentation at the level of the nation-state underlies the concern of Baroness Kennedy's Committee, the Electoral Commission and many others.

1.6 The professional context: learning to belong

The profession most naturally concerned about what those who have been in their charge make of their work is the education profession. Teachers in schools are expected by society to accompany children from a very early age until they leave school and enter further and higher education or employment.

The question that we now face, given the issues raised above, is what can any child - whatever their situation - learn about belonging and connectedness with the school as a whole?

If they do achieve a sense of belonging, what was it that enabled that to happen? How is the attachment, which Bowlby described above in relation to parents, taken further as a result of their attachment to teachers? How can it be taken even further in terms of learning to belong to the ever expanding abstractions of 'class', 'year', 'school' and ultimately 'society'?

To put it another way, how is the idea in the mind of the child developed from understanding what it is to learn to be a *daughter/son* in their *family*, with all its satisfactions and frustrations, to learning to be *pupil* or *student* in *school* and *college*, and then on to being a *citizen* of the *state*? These experiences can be structured to work through different stages of development and enable young people to begin to know how to belong in society. This includes learning to be a citizen - and an engaged one at that.

Since schools are places designed to further learning for all their members, the question of how best to further the learning of everyone is critical. If what happens is that a select few gain while the remainder are left either to be dependent on those who 'know' or to muddle their way through as best they can then there are questions about elitism that need to be addressed.¹⁴

Schools work with *every* pupil and student. They have evolved organisational designs over generations which mean that through the classroom structure every child is provided with continuous opportunities to learn in academic

¹⁴ See for example B D Reed and J L Bazalgette (1977) **Education for Mature Responsibility: countering some of the ill effects of the present educational process in secondary schools** (pp 9-15 on elitism) – The Grubb Institute, London UK

terms. These may be ably or poorly delivered, but the structure ensures that there is no child in a school who is not the responsibility of at least one adult in the role of teacher, tutor or other educational role. At the heart of this is the idea of preparation for active citizenship.

As the September 2006 report on citizenship in secondary schools stated:

To put it simply, a good school council represents education for democratic citizenship in action: a school council that is the preserve of an elite group, or the headteacher's poodle, is a weakness rather than a strength.¹⁵

1.7 'Belonging' as the subject for study: learning to use power and authority

Baroness Helena Kennedy's Inquiry focused upon changes that might be made to enable those who already have the vote to feel that it is worth using. They also recommended that the voting age should be lowered to sixteen. They went on to suggest that voter registration should be automatic at 16 years old, and that the citizenship curriculum should be shorter and lead to a qualification.¹⁶ Given the argument we have begun to advance, we feel that, desirable though these proposals are, they will be limited in their effectiveness if the underlying issue of belonging - wishing to belong and knowing how to - is not addressed at the same time. The Kennedy report was called 'Power to the People': changing the structures may give the horse a chance to get to the water, but it needs to learn how to drink that water.

The human process of growing up involves gaining increasing power and learning to use it in relation to others whose power may be different: learning. This means that learning about our connectedness with others raises questions about the changing ways in which power is used in those connections.

¹⁵ See Ofsted (sept 2006) – **Towards consensus: citizenship in secondary schools** – HMSO/HMI2666

¹⁶ *Op cit* Recommendations 16,17 and 18.

1.8 *Learning how to work in role*¹⁷

All those involved in situations, children and adults, draw on their previous experiences of power - physical, mental, emotional and social - to understand the dynamics of power as they encounter them in practice.

The child's early experiences in school focuses on the teacher and their fellow pupils. For them the teacher represents the headteacher and the school; their fellow pupils are their companions and - except in terms of their capacity to perform in subjects in class or on the sports field - they are their equals. For the pupils and students, each teacher represents something more than simply themselves: their age and experience, subject specialism, and position in the school structure makes them different from the pupils. These attributes give them power, but children grasp very quickly how to differentiate between when an adult uses that power well and when they use it badly.

Where the adult's power is used effectively for the benefit of the children's learning, the teacher has authority and is experienced as authentic. This can be referred to as the adult working in role as 'teacher'. The children in their turn learn how to use their power. Paradoxically, being willing to acknowledge that one doesn't know or has made a mistake is potentially a source of power. The teacher who responds positively to the power of the pupils enables them to find, make and take their roles in the school, especially as learners.

Pupils and students all deal face-to-face with their teachers in classrooms. So long as each pupil develops a working relationship with at least one teacher in a classroom, and they feel they can gain from that teacher's experience in school, there is a chance of feeling that they belong to the school.¹⁸

However, other extra-curricular structures, such as the prefect system and the School Council, have to earn their credibility by their capacity to enable other pupils to feel that they help them to belong. Thinking of the School Council, in the way that the school devises ways of using structures through which the student voice is amplified, opportunities are created to learn about empowerment through representation both by elected and appointed representatives.

¹⁷ This technical question is explored in detail in John Bazalgette et al (2006) - **Leading Schools from Failure to Success** - UIT Publishing, Cambridge UK pp 67-97.

¹⁸ See for example I Kehoe (2004) - **Including 'Dizzie Rascal'** - The Grubb Institute, London UK

This is where the educational significance of the School Council comes in. By contrast with the face-to-face encounters in the classroom, where the teachers are appointed by the adult world's structures,¹⁹ School Councils can operate through representative structures, elected and appointed members who gather together to express the pupil/student perspective on the school and how it is working. Taken seriously, a School Council creates completely different learning opportunities from the taught or tutorial curriculum. However, it is important that these opportunities are recognised and capitalised on.

As the Electoral Commission and Baroness Kennedy's evidence shows, it is insufficient for democratic structures simply to exist: the capacity to know how to use them is essential. If the issue is that young people feel powerless in the electoral process, this calls for a need to strengthen opportunities which teach young people to use democratic structures effectively while in school. This will equip them to engage with society through the structures that exist in it because they understand how to.

1.9 A working hypothesis

The working basis for this action-research project is the hypothesis that:

- *Being disengaged from social structures is something that grows as a result of experience from which learning has been derived. At present, that learning happens incidentally in schools rather than through design.*
- *This is because those who make educational policy respond to their interpretation of the electorate's expressed priorities for schools and focus upon evidence of academic and classroom learning rather than taking into account evidence of other areas of learning.*

Like riding a bicycle or swimming, engaging with other persons in a shared enterprise cannot be learned without the experience of it. Cycling is not learned from the fact that bicycles exist or that books might be written about it. Cycling is learned by cycling.

Children learn to be members of a family - learn to be sons and daughters - by being a member of one, with all its satisfactions and frustrations. As they grow through schools, children have opportunities to engage with more and

¹⁹ *Though there are increasing numbers of schools that use pupils to help with appointments.*

more complex structures until they enter secondary school, which may be the most complex structure to which most of them will ever belong. They learn to be pupils, students and learners by taking those roles in the school or college in a range of different ways that suits each of them.

Learning to take part in organisations well means paying attention to what is involved, grasping what the organisation is for in reality. This enables one to learn especially about the use of power, one's own and other people's.

However, schools in our society are geared by political and professional practice to focus primarily on 'book' learning. What we have said before implies that learning for an effective life in the school, and later in society, calls for more than this. This calls for an understanding of what the school is for, how its structure of roles and relations is designed to further its purpose, developing the skill to engage with those in positions of authority and power, and how to use one's own authority and power. Learning these things may come about through happenstance, but it will be more effective if attention is paid to them.

1.10 A starting point for testing the Working Hypothesis

The question that needs to be addressed is how issues about Pupil Voice, Student Leadership and Pupil Participation can be explored. The question to take up might be put thus:

What would happen if the Student Council, the obvious 'voice' of the students, could not only speak eloquently, but with power and authority growing from research-based evidence critiques of the way the school is functioning? Would realistic recommendations about how the school might be transformed result?

That is the basis on which this action-research programme has been designed and its pilot study conducted.

Section 2 Responding to a school's need as identified by the Headteacher

2.1 *The initial encounter*

Jane Gray, the headteacher of Our Lady's Convent High School, a voluntary aided, Roman Catholic girls' school, was concerned about the way the Senior Leadership of the school was functioning and had been advised to make contact with The Grubb Institute by the school's Link Adviser. Her question in the first meeting with John Bazalgette was "*How can I transmit to others where I think this school can go?*"

That meeting was followed by a further series, from which wider perspective emerged, and in due course a more fundamental issue was identified.

2.2 *School Leadership: the existing situation as at April 2005*

Jane Gray had been in post for just over a year. The Governors had appointed her to make a real difference, but she felt that she had only been able to 'tinker' with things while she found her feet in the school.

She is only the 7th headteacher since the school was established by the Servite Sisters in 1904; she is only the second lay head in the school's history, all others having been Servite Sisters.

The Senior Management Team at the time consisted of seven members, all but one of whom she had inherited from her predecessor. One deputy was due to retire at the end of the calendar year. She was particularly concerned with the need for team building with the SMT as a whole: it seemed that the team had few ways of working together, tending to act independently or to refer things to the head to deal with, especially when two or three of them might have to take shared action. She wanted to work out how new definitions of responsibilities might fit together differently in relation to what the school really needed, and on that basis to be able to work more co-operatively.

The Governors had a reasonable working relationship with her: they maintained a distance, letting the head get on with things, though on one or two matters in the past they had resisted the head's advice.

The time was right for a rethink. The retirement of one Deputy head provided an opportunity to look at the management structure since she did not want to make a like-for-like replacement. Further than this, the school was coming up to a crucial time because of new regulations about payment for management responsibilities. These now needed to be related to Teaching and Learning, and pupil achievement. While implementing these could cause considerable disturbance, it could also provide a point of leverage for change and a new structure.

2.3 Culture

The school had a reputation as a Servite school with: the tradition of a Marian spirit; compassion in the honour of Mary; service to the poor.

However, the kinds of things she had found on her arrival amongst staff and senior managers were:

- ☒ The reluctance to be proactive - for example, when on playground duty staff tended to move away from difficult behaviour;
- ☒ A culture where 'obedience' was the principal value, the effect of which was to drive decision-making upwards, until she as headteacher was inundated with requests to make decisions, often about things she felt were trivial matters, often with inadequate knowledge of the appropriate details;
- ☒ A widespread fear of 'loss of control' and reluctance to take risks;
- ☒ Assemblies tended, traditionally, to be 'a ticking off and a prayer'; there was no tradition of pupil participation;
- ☒ She experienced a climate of passive resistance to change - no outspoken opposition, but just a climate that would not budge;
- ☒ Some of the lessons she had observed were desperately dull, yet these teachers still appeared to deliver 'good' results in terms of exams.

Amongst the girls, she noted:

- ☒ A widespread loudness;
- ☒ A general willingness to learn;

- ☒ A willingness to wear school uniform;
- ☒ She had found a 'recurring theme of girls helping one another, caring for each other ...';
- ☒ They showed an inclination not to suffer fools gladly (especially amongst staff);
- ☒ They were aware which teachers they could take advantage of, and which needed to be taken seriously - good teachers were appreciated;
- ☒ They had a sense of ambition to get to university (2-3 girls hoping to get Oxbridge places each year), and not seeing themselves as stuck in Hackney or North London for life;
- ☒ However, the cramped conditions, especially in the playground, meant that there was a feeling of 'sitting on a bomb' at break and lunch times.

Since her arrival she had introduced some innovations:

- ☒ A raised profile for the Student Council, which had been resisted, and getting it through had felt like 'pulling teeth amongst staff';
- ☒ The 'resurrection' of the prefect system, with a job description and open application for the post;
- ☒ To test whether her impressions were based on reality, she had set up studies of student attitudes by Cocentra, the London Challenge Survey by Keele University and Investors in People (See outlined findings below);
- ☒ She began using Senior staff to observe lessons and to report back to the SMT on their findings;

In all of this she felt a general sense of fragility across the school in the face of change.

2.4 Independent evidence

The head had mobilised several studies in order to provide a sound basis for transforming the school. The following evidence is drawn from their reports.

Cocentra Study (Summer 2004)²⁰

The Cocentra major points were vital to any effort to transform the school:

- ☒ *“Currently the school’s overall capacity to initiate, respond to, manage and sustain change, both where the necessity for change has been identified by the school and for externally initiated change, is limited by aspects of the leadership and culture. Many of these aspects are to do with knowledge and understanding (as evidenced by the large numbers of ‘don’t know’ responses) rather than negativity but they nonetheless restrict the school’s future development.” (p3);*

- ☒ *The head’s own leadership was rated by staff and governors as mixed with a range of strong points and weaknesses, with weaknesses tending to outweigh the strengths. (pages 5-6);*

- ☒ *The school’s organisational culture was rated by staff and governors as having areas of particular strengths and weaknesses. Overall Cocentra felt that weaknesses and strengths were broadly in balance but some positive indicators were countered by negative ones. They rated the overall picture as ‘indistinct’. (pages 7-8);*

- ☒ *There were grounds for reflecting that the responses about the head’s leadership may say more about previous leadership styles and cultures than the reality of Jane Gray, which have been projected onto her;*

- ☒ *What emerged quite clearly was the concentration upon teaching in the school, which is seen as very strong;*

- ☒ *The Pupil Attitudinal Surveys were important, showing mixed replies to certain statements. Eg Y8 who indicate that there were problems of behaviour in class which contrasts with how pupils know they should behave.*

The London Challenge Report (Summer 2004)²¹

This report made the following points:

- ☒ **Y7 pupils** *While 46% of all Y7 pupils think that most teachers are good at keeping control in the classroom, 24% of Y7 pupils feel that classroom disruption happens every day; 43% say that other girls are ‘so noisy’ as to*

²⁰ Cocentra (Summer 2004)- **Future Proof – Essential audit summary: Final Report - Cocentra**

²¹ London Challenge Survey (2004) – **Analysis of Findings: Our Lady’s Convent High School** – Keele University, Centre for Successful Schools

prevent them working; 14% say that other pupils make fun of those who work hard; 26% think racism is an issue in the school. (para 4.7);

☒ **Y10 pupils** This mostly gets worse by Y10, where 37% now say that disruption of lessons is a daily occurrence; 45% now say that other girls are 'always or often so noisy in class that they find it difficult to work'; 18% say other pupils make fun of those who work hard. The one positive change is that racism is seen as less of a problem (3% now). (para 5.6);

☒ **Pupils overall** As a whole pupils (62%) do not feel that teachers effectively deal with bullying; 60% do not feel they can go to a teacher with a problem; 63% of pupils think that teachers are not good at dealing with bad behaviour in class. (Table 3 Qs 54, 51 and 70);

☒ **Teaching** By contrast, 60% of pupils felt that teachers explained what was supposed to be learned in every or most lessons, while 35% felt that teachers sometimes explained the purpose of lessons. (Table 3 Qs 64 and 65);

Investors in People Report (June 2004)²²

This report tended to say things that contrasted with some aspects of the Cocentra report.

☒ Staff appreciated the head's leadership style, finding it a more positive, open and available style than had been experienced before;

☒ Aims and objectives were now more measurable;

☒ Long serving staff said that the school had been driven by the previous head and that many decisions were taken by her, while the new head was prepared to give people responsibility and trust them to get on with things;

☒ Previously the staff had been told the vision, values and objectives, whereas now they feel they have more input.

The head felt that the IIP report was too uncritical. IIP had got the answers they were hoping for and accepted things that people said without testing them.

²² *Investors in People (2004) - Post Recognition Review Report for Our Lady's Convent High School – Investors in People*

The Ofsted Sixth Form Questionnaire (April 2005)

This survey showed mixed results:

- ***Positively:*** Over 80% of students felt they were well taught and encouraged to research topics independently (Qs 5 and 6); just over half felt that they were well informed about their progress in relation to the qualifications they hoped to get (Q8); about 80% felt that their work was thoroughly assessed and that teachers were accessible to them if they had difficulties with their work;
- ***Negatively:*** However, only just over 50% felt treated as a responsible adult and that the school listened and responded to the view of Sixth Formers (Qs 13 and 14). More worrying was that only 35% felt they could rely on strong, sensitive support and help from the school when they had personal problems (Q11).

Ofsted, in November 2005, rated the school as improving, the headteacher agreed, but felt there was room for further improvement: to her mind the school was coasting, not simply in terms of exam results, but also in that there was a climate of complacency around. On the basis of her experience of teaching and managing in both maintained and independent schools, she recognised the kinds of under-performance to which others were not as sensitive.

2.5 What was the desire of the head?

When John Bazalgette asked how Jane Gray would describe her desire for the school, she began by saying that she wanted to enable the school to 'raise its game' and she made the following points:

- ☒ *In a complex world people need to be able to think for themselves, make judgements and act upon them. She wanted the school to be a place that equipped its students for the maturity which that responsibility would require;*
- ☒ *To do this would mean breaking out of the 'silo' culture, where classrooms were a kind of bunker in which teachers could carry on doing whatever they had done over the years. There was also evidence that senior staff worked without a basis of mutual understanding of what it meant to lead and manage across the school as a whole: they conceived of the school as a larger version of a class room;*
- ☒ *There was a continuous, though low, level of bullying in the school which was proving hard to eradicate;*

- ☒ *The world of work and family life into which girls would go after they left education was one in which the demands on them, especially when they started a family, would be harder than for most of their mothers. The school needed to prepare its students educationally, emotionally and psychologically for the challenges they would meet;*

- ☒ *The school had few problems in enabling girls to get qualifications that matched their apparent ability, but she felt there was untapped capacity in many girls, especially in terms of personal maturity;*

- ☒ *What was difficult - and indeed resisted - was working to create a climate of challenge and support on wider issues that would contribute to deepening the students' sense of belonging to the school and their feeling that they could influence what happened in it. The maturity girls showed and their capacity to envision themselves and the school could be at a higher level than was current;*

- ☒ *While the RE Department mounted an excellent and effective programme of support for charities, the spirit that underpinned this did not apparently seep into the culture of the whole school to the extent that it might;*

- ☒ *As a Catholic school, though at one level there was evidence of a notable presence of caring interaction - willingness to contribute to tackling poverty, good attendance at Mass and so on - it was hard to feel that faith was a resource and a truly inspiring feature of the school's life;*

- ☒ *As a multicultural school there was work that could be done to enable those from such a variety of cultures, both to draw on their existing different cultures, and to engage creatively with the prevailing 'host nation' culture around them, without losing their sense of their own identity. Girls needed to learn how to belong to society, and learning to belong to the school was a first step in this;*

- ☒ *There was much more that could be done by using the creative arts, such as drama, to help girls prepare for their futures by tapping into their imagination in new ways;*

- ☒ *The prevailing culture of the school was one where major change needed to be brought about by the exercise of power and authority, especially by herself. She said "I am trying to prove that the school can be run on lines other than a dictatorship.";*

☒ *She was concerned to incorporate the five aims of the White Paper, Every Child Matters, and the Children Act 2005 into the life of the school,²³*

☒ *The overcrowding all through the school, and especially its impact on the lunchtime experience, needed to be dealt with. The Hackney plans for Building Schools for the Future (BSF) would be bound to relate to Our Lady's and she wanted to be in as good a position as possible to brief the architects about what this school would need in terms that were more radical than could be enunciated at present;*

☒ *The first priority of The School Development Plan 2004-2005 included increasing the leadership role of students through the School Council, the prefect system and peer mentoring;*

2.6 Facts about the school

☒ The school is a Voluntary Aided School and its Foundation Trustees are the Servite Sisters, who founded the school in 1903.

☒ It is an all girls' school with a four form entry from Year 7 to Year 11; but there are some boys taking part in some of the school's 6th Form provision (Years 12 and 13).

☒ Total on roll in April 2005: 770.

☒ The Sixth Form had a roll of 170.

☒ Exam results are good: 80+% A*-C GCSE in 2004, 2005 and 2006; quite reasonable A level results, though 2005 reflected a fall on 2004, which recovered in 2006.

☒ There are low numbers of SEN and Free School Meals, though this information is not given on the school's website. Over 50 different mother tongue languages are spoken by the students.

☒ The school is on the smallest site in Hackney, with very limited playground space; there are real problems at lunchtime with seats for only 140.

²³ *Precipitated from interviews and discussion with children and young people these are: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being.*

☒ The *Building Schools for the Future* programme (BSF) in Hackney should benefit the school.

2.7 *A systemic proposal: the new leadership project*

It was clear that on the whole there was not much to criticise in terms of teaching and the effectiveness of the school's capacity to help students get satisfactory results in exams. However, there was a great deal of evidence that supported the head's view that this was a school which was *coasting* - to use the government's phrase.

This was what she was determined to address, but the evidence from the three studies she had commissioned suggested that transforming the prevailing culture would be resisted at a deep level and, though some superficial changes might be adopted, the seismic change the head desired would be unlikely to occur. Indeed, the evidence was that she had already found herself slowly sucked into the prevailing culture and was now in danger of being neutralised on all the most fundamental things she felt the Governors had appointed her to achieve.

Thinking about all the issues as they had been presented, both by Jane in the meetings and in the commissioned studies, John Bazalgette proposed that a ***systemic intervention*** was the kind of initiative that would be most likely to make the difference the headteacher and the Governors were looking for.

This would bring about what is known as '*third order*' change²⁴, in terms of the shift in values and priorities - especially in terms of learning new ways to use power and authority in the school. This would mean that students would leave school more fully equipped to seek to make a difference in the world, both in terms of their own futures and of changing aspects of the world itself. Third order change is reflected in several of the kinds of transformation sought by the government in maintained schools, such as personalised learning.

Rather than proceed by focusing on individual issues, including initiatives like a team development project with the School Management Team, as Jane Gray had originally felt she was seeking, a quite different point of entry would be more likely to yield the kinds of results she was looking for.

²⁴ In first order change in a system, details are changed which do not affect the way the sub-systems or internal parts of the system interact with one another. In second order change, changes are made which cause the sub-systems to interact differently with one another. When third order change is introduced, the system interacts differently with its environment: this is especially true when new values flow from the kinds of change made.

Seeing Students as the Key Partner in School Transformation The initiative was designed to shift the psychological culture of the school away from the heavily 'top down' model she had inherited and to re-imagine it in terms of the corporate interaction between two groups of people:

- *the group of adults*, paid to be there as teachers and support staff;
- *the group of students*, present because of their age and because the school existed primarily for their benefit.

Seen like this, the fact became obvious that the Student Body has both the most to gain from the school's success and the most to lose from its failure. Once given confidence in their capacity to make a real difference, the pupils' motivation could become an irresistible drive for school transformation in exactly the terms that Jane Gray and the Governors wanted.

If the head could create a climate in the school where the Student Body was regarded as being the Key Partner in transforming the school, rather than beginning with the more conventional assumption of her primarily working through the staff (especially the teaching staff), a fundamentally different power relationship would emerge across the school. With the appropriate structure, every pupil's desire to belong to a successful school could be maximised on their terms, rather than on terms primarily controlled by the staff.

This would call for new styles of leadership at all levels of the school - including the pupils.

Towards a New Conception of the Head's Leadership In practice both Student and Staff groups work under the leadership of the head, though she exercises her leadership of each group differently. The key structure through which her leadership of the Staff was exercised at the time was the Senior Leadership Team, through which the subject, tutorial and administrative staff were held to account. Conventionally the head's direct leadership of Students had been exercised through assemblies and (depending on the particular circumstances) the school's prefect system.

The question was, how could the headteacher be principally experienced as **the** leader of the Pupil Body as a whole?

If the Student Council could be given greater potency (and credibility) in the life of the school, and not just be a forum of student opinion (often open to

unconscious manipulation by staff), the headteacher and the School Leadership Team could seek ways to be recognised as being responsive to the students' power. Then the required shift in culture away from 'top down' towards one of mutual accountability for how the school was functioning would be more effectively achieved.

Evidence-based Leadership If a new style of the school's existing leadership culture could be developed, synchronised with the style being developed with the students, then a real school-wide transformation could occur which would be both suitable for and conducive of personalised learning.

John Bazalgette proposed that the new leadership style that might be adopted should be what has come to be called '*evidence-based leadership*'. In this, leaders are equipped to offer leadership through a disciplined process of basing action upon working experience, which is analysed through testing hypotheses about what is happening in a system as a whole. What is learned from adopting this approach - which calls for working in a spirit of enquiry rather than making assessments on the basis of untested assumptions and opinions - would be likely to establish a new climate of learning across the school. It would address many of the problematic issues described earlier in this document.

Equipping Students and the Leadership Team A twin pronged approach would be necessary to bring about this transformation.

One would be to equip the head and the senior school leaders to provide evidence-based leadership for the school as a whole. This would involve individual work with the headteacher on how she was finding, making and taking her role as head, followed by a workshop for the Leadership Team as a whole. This approach would include supporting a designated member of the Team to work with the Student Council. The Grubb Institute was in a position to provide resources for those pieces of work.

The other action would be to provide the Student Council with a team of 8-10 trained student researchers to investigate issues that the School Council had identified as needing to be understood in depth if the student perspective on those issues were to be taken seriously in transforming the school. These researchers would need to be drawn from a Year that was not subject to exam pressures - Year 8 seemed the most suitable - and they would be trained in social science research methods by the Children's Research Centre

at the Open University,²⁵ who have several years' experience in this kind of work.

²⁵ For further information, see the Centre's website: www.childrens-research-centre.ac.uk

Section 3 Empowering the School Council

3.1 *Two interacting groups of people: the school seen systemically*

Two groups of persons: children and adults Students Engaged in School Transformation (SEST for short) is based on the idea that, seen systemically, a school is a place where a structured group of adults engages with a structured group of young people around a social task. The emotional climate that intuitively prevails in that encounter is that the young people's group - made up of inexperienced and as yet untutored children in the school - is seen to be, of necessity, dependent on the group of adults - experienced, qualified and trained to work in the interests of the children. The established structure of schools assumes that classroom engagements lie at the core of the teacher/pupil engagement. The bulk of the innovations and other changes to schools are delivered with that assumption largely undisturbed.

Just as bees do not question that the structure of the honeycomb is the core of the hive through which honey making is carried out, the adult world thinks of the school, with the classroom and timetable, as the equivalent of the honeycomb: the assumption is that everything that matters gets done there. Consequently, innovations based on children developing their own voice run the risk of becoming enmeshed in this powerful structure, and children may feel they lose their own potency and have great difficulty in breaking through the prevailing culture. In order to address the issues of pupil voice, where the teacher/pupil relationship in the classroom provides the dominant paradigm for all other relations in the school, another robust paradigm, functioning in parallel with the classroom based one, needs to be established. But, to survive and flourish, bees must go out collecting pollen to bring back so that honey-making can continue. Interaction with their floral context is essential.

Of course in most schools some pupils meet some teachers who create different conditions, both within the classroom or in other activities. In these kinds of engagement other processes are able to take place such as learning to belong, maturing and envisioning how things might be different. These links provide 'mini-paradigms' which benefit individual students, but without a shift in the school structure as a whole, the potential **generativity** of the school as a whole cannot be optimised.

In order to address the issues of pupil voice in a school, where the pupil/teacher relationship in the classroom provides the dominant paradigm on which all other relations are based, another equally robust paradigm, which functions in parallel with the classroom based one, needs to be established.

This paradigm would need to embody amongst its principles some of those which are contained in those desirable individual relations mentioned above.

Whose is the greatest desire for the school's success? Prime Minister James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in 1976 defined the principal context of schools as being provided by employment. The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced the National Curriculum, rigorous inspection and the publishing of examination and test results, placing the government's priorities as the dominant context. Since then the pressure on schools has been to prove their effectiveness to employers (appointing staff), government (proving its effectiveness to voters) and parents (choosing schools for their sons and daughters) all on the basis of good exam results, which lead to high a position in the 'league tables'.

All these pressures are founded on the adult world's view of what makes a successful school. But those who feel this pressure most acutely are the pupils: they are the ones who must deliver the goods in the end. This is not to deny the considerable efforts put in by teachers, but it is the pupils' work that gets 'measured'.

Teachers transmit the adult world's concern to the students in a range of manifest and latent ways. The staff's desire for the school to be successful inevitably gets mixed up with the pupils' and students' personal desires to succeed. While the established structure of the Senior Leadership Team enables work to be carried out with school's curriculum leaders, there are few students who would normally have a comparable structure or power to influence what happens in the school as a whole, even if, from their perspective, they can see ways to improve how things are done. Yet the students as a whole are the principal beneficiaries of a successful school.

It is not simply that they should have the democratic right to be able to engage actively with transforming the school, but if the whole student body is realistically motivated to transform the school for the better, very little could stop them. Conversely, in the unlikely event of their wanting to, they could destroy the school and little could be done to stop them.

Besides this, they can see things that the teaching body may not be aware of because of their particular perspective. This puts a gloss on what the Youth Summit that met in parallel to the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers said in October 2003 to the assembled Ministers: *'We can't do it ourselves, but you can't do it without us.'*

How can existing structures be made more effective? Students Engaged in School Transformation (SEST) takes basic structures that already exist beyond the classroom and sets out to maximise a school's potential by taking those structures very seriously. In so doing, the conditions are created whereby the four processes which equip children to enter the adult world - learning to belong; acquiring knowledge and skills; maturing; and envisioning different possibilities for oneself and for the school - can be activated systemically.²⁶

Diagrammatically the project works like this:

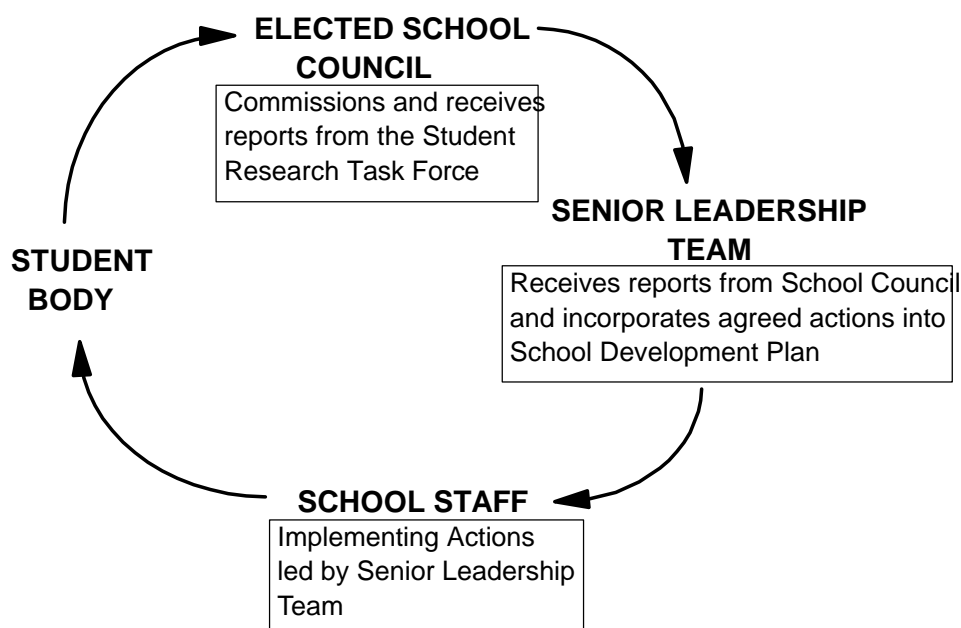


DIAGRAM 1

3.2 What if the School Council had real power and authority?

The question the project is exploring is:

What would happen if the School Council were given full authority to commission properly conducted research²⁷ into the issues that its

²⁶ These three processes are spelled out in detail and represented diagrammatically in a model called the Reed Rainbow of Human and Social Development. This is a way of envisaging basic processes in a school so that the work of integrating them can take place with greater clarity. See JL Bazalgette, BD Reed, JM Reed and I Kehoe (2006) - **Leading Schools from Failure to Success** - UIT Cambridge.

²⁷ After all, heads and senior staff commission research into different aspects of school life: why not put the same kind of resource at the disposal of the students?

members, representing all the students, felt were central to the school's transformation?

This means using the School Council as a major point of leverage, resulting in the SLT finding itself challenged to go beyond its own opinions in the formulation of its policies and Action Plans. How would that influence how teachers work with pupils?

The existing power relations across the school would probably be changed and the resources of the Pupil Body as a whole, including their common desire for the school to succeed, would probably be more effectively mobilised. The school might also break out of the snare of seeing 'citizenship' simply as a classroom subject, and make it part of the way the school actually works.²⁸

At its heart SEST could enable the school to become truly democratic in its culture, without endangering either the need for the headteacher and SLT to weaken its leadership of the school, or for the staff to lose control in the classroom: it could enable the whole structure of the school to hold everyone properly accountable for how they carry out their work - teachers, support staff and pupils. In addition, this way of structuring the school would provide everyone in the school with real learning opportunities about how to make Citizenship Education work.

3.3 *What would that involve in practice?*

The shift in culture that such a project requires can only take place if three things are addressed:

1. The leadership style and frameworks of thought used by the headteacher and the SLT are appropriate – called 'evidence-based' in this project;
2. The School Council understand what this means for their leadership; they recognise the different approach that is called for from them in their work and they feel authorised to work in that way.

²⁸ *The problem of the shift is illustrated in the Ofsted Report on Citizenship (op cit), where the underlying theme is about better classroom teaching, rather than re-structuring of the 'citizenship experience' of the pupils in the 'polis' of the school. The significance of making this shift effectively is supported by the NFER four year longitudinal study 'Active Citizenship and Young People' as described in its fourth annual report, May 2006. See www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/citizenship*

3. Students carrying out the research for the School Council are properly authorised and equipped for the task.

Our Lady's Convent High School went about doing this in the following way.

The Headteacher and the SLT

To create the conditions under which the School Council and the research they were to commission would be most successful, work needed to begin at the top.

The first step was for the headteacher to review her own way of thinking and experiencing herself in role. This has been done through *Organisational Role Analysis* (ORA), a series of one-to-one sessions with a consultant that have run throughout the whole year.²⁹

The ORA sessions were followed by a three day *Evidenced-based Leadership Workshop* for the whole of the SLT, and a six-weekly series of sessions of Role Analysis for the team as a whole. Here, critical incidents in leading the school have been analysed in order to embed the practice of working with evidence interpreted in relation to structural roles (eg as Deputy head - Curriculum, or Pupil in Year 9 and so on), rather than simply relying upon unexamined personal opinion. The critical issues raised have always related to the pupils' perspective and have surfaced tacit assumptions made about their behaviour in their roles, and assumptions being made about the SLT members' roles. The dynamic of the interaction between the assumptions about roles and the pupils' behaviour have been explored in greater and greater depth.

This enabled a new management tool for the SLT, the School Statement of Aim, to be developed. This Statement is:

People leaving Our Lady's are able to take up and develop their roles in society by drawing upon their

- *intellectual capacity*
- *responsibility*
- *spirituality*
- *humanity*

²⁹ *Organisational Role Analysis is an established way of working with top executives practised for many years by The Grubb Institute. The method is described in J. Newton et al (2005) **Coaching in Depth: The Organisational Role Analysis Approach** - Karnac, London*

acquired in our school by the way the school community has put in place the structures and processes to create an environment which recognises, promotes and rewards achievement and development.

This Statement was based on work from the Workshop which identified four strands to the overall work of the school. These were:

- Belonging and Initiation
- Education and Learning
- Maturation and empowering
- Transformation and envisioning.³⁰

This aim was transcribed onto a laminated card and used as a constant point of reference as members of the SLT worked in the school, providing a basis for consistent interpretation between them as they handled the immediate issues they encountered day by day.

The School Council

The experience of the Pilot Project demonstrated the need for the School Council to be fully prepared for the new kind of responsibility that they would have. For several unavoidable reasons the original setting up fell far short of what was needed, which had implications for the later phases of the pilot project. In particular, there were confusions over who 'owned' the research that was carried out in their name.

This led to some of the Council's representatives attending a training course, run by School Councils UK, late in the pilot's life. It also meant a change of senior staff member taking over responsibility for the Council and careful mentoring of its members in their work.

The Student Researchers

The team of 10 Student Researchers from Year 8 (13 year olds) were trained in sound social science research practice by the *Children's Research Centre of the Open University* (see their website). The Team was selected from the school's Gifted and Talented cohort. The reason for this was that at this first stage it was felt that the time taken in training (3 full days out of class, plus the time needed to undertake projects) would be less disruptive to them. They

³⁰ See J.Bazalgette et al (2006)- ***Leading Schools from Failure to Success*** - UIT Press Cambridge (p67-81)

undertook 10 projects, all except one of which was fully completed. Without prompting, all projects fell within four of the five outcomes selected by the students in Every Child Matters.

These outcomes are:

- Being safe
- Staying healthy
- Making a positive contribution
- Enjoying and achieving.³¹

This project has been described as being about Pupil Voice - and so it is; but it is about more than that. It is not simply about enabling the voice of pupils to become louder, but to enable that voice to be well-informed. Indeed, the project is about enabling *all* voices in the school to be well informed, leading to sounder decisions being made at every level of the school. We can illustrate it thus:

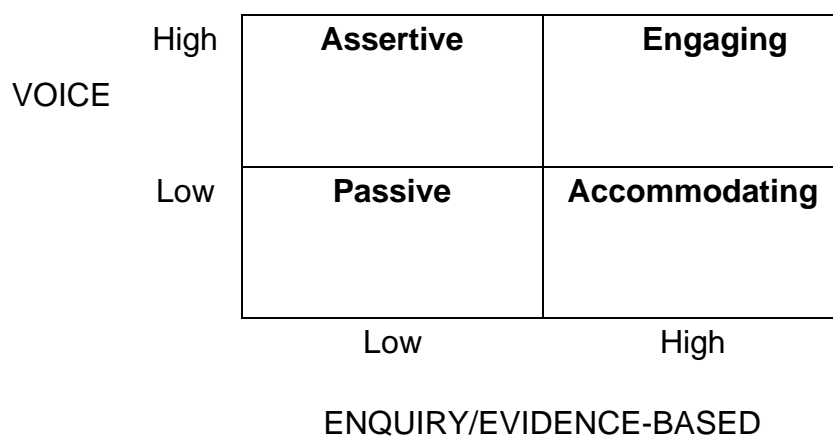


DIAGRAM 2

In a situation where the culture is one where there is neither reliance on being heard, nor on enquiry and evidence, the passivity leads to unspoken resistance and unused resources that exist amongst staff and pupils. If there is a move to reduce passivity, but what is aimed at is amplification of opinions, anger and resistance will increase.

³¹ *The fifth outcome is economic well being. (Every Child Matters, 2003, Green Paper HMSO).*

Where enquiry and evidence are used, but real dialogue about the meaning of that evidence is not increased, a culture of accommodation will prevail but without deep commitment across the school.

Where the capacity to voice perspectives is integrated with the organisational realities, then real engagement can take place between all parties.

The desirable position to attain, therefore, is where all decisions and practices by teachers and students are based on a high level of evidence derived from enquiry into realities. These need to be expressed sufficiently clearly to be heard and understood across the school.

In this way all the human resources in the school can be more effectively mobilised to further its transformation.

3.4 The Projects

Ten projects were commissioned and undertaken. In some cases researchers collaborated in carrying out the studies. Of the ten projects, nine were fully completed and reported on.

The subjects and methodologies were:

- *School dinners:* Questionnaires and focus group discussion on the options provided
- *The lunchtime environment:* Semi-structured interviews about the arrangements at lunchtime
- *The state of Marydale - a school annex in a poor state of repair:* Questionnaires
- *Respect for different cultures (2 researchers):* Questionnaires
- *Safety and bullying (4 researchers):* Observation and two types of questionnaire

It is interesting that the projects actually reflected four of the Every Child Matters outcomes in different ways: being healthy, feeling safe, making a contribution, enjoying and achieving.

All nine reports were presented to the School Council. After discussion with the researchers, the School Council presented the reports to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), supported by the researchers in case any questions arose that needed more detailed responses. The SLT in their turn reported on the research to the Governors. The Governors' Review Committee have taken up the report on bullying and are working with the researchers to revise the school's bullying policy.

3.5 *The present state of the pilot project*

The School Council, the SLT and the Governors have been energised by what has been presented to them. New understanding of the student perspective on life in the school has emerged. Practical actions that can enable transformation to come about have already begun to take place. Matters that take longer to implement are being built into the school's development plan for 2006/7.

In receiving the head's report on progress and plans for the future, the Governors have given the approach their full support. This needs to be built upon further, especially since this is an innovative and real way of incorporating Citizenship into students' experience.

Section 4 An interim assessment after one year: punctuation marks in a longer sentence

4.1 *Collecting evidence*

In order to gain an understanding of the impact of the project on the principal participants three enquiries were mounted. One was with the Year 8 students themselves to find out how they evaluated their experience. Another was with two key members of the School Council, gathering similar evidence.

Both of these enquiries were undertaken using a schedule of open ended questions, the interviewer being a university first year philosophy student. She had no other active involvement with the project or its staff, nor with the school or The Grubb Institute. She was briefed by the Project Director about the project design, its intentions and the questions that she would use. With permission from the subjects, she took extensive notes on the discussions from which these records have been compiled. The interviews were conducted at the end of the Spring term, at a point where the School Council had experienced their first session of reporting to the Senior Leadership Team.

The third source of evidence was a series of interviews with members of the school's Senior Leadership Team, conducted by a Senior Organisational Analyst from the Grubb Institute who was not involved in the project in any other way. The members of the SLT were interviewed at the end of the summer term.

At this stage any findings have to be seen as interim findings and open to revision. There were several difficulties in running the project, not least the illness of the headteacher during the first half of the autumn term when the project was beginning. The Director of the Open University's Children's Research Centre also had to go into hospital for most of the Spring term, which affected her contribution to the training and support of the Student Researchers. Even if those setbacks had not occurred any assessment at this stage would of necessity be for the time being and not the final evaluation of a complex project.

4.2 *Student Researchers' reflections on taking part in SEST*³²

Students were interviewed for the length of a lesson, in two groups of four and one of two. The interviewer used a series of open-ended questions to stimulate discussion. They explored the following areas:

- 1 How would they rate their experience on a five point scale?
- 2 What kinds of learning did they feel they had gained from taking part?
- 3 How important was the work to them?
- 4 How important was it to the school?
- 5 What criticisms had they of the project and the way it had run?
- 6 How would they advise the school about the future of the project?

Experience of taking part: general comments The researchers were first asked to rate their experience of taking part on a 5 point scale (1-low, 5-high). They all rated the experience between 2.5 (1 instance) and 4.2 (1 instance) with the mean being 3.6, and the mode being 4.

Positive comments:

Words used frequently were: *Enjoyment - privileged - proud - valued.*

Direct comments: *We stopped feeling like Y8 girls - we realised we could solve problems teachers can't - found you can do anything if you put your mind to it - felt independent, we weren't being spoon-fed any more - knowing we were chosen felt good - glad we stuck at it, though it was hard at times; it's not something I would ever have done before, but I'm proud I completed it - we felt more important - It was hard work but it was up to us if we wanted to take time over it or not - we have a better understanding and appreciation of how the school works - we can make a difference but there's a lot more to be done - we valued the group aspect - this is a real preparation for the world.*

Negative comments:

Words used frequently were: *Unheard - overridden - not respected -*

³² The interviews were carried out by Alyse Roberts, a philosophy student from Nottingham University, using a semi-structured interview schedule which led into an open-ended discussion.

not taken seriously - ignored - pushed into it - 'gifted and talented' (seen as exclusive and a criticism).

Direct comments

Re the School Council: *The major difficulty was handing over to the School Council, they took over all the credit for what we did - The researchers were just the tools to do all the hard work - They weren't involved at the start and they talked over us - They didn't ask us any questions about our work - The 6th Formers shouldn't have been involved; they're only going to be in the school another year - 6th formers don't use the same facilities as we do - When we presented to the School Council I had ideas but I didn't say them.*

Re the Selection: *The choice of who would take part was based on exam results; the school seemed to think that less clever people would get less out of the experience - I felt a bit pushed into it, but I didn't want to get into trouble for quitting - We felt awkward about being chosen because we're rated 'gifted and talented'. We get taken out of class, we go on trips to Oxford, there are secret meetings about us. One of my friends stopped speaking to me; others asked why we were so 'gifted'.*

Re the Training: *Some of the training felt too much like a lesson, even though it was optional - We felt a bit abandoned when the OU people left - The whole thing felt rushed and we covered too much in the training sessions.*

Re the lack of understanding across the school: *Staff and other students didn't understand what we were doing and didn't appreciate how important it is; my form teacher didn't even know about it - Some of the people we interviewed just took it as a joke, especially people in Y10 - At first it was a bit of a drag and I wanted to drop out - The secrecy of the project was a problem, it should have been made clearer - When it came to reporting, a lot of other things seemed to take priority over our work - We spent four months on this; I stayed in loads over Christmas to work on it; we need to be appreciated more - The worst thing about not being taken seriously was that I felt we were letting down our peers; they were brave enough to voice opinions in interviews or on paper but the School Council would laugh about it.*

Ownership The sense of the student researchers owning what they had done was marked.

Direct Comments

85% of it was all me; we did own it; no-one was in charge; they just watched over us - I got these results, I did it myself - I realised that I can do other stuff besides normal learning, it made me feel important and that I

could change the school - I'm part of this school as well and now I am more confident in my own ideas - we can make a difference but we know there is still a lot more to be done.

Their assessment of their own learning What the researchers said has been categorised into the four strands of the Reed Rainbow, a framework of thinking about the key processes of human and social development. This was also used in working with the members of the Senior Leadership Team. The students' direct quotes are reproduced here in italics.

Belonging - They felt that they belonged to the school and that what they had to say was important - *'I'm part of this school as well and now I am more confident in my ideas'* - they felt that they were taking a real part in the life of the school.

Learning Skills - The students being systematic, sceptical and ethical - learning to work with the data and to write it up clearly - thinking up questions to test their own thinking - interviewing people and having to be imaginative in getting as much information as possible from people - *'Interviewing people and collecting data taught us valuable life skills'*.

Maturation - They felt empowered, feeling that what they had to say was important - *'We've matured and talked to people about what we have learned'* - gaining confidence - *'We can make a difference ...'* - they commented about learning from the range of interactions they had on the project - They felt they had mastered determination - *'We had to try to be taken seriously ... Sometimes you had to be thick-skinned and fight to get pupils' opinions across'* - *'While we were doing it we were maturing and getting more powerful'*.

Transformation - They felt that there were things that needed changing and that they could affect these - *'We can make a difference and we know there is a lot more to be done'* - They saw evidence of this when the benches in the playground were newly painted *'Even though that wasn't one of our ideas directly, it shows a positive change because of what we raised'*.

About the actions that resulted in the school Given the stage of the Spring term that had been reached, the interviewing took place after only one session where the School Council had reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). At this meeting the reports that were discussed concerned the way students felt the school acknowledged the cultures from which many students come, and aspects of the general environment.

As a result some things were actioned immediately, and were noticed by the student researchers: the introduction of a 'culture calendar', acknowledging the different cultures from which students come, the marking of Independence Days of countries where this was applicable, and the painting of benches in the playground.

The researchers recognised that some things like the anti-bullying study and safety and security around the premises would take more time to be implemented once these were presented to the SLT. *'This is a long term problem and is hard to stop.'*

The importance of this way of working to the school All the students believed that this project should become part of the general life of the school in future. They said:

To carry on being effective something needs to be done over and over again.

You have to start somewhere and now that we've started we can't go backwards, and that's a positive thing.

You have to have faith in a system, even if people say the project is silly you still have to have faith in it.

Some of them saw that this might have a major impact on the external image of the school:

This school is labelled a 'good school' but sometimes it feels that all the school is interested in is good exam results.

All you hear about is about 'learning' and 'good results', even if the pupils aren't 100% happy. Now people might join this school because it is a place where students have a voice.

4.3 School Council Reflections on taking part in SEST³³

Given timetabling constraints, the interviewer was restricted to meeting only two members of the School Council, one from Year 7 and one from Year 10. She met them together. They had both been involved in presenting the first round of reports to the Senior Leadership Team earlier that week.

1. *What kinds of learning do you feel come from being members of the School Council?*
2. *What did you understand the researchers were doing for the School Council when they started? And what did you feel they were doing at the end?*
3. *How seriously do you feel you and your colleagues on the School Council took the work of the Student Researchers?*
4. *Thinking of the way the Researchers presented and discussed their findings with you and your colleagues on the School Council, what do you feel they were gaining from taking part?*
5. *What thoughts and feelings did you have about presenting the reports to the school's Senior Leadership Team?*
6. *What would you recommend that the school should do next year in terms of a project of this type?*

As will be evident on reading this data, a key issue in the way the material emerges suggests that the School Council members were not very clear about the difference between the realities of their own views and those of the Student Researchers, especially in response to Question 4.

Evidence and opinion are mixed up in their replies. This does not invalidate what they had to say, but underpins the need for proper training and preparation of the School Council to enable them to undertake their function effectively.

The learning value of being a School Council member before this project

There was little evidence that Council members felt being on the

³³ *Alyse Roberts carried out these interviews using a similar structure to that used for the researchers.*

School Council had been a learning experience before this project came into being.

There were discussions about changes but no-one knew how to do anything about them - There was a lot of complaining and not very many suggestions about how to change things.

The School Council was meant to be a way of empowering the student body. However before the research:

We didn't have sufficient information to ... be powerful enough in the school to change anything - The research put us in a very different position. Now we have more ideas we can use - We're addressing many of the same things but people are now working together and are aware of more things. We have more information.

What the Researchers were doing There was confusion at first as to the point of the project. The Council said that all they knew was that there was a group of Year 8 students with different projects which they were bringing to the School Council to look at. However, once the reports were delivered:

We knew the problem but we didn't know how to get around to it before the research began - They gave us statistics, so we weren't just a group of people moaning about something - It made us realise how many people want changes, and how many people want the same thing - It made us feel proud that the teachers gave us the responsibility and recognised that we are more aware of what pupils want than they are.

The seriousness with which the School Council take their responsibilities The Council members found it hard to interpret some of the findings because things weren't evenly spread and some of the data was a bit thin in the upper years. Even so, the data generally fitted their own feelings about things, and the Year 8 Girls had done important work. This had triggered the School Council into coming up with some ideas of their own. For example:

We came up with ideas we thought would be useful in changing the school. We thought that on the last day of term people could go around with buckets collecting for the Marydale building (whose state had been a subject of study). If we put our own money into the building we would feel more ownership of it and would respect it more: graffiti and damage to furniture might go down.

In answering this question the two respondents conveyed a sense of duty to the school that went along with being a member of the School Council. What the research did was to sanction their own experience, when before they may have doubted whether their view was simply a personal one, a feeling that had inhibited them before:

You have a duty to the school if you're on the School Council, but at the same time those issues are affecting you as well.

The value of the experience to the Year 8 students At first the Council members had felt that Year 8 girls were quite young, possibly too young for what was being attempted. But it was obvious that they had learned a lot from what they had done.

At first they didn't feel that important, but as they discovered what other people thought they realised that the same issues affected them. They weren't just a minority.

You could see how they gained in confidence as the process went on and became less awkward. They seemed to enjoy getting more involved with the school.

They were part of the change and they realised that all kinds of change are possible.

Maybe the most important lesson for them was that just having the ideas won't make a difference, you have to become involved.

The Council Member in Year 10 commented that when she was in Year 8 she didn't even know what the School Council was and that it was useless:

People asked for changes but they never happened, so people carried on moaning.

Presenting the reports to the SLT The respondents had felt at ease during the meeting with the SLT. The Year 7 girl only knew one member of the SLT, but this did not make her more nervous than any one else. They felt they had been taken seriously. Before the meeting they had been worried that the SLT would pick holes in their arguments and criticise the reports:

When we got into the meeting what we said was treated as valuable and in the discussion we came up with achievable aims together.

At first I was worried that I might get into trouble if I said the wrong thing, but as the meeting went on I found it easier to be open.

They felt that the SLT listened to them attentively:

We knew it was up to us but we thought at first 'we're only students'; now we know we can physically make a difference.

They could see that within a day or so of the SLT meeting, benches in the playground had been painted and other changes were in progress. They were surprised to find:

The SLT had some of the same ideas but just needed to see that the students also thought the same way.

Recommendations about the future They felt that the beginning of the project had been unclear and that the overall function of the School Council was itself unclear. They had not known what was on the Council's agenda, and meetings had often been rushed or rescheduled. This was improved now. This project had begun to help the Council to understand itself better.

Having evidence makes people care more.

As far as the future is concerned they felt that the approach should be more fully understood across the school.

The reports should be read out in assembly, or even read them out to all the forms so that everyone knows what has been done.

We like feeling that we are helping to make the school the best it can be. People should enjoy being here and be proud to say 'I go to Our Lady's'.

This way of working will keep being useful in making the school better. Every Year will come in with new opinions and new suggestions for improvement.

They felt that there were some things that needed thinking about as far as the research is concerned. They felt that the Year 8s were perhaps too young and that this may have influenced the collection of data.

They've only been in the school for a year and maybe people didn't take them seriously. ... We can't be sure how far everyone would agree with some of the findings because in some Years there were not a lot of people answering the questions.

They both thought that the approach was good, but that it would probably take some time before big changes happened. They agreed that it should go on.

4.5 The Impact of SEST on the school: the SLT's assessment³⁴

The preliminary thinking about the project was that, if the School Council and the Student Researchers were to make the impact on the school that was intended, the Senior Leadership Team would have to change their ways of working. The headteacher's assessment was that she had inherited a team that were not effective in working together, that issues were constantly referred back to her for decisions and that there was a fear of loss of control, which meant that risks were seldom taken. Across the school she felt a passive resistance to change, especially to anything that might possibly distract from the school's effectiveness in the classroom, for example the School Council. The independent studies had confirmed much of what she had said. The development of the work of the SLT was therefore an integral part of changing the school climate and opening up opportunities for a wider range of people to make an impact on the school's transformation, including the pupils.

Collecting the SLT's Assessment of the pilot Members of the SLT were interviewed at the end of Summer Term 2006 about their assessment of what had been the impact of the school's involvement in SEST over the year. In the event, one of the members of the SLT was leaving the school at the end of term and was not available for interview. The findings reported here are therefore based on individual interviews with the head and the four other members of the SLT.

³⁴ Interviews with the SLT were carried out by Colin Quine of The Grubb Institute, using a series of questions which required subjects to rate the different issues. This led to an open-ended discussion about the gradings. The grading and tables are placed at the end of this Section.

The interviews explored what the outcomes were from the project for those who had been directly involved, the researchers, School Council and SLT, and their assessment of its wider impact on the school. They were asked to rate these on a seven point scale which led to a qualitative evaluation of the changes during the school year. The scale ran from **-3** (less significant) through **0** (no change) to **+3** (more significant).

Impact on Students SLT members were asked: *Do you feel there is any change in whether the School Council is a significant part of the structure of the school?*

The responses ranged from “no change” (= **0**) to “**+2** (moving towards **+3**)” in terms of the School Council being more significant. The median rating was **+1**, indicating some increase in significance. The SLT Members’ responses are summarised in the Tables at the end of this Section.

The overall feeling was very much of a change that was just beginning and which the SLT felt would develop further:

“The potential of the School Council has been identified and is on the way to being changed. It’s profile was very low, and is now definitely on the up.”

“The School Council feel a difference - and some friends feel a difference. But there is an issue of how far that change is embedded more widely.”

“They have a higher profile now (but I’ve only seen it from the School Council’s side). I think they are doing a brilliant job.”

“It raised my personal awareness of what is possible.”

Overall the responses indicated an impact on both the School Council itself and on how the SLT was seeing its potential. This had been supported by the training provided within SEST by the School’s Council. This was reflected in the action that was being taken to strengthen the structure of the School Council to ensure that its members were “*not just the loud voices in their classes.*”

“It (the School Council) was a shambles and not fit for purpose, a random selection of people, who turned up unpredictably. We’re starting afresh now, developing a selection process so that it’s seen as a serious job and becomes respected.”

There was general support among SLT members for the proposed changes; one member who had rated the increased significance of the change as **+1**, added "*but heading for +2 or +3*".

There was recognition that as an SLT, it was important to ensure that staff were on board about this development.

"Some form tutors (and their classes) had become detached from the process. And staff have some anxiety about where this development will go. It helped that the topics chosen to be researched were not contentious."

"We have to raise the School Council's profile amongst staff."

Changes in the perception of what Year 8 students can achieve

SLT members were asked: *Has the work of the researchers changed your sense of what Year 8 girls can achieve?* The responses are summarised in Table 2.

Overall the feeling was of no change in their expectations, with 4 of the five rating this as **0**. (This may in part reflect all teachers' sensitivity to the impact of low expectations on students' academic achievement.)

Though they said there was no change in their perceptions, it was clear that SLT members had been impressed by what had been done.

"They were so impressive - to see the quality of the research was staggering and the way they did the feedback. If they can do that at that age, what will they be able to do later!"

"I have always felt they were able to achieve. I was impressed by their basic commitment. I was impressed that they went to the DfES; the feedback was that they did brilliantly."

"It shows the untapped resources. The process put old heads on young shoulders."

"I always have great expectations, even though we can underestimate their capacity. I was surprised by their tenacity with which they stuck to the task, despite the bad organisation on our part."

"It has an amazing impact on the researchers themselves. I saw a transformation in some of them I know. For example, at the DfES they were able to talk in a way which they could not have done 6 months before."

It is worth noting that what the SLT members identified was not the academic capacity of the students, but their **emerging maturity** in terms of tenacity, commitment, ability to handle others' scepticism and making a case to the adult world (both the SLT and the DfES). In terms of the Reed Rainbow this activity clearly contributed to the maturation process, and represented a significant step forward from a culture in which students had felt repressed.

There was acknowledgement of issues around this aspect of SEST. One SLT member commented on difficulties in *"getting older students to take them seriously"* and expressed concern about the researchers *"being labelled, and some of their friends envying the attention they had received"*. Another respondent raised questions about *"how we share and embed the process, so that the whole school can be involved."*

What emerged from the interviews was that the SLT had a clear sense that the students involved in SEST had responded positively, responsibly and effectively in taking up the new roles which had been offered to them as "researchers", and as members of a School Council which was being asked to make a real contribution to the school's development.

Their caution was because they recognised that relatively few students had been directly involved and their concern was about how to build on this, so that it became embedded in the culture of the school. They recognised that they needed to take action, both to develop structures which supported what was emerging (eg for a more representative School Council) and to offer leadership to staff in getting them 'on board'.

Here is an interesting potential hypothesis to reflect upon and test in the future:

The SLT members covertly held positive expectations of the students' capacities beyond their academic ability. However, they were inhibited from either entrusting action to Year 8 students which relied on such positive perceptions or from expressing their judgement openly until this point. This was because until this project the SLT lacked a suitable frame of reference for speaking or thinking. SEST has provided that frame.

This hypothesis gains some support from the evidence above, where members of the SLT, in response to the question about whether their perception of the ability of Y8 students has changed at all, said that these had not changed, but then went on to make a series of highly positive comments about what the students had achieved.

Impact on the SLT The evaluation also explored three questions about how the involvement in SEST had affected them as members of the SLT, in terms of their effectiveness as a Team, the clarity in their own role and personal sense of job satisfaction.

We asked team members: ***Has there been any change in how effective you feel the SLT is in working together to provide leadership in relation to the aim of the school?*** SLT Members' responses are summarised in Table 3.

What emerged was a shared sense of improved effectiveness, with 3 feeling that there had been a significant change.

This was linked by most to the experience of the Evidence-based Leadership workshop (EBL) in December and how this had been built on.

“Since the EBL workshop in December, we work more now as a team. We are more aware of the strengths of each other - and the weaknesses. We are more supportive of each other - and are seen to be more supportive of each other. Before we were not seen as supportive of each other - we came across as (reflecting) one person's ideas.”

“The opportunity to step back and come out of the school environment was very useful. We got a different viewpoint and began to think in a different way. It enabled me to identify what I should be doing.”

“Certainly more effective in our approach to problems. This has changed over the year. In the previous regime, people did not give expression to views or ideas that were different. Spending two days together outside school meant that people became more bonded. It was invaluable to get an outside view of what we're doing - not threatening.”

“The Team has gelled and learned to work with each other, not against each other. We have found ways of dealing with different positions more

positively. We are using the tools from the workshop and as a result we are asking different questions. It has been a huge relief.”

“It helped us appreciate how complex an organisation the school is and to realise that as a team we were open to changing the climate of the school.”

One team member felt that there was an element of “*two steps forward and one step back*”, especially in relation to working strategically, and had therefore rated the change as **+1**.

The SLT members were also asked: ***Do you have a clearer sense of your role in the school and the difference you make?*** The responses are summarised in Table 4.

Every team member felt that their role was significantly clearer, with two feeling that this was moving towards **+3**.

“For me this was the main change. It made me think about the jobs I was asked to do because I was good at managing. I hadn't had the chance to be effectively engaged in leadership in the school. I began to develop my leadership skills further and to stop getting bogged down in minutiae. I got other people to do the detail work. It made me look at outputs, not just inputs and processes. The whole project crystallised in my mind what I should be doing.”

“I feel that I am clearer about the difference I make and the decisions I can make. I feel the head is more aware of what I do.”

“Maybe not clearer, but added things to my role and how I understand it. The Workshop forced me to detach from the little ‘bubble’ (of the area I manage) and see the whole picture.”

“I realised that conflict, healthy debate, is not a bad thing and I don't see it as a waste of time to try to get to the bottom of things. I realised that making a deal is not abdicating responsibility.”

“I have greater faith in what to do and how to do it. Also a greater openness to criticism as I have a greater belief in myself and recognition that what I do is good. I also feel I am more flexible in the way I am

responding to situations in the wider school as I see where others are coming from and see how they operate and respond.”

An important theme in the answers was a feeling of greater **appreciation** by the head and other Team members of their distinctive roles and the contribution they could make through their leadership in those roles.

Satisfaction in one's own role We also explored how these changes had affected their personal sense of job satisfaction in the way they took their roles, personally and collectively, asking: **How would you assess your own sense of job satisfaction in your role?** The Team Members' responses are summarised in Table 5.

This question resulted in a wide range of responses, with 3 SLT members reporting a very considerable increase (+3) in their job satisfaction. The person who reported 'no change' (0), did so because they had begun the year with a high level of job satisfaction. (The fifth team member found it difficult to rate this question).

For those who reported increased satisfaction, key factors were *“learning to become part of something bigger”*, feeling that they were *“more aware of the value of the contribution they made”* which was *“recognised”* and *“not taken for granted”*.

It is evident from these answers that SEST has had a significant impact on the way that the SLT and its members are functioning, both in working together as a team and in their specific roles. As several noted, this was despite a great deal of scepticism about the project on their own and colleagues' part when they first became involved.

It is worth drawing attention to the parallels between the experience of the student researchers and School Council members and that of SLT members. They too had been given the opportunity and support to take up their roles in a different way, and had been able to respond both positively and effectively. As a result, they had a greater sense of responsibility and freedom (eg in not having to refer everything to the head) and this had significantly increased their job satisfaction.

Impact on the school as a whole Whilst the evaluation of the first year of SEST has provided evidence of how those directly involved assessed the project, how far had it begun to contribute to whole school transformation? We asked SLT members: *Has the climate of the school as a place in which young women can develop improved over the last year?* They were cautious in their response as is evident from Table 6.

The two SLT members who felt there was a change, saw a change beginning to be evident in students' behaviour and their response to being challenged. They were beginning to flex their voice in a more positive way - they were learning that just because one had a particular view, it didn't mean that every student saw it similarly. But SLT members also acknowledged that this change was only slowly filtering out and that a lot of work was needed to support this in gathering momentum.

The three SLT members who felt the change was limited as yet, were hopeful of the impact of what was being put in place, but conscious of the some of the factors that were potentially holding it back.

"At present it is limited to a small group and the school as a whole has not moved to a noticeable extent. But the systems that are coming into place will hopefully impact. Whereas the old regime was top down, the new head is working on the basis that every individual has the capacity to contribute. I expect the systems which are starting to be put in place (based on this philosophy) to have a positive impact once they are embedded. It is creating a fertile soil. We need to see it is well watered."

"There are changes in some people's attitudes, but it has not yet had time to permeate through the school. It is a mixed picture depending on whom you ask. Some look back to the past with rose-tinted spectacles. But on the other hand a lot of pupils have more opportunities than they have ever had before."

Comments in response to other questions indicated where the SLT members were seeing transformations and resistances. They all felt that a key issue was how staff were engaged in the process of school transformation:

"Staff feel more consulted than before - and that what they say when consulted is now being heard. But it is still a transition period and there is a heritage of past experiences to be overcome."

“I wonder if staff are seeing a difference in what we (= SLT) do? They may have noticed I make more decisions without having to consult the head.”

“Staff still have a very similar picture of the school that they always hadThe missing group in SEST to the present are the staff. The new structures will take time to bed in; the challenge is to get staff on board, particularly in relation to students having more say in what we do.”

SLT members recognised that the change towards a climate which was less repressive, working on the basis of everyone taking more responsibility for their actions was likely to increase staff anxiety about losing control. At the same time they were being asked to handle situations themselves rather than passing them on.

The Head's Perspective It is important to put the SLT's evaluation of the current situation in the context of what the head was experiencing at the start of the project, as a new head of Our Lady's Convent School. Features she identified about the school were:

- *“Too many people in too small a space” - resulting in incidents in the playground, which were in part a response to the overcrowding.*
- *A culture which was very controlling, expecting the girls to be seen but not heard eg the expectation that they should file into assemblies in “total silence”, with anyone who talked “being bawled at”.*
- *Staff who referred problems and decisions upwards (ultimately to the head), even when they could have dealt with them appropriately at their level.*

These factors could be seen as interacting, both contributing to and being shaped by the culture of the school.

What the head was seeking to achieve in the work with students and that with the SLT was ***“that we have got to be responsible for ourselves”***. (In her mind, this was also a key element of learning from family life.) She felt that what the student researchers and School Council had done was a demonstration of students' capacity to act effectively and responsibly. This work needed to be built on, *“putting greater trust in the girls, so that they are less regimented in the curriculum, but have had consistent boundaries set which enable them to appreciate what is nonnegotiable.”* This was also what members of SLT were increasingly doing in the way they operated in their roles. She felt that as a result *“we feel less burdened - there are more people out there with an idea of what we are trying to do - and doing it!”*

The Contribution of the Project

In asking about how the SLT members' had experienced changes over a school year, we recognised that a number of factors had contributed to what had happened, positively and negatively.

What was problematic was that they saw a significant contribution to the development of SLT and the School Council but felt the impact on the School as a whole had still to be demonstrated. The specific answers very much repeated the points already made. The three people who did score the contribution did so at **+2** positive contribution.

It was clear that the December workshop had been a very significant event for each of the SLT members interviewed. There was considerable appreciation of the way it had been designed, the tools they had been offered and the way it was led. As one member summed it up:

"It contributed to the creation of the Team and forced us to operate as a team. We had to learn to take risks. This has paid off. We are more relaxed and able to work together for the benefit of the whole school. Before people didn't open their mouths for fear of being destroyed and 'rubbished'. We are no longer afraid to make mistakes. It gave us the tools to analyse things in depth."

The Head's Perspective From her individual sessions with the project consultant the head had recognised:

- *"You can't assume that people know what you are thinking I assumed too much at the outset and did not communicate clearly enough."*
- *"That conflict is not necessarily a bad thing - there is such a thing as healthy debate. I don't see it as a waste of time to get to the bottom of an issue. When you can marry that back to role, that is really powerful."*
- *"I realised that to make deals with people is not necessarily an abdication of responsibility."*

She also felt strongly that the December Workshop had been a key point. In anticipation she had felt terrified about how it would go, given the scepticism of other members of the SLT. In practice, what had developed was a shared "*appreciation of how complex an organisation the school is*". Her experience was that at the end her colleagues had a clearer idea of her vision and had (mostly) "*bought in*". She found that they were "*open to changing the climate of the school and that whilst there had been a little bit of resistance, it was not as much as she thought it would be*". She felt that what had also emerged was an "*appreciation of my role as head*" and a shared appreciation of the

roles of Assistant head and Deputy head. This was consistent with what other SLT members said in their interviews.

The head felt that *“We couldn't have done it without the Grubb Institute - we learned so much. We would still have tried to do it - but we would still be chasing around mopping up after people”*.

4.6 Overview

These interviews were carried out in the midpoint of a transition process. The driving vision which had led to the Governors appointing the head was their view that the climate of Our Lady's Convent High School needed to be addressed in new imaginative ways. They would support change in the heavy concentration on life in classrooms and paying more attention to equipping girls to be able to take a full part as mature women in the adult world. The head recognised the wider talents of the girls and wished to mobilise them as resources in the transformation of the school. She knew from the independent evidence that she was not imagining things and that she need not be a lonely voice. Amongst those who would support her were the girls themselves if they were given the opportunity.

She planned that the school climate would be one in which pupils behave well out of respect for each other and the work of the School, not because they are tightly controlled and any dissent suppressed. In different frameworks this could be described in terms of a move from an external 'locus of control' to an internal locus of control, from discipline to self-discipline, from an emphasis on obedience to an emphasis on respect. This would in effect be a re-framing of the purpose of the School, in terms of the nature of the maturity and creativity of the young women which it is seeking to foster, which was embodied in the SLT's new management tool, the school's Aim Statement referred to earlier.

From the SLT perspective, the SEST programme appears to have enabled three significant groups to find, make and take their roles in new ways which both contributes to, and is consistent with, this purpose - a group of Year 8 girls, the School Council and the SLT itself. In each case it was able to do this by clarifying the task/purpose of specific systems within the school - the Student Research Task Force, the School Council and the Senior Leadership Team. This was done by providing appropriate support and training and working with what emerged.

The Student Researchers The Year 8 Student Researchers found that they now felt they belonged to the school in new ways and that, rather than

being insignificant little members of it they could make a difference. They felt more mature. They had skills and confidence that were valuable, not simply to the project but on a wider front.

They recognised the weaknesses in the setting up and the ways these had handicapped their work. They believed that something important had been started and that it should be kept going. There were major issues in the school that needed tackling and the teachers were not in as good a position as people like them to address them.

The School Council They recognised the confusion in the beginning of the project and its impact on them. This was a mixture of the existing confusions about what the Council was for at the time, and the lack of understanding of what the project was planning to do. Nevertheless they were clear that the emerging conception of the School Council was significant for the development of the school. They had been apprehensive about being taken seriously by the SLT but had quickly lost their fears and felt the new relatedness was something that must be taken further.

Their main worry was whether the Year 8 Students were old enough to handle the new relations that were required for the emerging situation. However, this was more of a prejudice than something borne out of their experience. It was not something the Year 8 students felt at all!

The Senior Leadership Team At the end of the year, the SLT appear to have a sense that the transformation they had experienced is both what is needed and is achievable - albeit it will require considerable leadership. In particular it depends on their willingness to offer leadership to the school as a whole in:

- *believing in each other's capacity to make choices, to do so responsibly and live with the outcomes*
- *believing in the researchers capacity to address whole school issues realistically and see the research through*
- *belief in the potential of a School Council to be a responsible student voice*
- *the belief in the staff's capacity to take more responsibility and to trust and work with the capacity of students to contribute to school transformation*
- *the invitation to students to take a role in transforming the school as a place which supports the development of mature and creative young women.*

They acknowledge that this is the beginning of a process. The head in particular can see that there is still much to do but she now has ample evidence that across the school are the resources to move forward towards transmitting to others - students and staff - where this school can go.

Tables

<i>Less Significant</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	<i>More Significant</i>
				2	2	1		(N=5)

Table 1 Changes in the significance of the School Council

<i>Less Capable</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	<i>More Capable</i>
				4		1		(N=5)

Table 2 Changes in SLT perceptions of what year 8 students can achieve

<i>Less Effective</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	<i>More Effective</i>
					2	3		(N=5)

Table 3 Change in the effectiveness of the SLT's Leadership

<i>Less Clear</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	<i>More Clear</i>
						5		(N=5)

Table 4 Clarity of SLT Members' own roles

<i>Less Satisfied</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	<i>More Satisfied</i>

				1			3	(N=4)
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Table 5 Satisfaction in one's own role

<i>Less Supportive</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	<i>More Supportive</i>
				3	1	1		(N=5)

Table 6 Improvement in the school climate as a place in which young women can develop

Section 5 Implications for the future

5.1 The longer term

In initiating this approach to citizenship education we advanced the following points:

1. That the low turn-out at elections by young people may be less to do with their apathy and more to do with a sense of not belonging to society as a whole, as offered to them through its electoral structures.
2. That this results in their feeling powerless to influence matters through the electoral process.
3. That this sense of not belonging to society through the electoral process has its roots in their experience of not being able to influence their school through its structures, including those in place through School Councils.
4. That by strengthening the power and authority of an elected School Council pupils' experience of influencing school policy from the student perspective would provide a basis in their experience for becoming interested in being more engaged in political life in society.

We offered a Working Hypothesis based on these points.

- *Being disengaged from social structures is something that grows as a result of experience from which learning has been derived. At present that learning happens incidentally in schools rather than through design.*
- *This is because those who make educational policy respond to their interpretation of the electorate's expressed priorities for schools and focus upon evidence of academic and classroom learning rather than taking into account evidence of other areas of learning.*

5.2 The findings from the pilot

We have undertaken a small pilot project in one school, lasting one year. It cannot be thought that we have done any more than begin to mine a particular seam to see whether further work in other schools would be worthwhile. If the issue of developing active citizenship were to be taken further using these principles they need testing in institutions other than a secondary school. For example, what would happen if it were taken to a college of further education? More significantly perhaps would be the question of what would happen if a local authority decided to test it out within its overall structures, including a Youth Parliament?

The evidence from the pilot suggests that the underlying principles are sound. But first we need to explore how to take further what has been effectively opened up in this particular school.

We initiated a piece of work which asked the following question at Our Lady's Convent High School:

What would happen if the Student Council, the obvious 'voice' of the students, could not only speak eloquently, but with power and authority growing from research-based evidence critiques of the way the school is functioning? Would realistic recommendations about how the school might be transformed result?

The evidence we have collected so far suggests that:

1. Conceiving the school as being structured to further the effective engagement between two key partners - the pupils seen as a body and the staff seen as a body - does lead to new perspectives being developed by both the school leaders and pupils who were involved in the project.
2. Creating a culture where evidence-based leadership marks the style of the headteacher, the Senior Leadership Team and the School Council, enables a working dialogue between the two partners to emerge, which has an impact upon the way both undertake their responsibilities.
3. Year 8 students who took the roles in the Research Task Force valued the experience of being trained as researchers, carrying out the research and reporting back to the School Council and to the Senior Leadership Team. They also discovered that, despite their initial

feelings of being of little account in the school, their contribution and work were valued and brought about change. This gave them confidence in the school's systems, which they felt should be taken further.

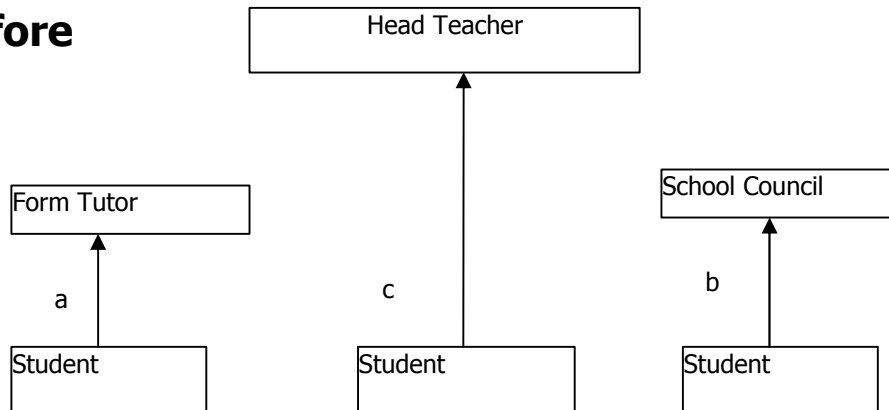
4. Members of the School Council felt that commissioning research and using it to engage with the Senior Leadership Team meant that their work became more meaningful. It clarified the nature of their responsibility as representatives of the pupil body and their authority in relation to the head and the Senior Leadership Team. It also gave them a new appreciation of the capacity of young pupils to do things of significance to the school as a whole.
5. The head and members of the Senior Leadership Team unanimously felt that the training they had received to equip them for the new situation had made a significant difference to their own ways of working. In particular they felt that the role of the Team and its members became much clearer. They found greater freedom in working together as a team.
6. They gained a new appreciation of the value of the School Council as a partner in the running of the school.
7. They recognised the hitherto untapped resource which the Year 8 researchers revealed, reminding them that these were only a small proportion of the cohort. Other ways of mobilising this untapped resource could be imagined.
8. They felt that what they were now doing as senior members of staff was closer to their own sense of why they came into teaching than it had been under the previous ways of working.
9. They felt that the way the school could contribute to the growth and development of young women, fitting them for roles in today's society, had become clearer.
10. The head felt that the things that the governors were looking to her to deliver when they appointed her were now more likely to be achieved.

Several actions resulted from the pilot project. One was that the Assistant head - who took over responsibility for working with the School Council - drew

up a diagram to show how the Student Voice was changed in the light of experience. It is reproduced here:

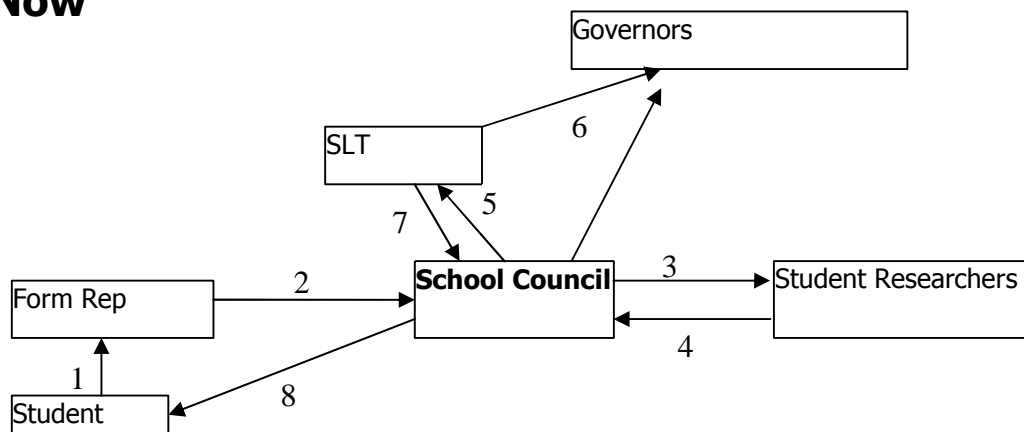
Student Voice - Channels of Communication at Our Lady's³⁵

Before



Route a) Nothing likely to happen as Form tutor has no influence
 Route b) Nothing likely to happen as School Council carries no weight
 Route c) Something may happen if you complain loudly enough

Now



Step 1 Student raises issues with Form Rep
 Step 2 Form rep reports to School council
 Step 3 School Council commissions research
 Step 4 Researcher report back to School Council
 Step 5 School Council present report to SLT
 Step 6 SLT/School Council report goes to Governors
 Step 7 SLT communicates decision to School Council
 Step 8 School council communicates decision to students

³⁵ Drawn up by Declan Tierney, Assistant Head, Our Lady's Convent School

A second step was that the School Council decided to structure its work into three areas: social and cultural issues, safety and well being, and the school environment. Council members were allocated to work on each area and it was from these groups that the research areas for 2006/7 were derived.

The third step was that the Officers of the School Council presented the new ways of working to Year 8 and invited volunteers to put themselves forward as researchers. They wanted a Task Group of 8 and more than 8 volunteered so the Officers interviewed them all and chose those they felt most likely to have the qualities needed to carry out the work, including the determination to finish the job.

5.3 Next steps in the pilot school

The school governors, head and the Senior Leadership Team (now named as the Strategic Leadership Team) have taken the decision to continue their work on the project. What is needed is to embed what has been learned into the day-to-day practice of the school.

This entails the following:

Integrating the School Council into the Whole School Leadership

- Developing the electoral system from Forms to the SC
- Training the elected Council members
- Developing the role of the Student Council Leaders
- Clarifying the relatedness of the Council to the SLT and the roles of the SLT reps at SC meetings
- Embedding a system of reporting back by Form reps
- Enabling the SC to identify the issues that reps believe need to be researched in order to transform the school
- Equipping the SC to receive the research reports and to prepare to take matters up with the SLT and/or Governors.

Developing the SLT's skill in integrating their leadership with the School Council's leadership

- Further work with them in relation to raising their skill at working with Evidence-based Leadership across the school
- Work with the SLT reps at the SC as the roles evolve
- Work at integrating SC initiatives into whole school leadership.

Establishing the Student Research Task Force as part of the normal life of the school

- Selection of the Task Force - explore wider selection principles which move beyond the Gifted and Talented cohort (see above)
- Developing the training of the Task Force
- Phasing in the training with the SC
- Supporting the Task Force from within the school and with the Open University staff, as they carry out their research and write their reports
- Create the conditions under which the Researchers can effectively report back to the SC and, where called for, the SLT and Governors.

Integration into the overall leadership culture at all levels in the school

- Developing the appropriate understanding and practice by Subject and Departmental staff
- Developing similar practices through the Tutorial and Year staff.

Handbook

- Finalise and present the Handbook and provide training in how to use it.

Headteacher

- Continue work with the head as her role continues to develop

5.4 *Developing the fieldwork beyond one secondary school*

Given the potential significance of this approach to developing Citizenship Education, three further areas of work emerge as being needed. They do not all need to be done immediately but could be sequenced in over time.

- *Testing out in other schools:* These could include primary and secondary schools.
- *Testing out in Further Education:* A London college has indicated its wish to be involved.
- *Exploration in a whole LEA:* With the growth of Youth Parliaments and similar structures there is a place for similar work to be developed.

In practice two of these opportunities – Lewisham College of Further Education and the London Borough of Brent have opened up discussions with the Grubb Institute, with the firm intention to test the innovation with their own structures. Interest has been expressed by other schools – primary and

secondary - but these have not yet been pursued while the other contacts are worked at.

5.5 Funding

Our Lady's Convent High School has been in a position to fund the work done in the school. If this pilot finds support more widely, funds will need to be found to further it.

5.6 Relating to government policies

Discussions have taken place with the Department for Education and Skills Innovation Unit and the Gifted and Talented Education Unit. Discussions with the Citizenship Unit are being set up. It seems clear that several of the current policies could be advanced using this method: citizenship education, personalised learning, developing the 'soft skills' described in Ofsted's 20/20 report,³⁶ and young people increasing their agency in their own concerns.

Studies such as the UNICEF study on Child Poverty,³⁷ the IPPR study entitled Freedom's Orphans,³⁸ as well as the concerns about dealing with gang cultures, all suggest that this approach has something to offer on a wider front than simply in schools.

What this pilot project does offer is a flexible, robust way of working that is simple to install and effective in its results.

Using the project's principles in these different settings could enable young people and adults to work together more effectively to develop a culture of mutual accountability for their shared future. In this way they can learn what it is to be an *engaged citizen*, which in the end may be more socially valuable than being an active one.

³⁶ DfES (2007 – 2020 Vision: Report of the Teaching and Learning Review Group

³⁷ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2007) – **An overview of child-wellbeing in rich countries** - reports that 9% of UK children 'feel awkward and out of place', evidence of not feeling that they belong. See Figure 6.3b p38

³⁸ IPPR (2006) – **Freedom's Orphans: Raising youth in a changing world** – says: "Young people are not simply passive recipients of social forces beyond their control. They make and remake their lives within social structures. Having the capacity to meaningfully exercise agency, matters more to today's society than it did before, as choices and opportunities have opened up to young people as a result of socio-economic and demographic change." (p167)

John Bazalgette
Programme Director
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