

involved parties will then be required. It is intended that students should have more involvement with the analysis and recommendations from the research.

### Recommendations for those considering this approach

- a) Build plenty of time in for preparation and adaptation. Be flexible!
- b) Make as many members of the community as aware as possible of your research activity.
- c) Work with a small group initially, and extend after reviewing the outcome.
- d) Empower the process at all levels, including feeding recommendations into school development plans.

### Suggestions for further reading

A copy of the BPRS report (Level 2). This is also available at:  
[http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_module/bprs/level2/docs/Frost%20Barry.doc](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_module/bprs/level2/docs/Frost%20Barry.doc)

The demonstration lesson used in the intervention is from Unit 17 of the Pedagogy and Practice: Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools (DfES 0423-2004G), Developing Effective Learners.

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**National Teacher Research Panel**  
engaging teacher expertise

# Every Child Matters: Empowering the Student Voice

  
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This summary was commissioned by the National Teacher Research Panel for the Teacher Research Conference 2006, which explored and celebrated teacher engagement in and with research. All conference materials are available at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp)

## Aims

The aim of this project was to involve students as researchers on classroom practice, as part of a wider school policy of increasing student voice, and including their views in school planning processes.

## Dimensions of the study

Rural, non-selective, 11-16 (NOR 570), drawing from Caistor, surrounding villages and NE Lincs, with 39 teaching staff. A mile away is a selective grammar school. Students are encouraged to be actively involved with school life and take part in schemes such as Prefects, Peer Mentoring, Student Council, fund raising, community projects and leading assemblies. At the time of this research boys were doing less well than girls at GCSE.

## Summary of the main findings

### Findings

- Developing students as researchers benefited students and staff, and led to meaningful communication between the two.
- Effective participation by students required detailed planning and required a lot of time to be carried out properly.

### Outcomes

- There was increased understanding among students of why teachers teach in the way they do.
- There was an increased level of professional reflection and learning among teachers.
- Thirteen participating students developed research skills.

## Background and context

### National context

Every Child Matters: The first stated Aim of ECM 4 Make a Positive Contribution is that Children and Young People should “Engage in decision making and support the community and environment”. The National Healthy School Standard highlights the “double benefit ... when ... pupils are involved in the process (of their education), it helps them understand the kind of young people the school is trying to nurture” (NHSS DfES 2004:11). The Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills programme (SEBS), due September 2006, encourages schools to explore opportunities for greater understanding of social skills and interactions within their environment.

### Project context

The study was sponsored by the DfES Best Practice Research scheme. Its key aims included research into possible gender differentiation in class, which may have an impact on boys' performance, and the identification of solutions and strategies for improvement. An extensive literature review, conducted in 2003, revealed a vast area that could be explored, so the study focused on looking at the language used between teacher and students within the classroom, and how this may differentially affect boys

and girls. The, then key, DfES document advising schools on gender and achievement was DfES (0487/2003), and this formed the basis of initial research and analysis. The key parts of the in-school research took place in May to October 2004.

## Teaching processes and strategies

A team of thirteen students - the student research group (SRG) - was the key observational element of the research. The SRG received training in research and observation methods which was delivered by the local authority Behaviour and Attendance Consultant and were encouraged to design their own data collection forms, based on a common model and practice with a video lesson. After their first batch of observations, the SRG contributed to data analysis, and helped design an improved data collection form, which collected far more detail on interactions, and reduced areas of disparity between researchers. The teachers being observed were also 'paired' with researchers to enable an agreed mode of operation to be established.

### Selecting students

After consultation and discussion, criteria were set for students undertaking the research. These were as follows:

- i) Respected by staff and students.
- ii) Able to understand and respect the Code of Ethics.
- iii) Capable of understanding the concepts and processes of the research.
- iv) Confident enough to work without peer support.
- v) Aware how to behave in classroom without disrupting learning.
- vi) Could be trusted to catch up with any work missed.

School data including ability, behaviour and attendance, was used to select students who appeared to meet the criteria, and the proposal was put to a selected group of staff. Thirteen Year 9 students were asked to volunteer if interested, on the understanding that the staff involved would have the right to veto, and parental permission was also required. All volunteered, and many others hearing of the project came to volunteer and be placed on a 'reserve list'. Staff approved the SRG members, and a letter went home to parents and guardians, all of whom gave support to the initiative.

### Student researcher training and teacher preparation

Doing this for the first time it was essential to equip school students with specialist research skills beyond those that they might encounter in the classroom, and accommodate the needs of staff involved. Both of these groups had separate development sessions, but they essentially received the same information and demo observation lesson clip, and were given the opportunity to comment freely on any aspect of the research, as well as contribute suggestions. It was stressed to all that ownership of data remained with the teacher, and the ethical guidelines of Lincoln University were to be applied.

## Findings

### Evaluations

The SRG researchers felt uneasy at first, but settled into the task and benefited from the activities. They developed action research skills, for example, including data collection techniques such as interviewing. They also practised data analysis skills, such as analysing video recordings of classroom interactions. All members felt the study had brought personal benefits to their own learning, motivation, and application, and to their understanding of the teacher within the classroom. Teachers felt the experience to be valuable for personal professional development. Among teacher comments were:

*“I felt that we built up a specialist and new relationship of mutual respect”*

*“It made me more conscious of how I interact, if I sound less friendly than I intended and also whether I favour certain students more than others.”*

*“I was impressed by the mature response of the SRG.”*

It surprised us to see just how much interaction occurred, with whom, and how students viewed certain interactions. Our students rose to the challenge and, “grew,” from the experience both personally and in understanding of others. Student responses included:

*“I was really excited and felt good.”*

*“I found the teaching methods like rewards and punishment interesting.”*

*“It was interesting to understand the reasons why teachers do what they do.”*

### What we've learned

We learned a lot about students undertaking research in lessons. The information they supplied suggested that teachers observed were interacting equitably with each gender in most areas. However, there were a number of key differences including 'Reasoning', 'Dialogue' and use of an 'Unfriendly' approach, and the impacts of these need to be carefully considered. For example, teachers were fairly consistent in terms of positive and neutral comments to boys and girls, but negative ('unfriendly'), comments tended to be addressed more to boys than girls. It was not possible to establish from the observation data whether the boys warranted more 'unfriendly' interaction than the girls, and the teachers may well have been making adjustments in their interactions to attenuate this.

### Impacts at school

This was part of an ongoing process of giving the students a voice, but beyond this, positive and purposeful relationships have been generally developed between teachers and student researchers, with a greater mutual understanding of the others' role. Students form opinions, want them to be heard and to see a result. Many teachers

were interested in the results and valued the responses. However, we had to accept that in asking for information, we had also to listen. We did not always hear what we wanted or expected but it still had to be valued. Certain members of staff, in particular those not involved with the research reacted strongly as they felt a little threatened by the empowering of students. All staff needed to be aware and understand, even if they were not directly involved. Many additional students are keen to be involved in further research. All teachers had access to the report, which provided suggestions to improve practice, and some have modified their approach. The school council is now selecting the next areas for research. These will be put to SLT for approval, and the SRG will assist with training and support.

### Other practicalities (administration, timetabling, etc.)

In-school co-ordination involved dedicated time commitment for briefing staff (those specifically involved, and in general), selecting students, contacting home, time tabling the observations and de-briefing both staff and students. Observations were planned to cover different year groups, avoid assessment lessons, consider teacher commitments, and so on. This made it a challenge to find sufficient classes for each SR to observe in one week. A greater number of staff involved would have helped. However, once fully briefed and trained students were self-sufficient and collected their record sheets from the Main Office and left the sheet with the teachers being observed. After adding comments, teachers posted the forms in a tray in the staffroom. In addition students had to find time to catch up on work which they had missed from attending the training sessions, the observations and the debrief.

## Research methods

Detailed data were collected on 400 teacher-pupil interactions. This was collated and presented to the SRG for their comments. Both staff and students were invited to feedback on the research. In addition the students had some time to help evaluate the results, the findings of which were made available to all staff. The students interviewed each other about the research and were filmed in discussion.

## Conclusion

As well as being encouraged to embark on systematic enquiry, pupils in this project developed a range of skills to do so, and this will hopefully help develop a culture of pupil research as a tool for developing pupil skills and informing policy. Our main conclusion from this study is that students are a valuable, informative and greatly under-utilised source of information and expertise, and should therefore be consulted in relevant decision making.

### What's next for CYS?

We intend to have students do further research, but on a topic of their choice. We have spoken to the Student Council and asked for feedback from tutor groups on possible areas of research, and how the researchers may be selected. It is a lengthy process, as consultation with