

Research for Teachers

Consulting pupils about teaching and learning

published: Wed Jun 01 10:40:56 GMT 2005

- [Overview](#)
- [Study](#)
- [Case studies](#)
- [Further reading](#)
- [Appraisal](#)

This TLA research summary is based on the work of a three-year network project on consulting pupils about teaching and learning. It was part of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). The research consisted of a number of projects, directed by Professor Jean Rudduck.

Our summary is based upon:

Flutter, J. and J. Rudduck. *Consulting pupils: What's in it for schools?* London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004.

Arnot, M., D. McIntyre, D. Pedder and D. Reay. *Consultation in the classroom: Pupil perspectives on teaching and learning.* Cambridge: Pearson Publishing, 2003.

Fielding, M. and S. Bragg. *Students as researchers: Making a difference.* Cambridge: Pearson Publishing, 2003.

MacBeath, J., H. Demetriou, J. Rudduck and K. Myers. *Consulting pupils: A toolkit for teachers.* Cambridge: Pearson Publishing, 2003.

Arnot, M., D. McIntyre, D. Pedder and D. Reay. *Consultation in the Classroom: Developing dialogue about teaching and learning.* Cambridge: Pearson Publishing, 2003.

The researchers found that pupils had much to say about teaching and learning. When their perspectives were taken seriously they felt more positive about themselves as learners, could understand and manage their own progress better, and felt more included in the school's purposes. They believed that what they said made a difference. Consulting with pupils was also beneficial to teachers - it helped them understand how to support pupil engagement and build more open, collaborative and communicative relationships with their pupils.

In this summary, we report on pupils' perspectives on several different aspects of teaching and learning,

including:

- pupils' engagement with learning
- pupils' confidence in their abilities as learners
- pupils' understanding of the criteria for 'good' work
- the impact of pupils' friendships on their learning
- how the way time is managed in school impacts on pupils' learning.

We also report on:

- the impact of student-led research projects - where students worked alongside their teachers to bring about a change in practice.

We think that these insights into both pupils' and teachers' experiences will be interesting to teachers and could help them to support their own pupils' learning more effectively.

About the terms used in this summary

Usually when writing a TLA research summary, we use the term 'pupils' to denote primary aged children and 'students' to denote those of secondary age. However, in this summary, in keeping with the terms used in the original research projects, we use the term 'pupil consultation' to cover all ages and the term 'student' when referring to 'Students as Researchers' (SaRs) projects at both primary and secondary level.

[Back to top](#)

Overview

Why is the issue important?

Interest in 'pupil voice' is growing. Many schools are starting to consult their pupils and involve them as active participants in classroom-based research investigations to help them identify ways of improving teaching and learning.

What did the research show?

When they consulted with pupils, the researchers found pupils had much to say about teaching and learning. Having their perspectives taken seriously helped pupil feel more positive about themselves as learners, understand and manage their own progress better, and feel more included in the school's purposes. Teachers also gained from the experience. Consulting pupils helped them understand ways of supporting pupil engagement and build more open, collaborative and communicative relationships with their pupils.

How was this achieved?

The researchers explored pupils' perspectives on several different aspects of teaching and learning, including:

- factors affecting pupils' engagement with learning and their confidence in their ability to learn
- the impact of pupils' friendships on their learning
- how the way time is managed in school impacts on pupils' learning.

They also looked at what happened when teachers tried implementing their pupils' suggestions for improving teaching and the impact of student-led research projects.

How was the research designed to be trustworthy?

The researchers gathered data from 48 primary and secondary schools located in different parts of the UK. The main sources of data were recorded interviews and group discussions. These were supplemented, where appropriate, by classroom observation (with some sequences captured on videotape), data from pupil questionnaires, and by school and classroom documents (including reports produced by students as researchers teams). The analysis of the impact of consultation was checked out through an end of project survey, which gathered data from a sample of 96 teachers.

What are the implications?

The research suggests the value of using pupil consultation data to:

- find ways of improving aspects of schooling that would make a difference to pupils in teachers' own classes
- help identify the kinds of difficulties encountered by different groups of pupils which would enable teachers to develop strategies to support these groups
- illuminate issues of particular concern within a school, such as the drop out rate for certain subjects, or ways of reducing disruptive behaviour etc
- check whether pupils understand how they could improve their work and what they are aiming for
- enhance teachers' professional development.

What do the case studies illustrate?

The case studies give examples of how:

- a school consulted with pupils about a specific school issue - target setting
- teachers implemented their pupils' suggestions for teaching strategies they felt would support their learning
- even quite young children were able to undertake active research, with training and support
- a school evaluated the impact of students participating in 'Students as Researchers' (SaRs) research projects on their learning.

[Back to top](#)

Study

Why did the researchers consult pupils and what did they consult them about?

The researchers argued that consumers are often asked what they think about a service or a product - partly because it makes consumers feel that they matter, but also because it helps companies and service providers to tailor their services and products better. They pointed out that until recently, the 'consumers' in schools - the pupils - were rarely asked for their views. Now however, many schools are starting to consult their pupils and involve them as active participants in classroom-based research investigations to help them identify ways of improving teaching and learning.

The researchers investigated the insights gained through consulting pupils, and explored whether paying attention to pupils' perspectives really did have the potential to improve teaching and learning in schools. They explored pupils' perspectives on what they felt made a difference to their learning and achievement, and their views of the kinds of teaching strategies they felt would help them to succeed. For example, the pupils' perspectives reported by Flutter and Rudduck (2004) included:

- factors they felt sustained their engagement with learning
- factors they felt affected their confidence in their ability to learn
- the impact of friendships on their learning

- their understanding of the criteria for 'good' work
- how the way time is managed in school affected their learning.

We explore these themes in the following pages.

What sustained pupils' engagement with learning?

From their discussions with pupils, the researchers identified a number of factors which pupils felt positively affected their engagement with learning and those which they felt switched them off learning. The factors which pupils said helped to engage them with learning included:

- being involved in a variety of activities. In particular pupils felt that practical work not only helped them to understand difficult concepts, but also engendered a sense of achievement, especially when there was a tangible 'end product'
- receiving positive feedback and encouragement from their teachers. Even the more confident learners seemed to need reassurance that they were making good progress on a regular basis
- having opportunities to make choices in the classroom
- feeling that the work they were doing was interesting and pitched at a level they felt comfortable with, yet also challenged by.

Practitioners may find it helpful to read a case study we featured in our RfT summary about ability grouping which describes how teachers enabled their students to choose to work at a level they felt comfortable with, yet also felt challenged by (either 'basic', 'standard', 'extended' or 'advanced').

For many secondary aged pupils, engagement with learning was also linked to their perception of the kinds of knowledge that are required for life in the world outside school. Students felt that topics which were relevant to 'real life' situations helped make them seem more interesting. Factors that pupils felt switched them off from learning included:

- too much emphasis on written work. Many pupils across all key stages, but particularly boys, said they found writing problematic
- disruptive behaviour. Sometimes pupils were disruptive because they were bored and their attention was not focused on learning and there was a danger that disengaged pupils' behaviour led others to switch off learning because of the risk of disruption
- needing help, but not getting it. Waiting for help or resources caused some pupils to engage in disruptive behaviour because they felt bored or frustrated
- repetitious, 'easy' and mundane activities, such as completing worksheets and working from textbooks and activities that involved little physical movement.

What affected pupils' confidence in their ability to learn?

The researchers identified a range of factors that appeared to shape pupils' confidence as learners, including:

- pupils' understanding of assessment
- feedback and praise
- having someone to talk to about their learning
- parental influence and support
- friendships.

Pupils' perceptions of assessment

How assessment was explained to pupils seemed to make a difference to their confidence in their ability to learn. Pupils felt more confident about their ability to learn when they understood that assessment could help them make progress with their learning. Where the purposes of assessment were not made clear, 'tests'

seemed to make pupils very 'conscious of what they could not do rather than what they could do'.

Feedback and praise

Receiving positive feedback and praise from teachers and parents clearly played a central part in pupils' learning. It affected both their engagement and their assessment of their own ability. How praise and rewards were given was also important to pupils. Whilst younger pupils were generally quite pleased to receive tokens such as merit badges and reward stickers during assemblies etc, secondary students felt such public rewards were demeaning and embarrassing. But pupils of all ages wanted their families to hear about their achievements through, for example, letters of congratulations sent home for parents to read, positive comments written on their work and words of praise and encouragement given in yearly reports.

Someone to talk to

Pupils found the experience of having someone to talk to about their learning helped raise their confidence in themselves as learners. Mostly, they preferred to discuss their problems and progress in private on a one-to-one basis. They suggested that having the chance to reflect on their work and achievements also helped restore their confidence. Pupils viewed mentoring by adults as a helpful strategy, especially where it provided direct and specific guidance on particular areas of work. Peer mentoring by older pupils trained in mentoring skills often appeared to have a beneficial effect on pupils' confidence in their ability to learn too. The researchers found that both mentored and mentoring pupils valued and enjoyed the experience and that it helped to create a more positive climate for learning.

Parental influence and support

Parental influence and support had a marked effect on pupils' attitudes to learning and on the development of their identities as learners. Some families played a positive role - for example some pupils described how their families' interest in their schoolwork helped them feel more confident. Pupils' comments also revealed how family influence sometimes undermined pupils' confidence. For example, pupils could feel less confident in their abilities to do well in a particular subject because their parents had little knowledge or skill in the subject and could not offer help with homework.

Our earlier RfT about the impact of study support reported how homework clubs were an effective strategy for helping pupils who experience problems with homework. The researchers found that many pupils appreciated after-school support and that this type of provision had a beneficial impact on pupil attainment.

Friendships

Friendships exerted a strong influence on pupils' confidence as learners. We look at the ways friendships impacted on both pupils' confidence and their learning in detail on the next page.

What did pupils say about the impact of friendships on their learning?

The researchers found that the role of friendships was a double-edged sword in the classroom - they could have either a positive or negative effect on pupils' engagement with learning and they exerted a strong influence on their achievement.

Pupils reported that their friendships were an important means of support - particularly for pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning. The influence varied from direct support with work to pastoral support. Both primary and secondary pupils commented on the value of friends' support with learning and motivation in the classroom:

'I'm sitting next to Jane and she helps me if I'm stuck and I help her. Sometimes she helps me know the answer but she doesn't actually, like, say 'Oh it's 36', she says 'Well, how many tens has it got? Now

count the units ...'

(Y3 girl)

'We're working in pairs so if one of you is better at music and the other is better at IT, if you can work in pairs you can combine the two. So it ends up that you both learn off each other because usually you end up with friends who'll have different kinds of skills.

(Y8 pupil)

'You think 'I've got to catch up to them' so you start working faster and better. You want to beat them'.

(Y10 boy)

Consequently, friendships that went wrong or friendships that were split up often had a damaging impact on pupils' learning and confidence. A student explained how setting resulted in her losing confidence in her ability because she lost the practical help from her friend:

'Well, my friend got dropped out of the top set so I have to sit on my own now and the work is really, really hard and I've like asked if I could go down to the second set ... and I hope I can move down because then I'll enjoy school a lot more because I dread Mondays and Thursdays because of [those lessons].

(Y10 girl)

Pupils were also aware of the problems associated with friendships. Many were able to make a clear distinction between friends who helped them in some way with their learning and those they enjoyed being with, but who were likely to have a negative effect on their work:

'I work best with Holly doing maths because she doesn't mess about and if I sit with Tom he always jumps up and takes the book all over the place'.

(Y3 girl)

Pupils were well aware that friends could also draw them into being disruptive themselves. Once they had acquired a 'troublemaker' image, they found it hard to change and re-engage with learning.

What did the researchers find out about pupils' understanding of the criteria for 'good work'?

Comments made by the pupils showed that often they did not understand the criteria for 'good work'. Pupils tended to think that 'working harder' or 'doing better' meant they needed to stop talking, produce more work, complete work on time and present work neatly. Similarly, when pupils assessed their own work, the researchers found that their evaluations concentrated on the neatness of their work, the amount of effort they had made and the time they had spent on the task:

'Well, if I look back at my book and I find my handwriting's neat and my drawings are better and like it's set out better then I'll find I could praise myself because of that.

(Y8 girl)

'I had a page and about a half to do in just a single lesson - that is forty minutes, and I thought I can never do this and then I didn't talk to anybody, I didn't stare at anybody, I just concentrated and I wrote it down in my neat book and I got it done'.

(Y5 girl)

To pupils, knowing how to improve their work was more important than vague instructions to 'do better' or 'work harder':

'I'd find it helpful if someone were to just sit down and talk through say, like you could get a C by doing more revision ... or just writing a bit more'.

(Y10 boy)

Pupils sometimes misinterpreted processes like target setting, intended to help them improve the quality of their work. Rather than giving pupils an idea of how they were performing and what they needed to do to improve, targets could appear to be an obscure hurdle to them, as this pupil explained:

'No one has ever talked to me about the targets ... like, no one has ever told me how I can reach that target ...'
(Y10 girl)

Practitioners may find it helpful to read about ways of providing pupils with feedback about how to improve their work, which we outlined in our earlier RfT about assessment for learning.

Practitioners may also like to read a case study of a school that used pupil consultation to improve the school's system of target setting.

How did the structure of lessons and the school day affect pupils' learning?

Pupils felt that some of the difficulties they experienced with their learning were due to the way time was used within lessons and through the school day - they felt constrained by the time structures that were imposed upon them during lessons and by the structure of the school day.

Many pupils felt that teachers spent too long explaining activities and left them with too little time to carry out the learning tasks. However, the amount of time pupils felt they needed varied according to curriculum subject and the individual needs of the pupils. Some pupils said they often felt 'left behind' because the pace of work was too fast, others commented that they felt 'held back' waiting for slower pupils.

Pupils also said that they liked to work on projects where they were allowed several weeks to complete work, rather than a lesson or two. They felt that when teaching moved quickly from one topic to another, their learning was piecemeal and fragmentary. Some pupils suggested allowing the class more flexibility and self-direction in time management - a solution that may be helpful for both faster and slower learners.

As well as wanting more time to carry out activities, some pupils also wanted more time to respond to teachers' questions. We explored the positive effects of extending 'wait-time' (allowing a pause of between three and five seconds after asking a question) on pupils' learning in our earlier RfT about assessment for learning.

Some secondary pupils felt that the rapid sequence of different lessons made it more difficult for them to sustain their concentration. They suggested that having fewer, but longer lessons in a day would enable them to cover more work and allow them to go into more detail.

What suggestions for improving classroom teaching did pupils make?

So far in this RfT summary, we have examined what pupils said about their experiences of learning - particularly their difficulties with learning. On this page we look at some strategies that Year 8 pupils suggested would help them with their learning and on the next page we examine what happened when their teachers tried incorporating some of these ideas into their teaching. This aspect of the network project was reported in Arnot et al (2003).

The pupils suggested a number of teaching approaches which they felt would help them engage more deeply, more actively, more sociably and with more responsibility in classroom learning activities. Their suggestions echo the comments made by pupils about their experiences of learning which we summarised in the earlier pages of this RfT.

Engaging more deeply in learning

Many of the suggestions made by the pupils related to the depth of their engagement in classroom learning. Pupils said they liked clear, concise explanations that included examples and concrete demonstrations. For lessons that involved writing activities, pupils said they preferred graphic styles of writing, such as spider diagrams, posters or tasks that combined writing with some form of drawing. The pupils suggested that writing activities such as these helped them make connections between concepts. Pupils said they found it helpful to have the learning purposes of lessons made clear and they liked activities that were challenging, yet pitched at a level they felt comfortable with.

Contextualising learning

Pupils suggested that their learning experiences could be enhanced if tasks were more closely aligned with the social worlds in which they lived - both inside and outside the classroom. They said they found it helpful when teachers used materials, objects and images that they were already familiar with. Where tasks were contextualised in these ways, pupils reported that they led to memorable and meaningful learning experiences.

Fostering a sense of agency and ownership

A strong message from the pupils was that they wanted to be trusted to learn. They wanted to learn by doing more and by taking responsibility for themselves. Acquiring greater responsibility in their learning was strongly connected by pupils to their sense of growing maturity. However, pupils realised the importance of balancing independent learning opportunities with more controlled opportunities.

Arranging social contexts more amenable to learning

Pupils felt that effective social contexts for learning were those that allowed them to collaborate with their peers. How groups were organised in the classroom was important to pupils although they did not agree about which group formations (for example friendship or non-friendship groups) worked best. (We explored how pupils felt that working with friends was both beneficial and problematic in an earlier page of this summary). Pupils reported that they felt frustrated when grouped with peers who did not share the same level of interest.

Were teachers able to make use of their pupils' suggestions?

The researchers found that the teachers were, on the whole, surprised by the richness, the positive nature, the insightfulness and the good sense of many of their pupils' ideas. They examined the ideas critically, especially in terms of their practicality and found that, in fact, many of the ideas reflected elements of their own current or past practice and also echoed their own educational thinking. The teachers commented, for example:

'Everybody liked the role-playing. So I'll try and include that. I've always done that, so that's something I'll try and maintain'.

'I like the idea of this fairy story suggestion which funnily enough I had done with another group ... it would be completely new for them and it would be quite a nice focus'.

'I think one thing that came out was they'd like to discuss wrong results more, which I think is a fair comment really ... perhaps I'll try to make an effort to at least do one piece of investigational work where we spend a lot of time evaluating'.

Most of the teachers made direct use of their pupils' suggestions to plan their teaching in ways that were more motivating for the pupils and which they felt were likely to contribute usefully to their classroom learning. How effective the teachers were at making use of their pupils' suggestions appeared to depend on:

- a readiness on the part of individual teachers to believe that their pupils had the capacity to contribute usefully to thinking about the improvement of classroom teaching and learning

- careful planning and their ability to overcome the various contingencies which arose in school life, such as technical problems with ICT equipment
- a realistic assessment of how far pupils had developed the skills, attitudes and understandings necessary for them to play an active part in planning or managing aspects of classroom life.

The pupils appreciated their teachers making use of their ideas. Making sustained use of their ideas appeared to enhance the pupils' feelings of trust in, and being trusted by, their teachers and of belonging to the school.

Practitioners may find it helpful to reflect on two case studies drawn from the project - one describes how a teacher successfully implemented her pupils' suggestions and another which highlights why another teacher was unsuccessful.

How else did pupils work with teachers to improve practice?

So far in this RfT summary, we have looked at feedback pupils gave about issues of concern to teachers and the researchers. Over the next three pages we explore approaches in which students investigated their own choice of issues. The 'Students as Researchers' (SaRs) projects (reported in Fielding and Bragg, 2003) involved students designing and leading their own research studies. The projects enabled students to work with teachers in bringing about change, with teachers supporting and facilitating the process. Rather than being a passive data source - answering interview questions or ticking boxes on a survey designed by adults - the students shaped the form and direction of the research.

In the SaRs projects, students researched a range of issues they viewed as important. The issues covered teaching and learning, curriculum and policy, and school organisation and environment. For example:

- teaching and learning - what makes a good teacher and a good lesson, the relation between classroom layout and student behaviour and the drop-out rate in particular subjects
- school and curriculum policy - making GCSE choices, post-16 choices, the structure and loading of homework, target setting, bullying policies and truanting
- school organisation and environment - playground layout and design, dining room arrangements such as queuing, and students' recreational needs.

Practitioners may like to read a case study of a teacher who taught ten-year-old children the knowledge and skills they needed to design and carry out research projects, drawing upon knowledge she had gained from completing research at postgraduate level.

An example of a SaRs project

One SaRs project reported by the researchers involved students investigating student perspectives on the issue of transition from GCSE to post-16 study. The project lasted from November to the summer. The school had identified teaching and learning in the sixth form as one of its priority areas for school improvement. A member of staff was given a responsibility point to recruit and support a group of 12 students to investigate the issue. The students met weekly at lunchtimes. They carried out lesson observations, then designed a questionnaire for students, asking them about their preferred teaching approaches, areas where they felt they lacked skills, the characteristics of good teachers and good students, and students' use of time.

The data they collected emphasised students' responsibilities in contributing to successful learning and teaching. For example, the student researchers observed that up to 60% of students were late for lessons and they asked students for their ideas on how teachers should respond to this situation. The students communicated their need for help (such as with organising folders) and their preferences (such as having homework set in the middle rather than the end of lessons).

The student researchers used postcards to disseminate their findings to the teachers - they wrote a finding on

one side of each postcard and drew a witty cartoon on the other. The postcards provided a talking point amongst staff and students. Students commented that they felt that teachers were listening to their concerns and that this had helped to improve staff-student relationships.

How did the students feel they benefited from participating in research projects?

The Students as Researchers (SaRs) projects appeared to have a positive impact on students - not just those involved as researchers, but the whole class and year group. Students suggested the benefits included:

- developing a positive sense of self-worth
- developing inquiring minds and learning new skills
- developing social competences and new relationships
- reflecting on their own learning.

Developing a positive sense of self-worth

Student researchers described the pleasures of participating in purposeful, challenging activities, addressing issues that they felt were important, and having an impact on how things were done at school:

'Finally I had found that extra niche that I needed in order to keep me interested in my studies and motivate me to come to school. From some work that I had done I had influenced the school's feelings about profiling so much that they had changed it. That gave me a great feeling of achievement'.

(Y10 researcher)

Developing inquiring minds and learning new skills

In the process of planning and doing the research, the student researchers acquired academic skills (such as devising questionnaires, analysing documents and interpreting data), became more confident communicators (because they were required to speak in public to different audiences) and developed civic skills (such as drawing up an agenda, taking minutes and chairing meetings).

'I'm more confident. My English has improved. I type up everything and distribute it and give presentations ... 30 teachers, six different schools, it doesn't bother me now to stand in front of a class.'

(Y10 researcher)

Developing social competences and new relationships

The projects often involved getting to know students of different ages and abilities, understanding their perspectives, and valuing what they offered. Students also often formed new bonds with their teachers, and by working with them in a different way, they came to perceive them differently:

'It has been quite helpful for us to understand some of the problems students have, but also that we really need to help teachers because if we don't put any input in and don't behave there's no chance that teachers are going to be able to get on with their job'.

(Y12 researcher)

Reflecting on their own learning

The students developed a greater sense of control over their own learning, and increased confidence in talking about it and how to improve it:

'Approaching teachers about my work - I feel so much more comfortable and try to communicate as an equal'.

(Y10 researcher)

Practitioners may like to read a case study of a school that investigated the impact of participating in SaRs projects on student learning.

What did teachers feel were the benefits of the 'Students as Researchers' projects?

Teachers reported they found the Students as Researchers (SaRs) projects rewarding in a number of ways, including:

- experiencing a different way of working with students
- seeing changes in students
- creating new partnerships with students
- gaining insights that helped their own professional development.

Experiencing a different way of working with students

The teachers commented that they enjoyed working intensively with a smaller group of students than usual in their teaching. It gave them the opportunity to get to know students in a different way and to work with students they didn't normally teach, including different age groups:

'It gives me a chance to actually get to know the kids, even if it's only a few of them, and I don't feel that I can do that in a classroom situation because I'm trying to keep control all the time'.

(Secondary teacher)

Seeing changes in students

The teachers noticed that students became more positive and active in their approach to teaching and learning - they attended more regularly, completed homework, helped other students and were ready to talk to teachers about problems or their progress:

'They had a real sense of collective ownership, thinking 'It's up to us to make this work, it's up to us to make this interesting. Let's suggest we go on a visit ...'

(Y6 teacher)

Creating new partnerships with students

Teachers developed greater trust, more positive attitudes and higher expectations of what students could do. They also came to understand how students learned about learning from the students' standpoint and became more confident about promoting collaboration among students:

'I know from working with students that the more you talk with them and involve them, the more it changes the learning relationship'.

(Secondary teacher)

Gaining insights that helped their own professional development

Students often gave valuable feedback to teachers that helped them move forward in their practice or reminded them about what they already knew to be good practice. Teachers commented on the powerful impact student feedback had, as this teacher explained:

'One member of staff had been at the school for 25 years and was impervious to a lot of professional development activity. Having had students observe his lessons, he shared with his staff that it had been the

most profound piece of professional development activity he had ever been involved in ... they said 'You always question to the right. And you walk up and down the aisles and the students have told us that they find that really intimidating'. Both of these things he has now addressed. Teacher appraisals had never picked up either of them'.

(Secondary deputy head)

How have schools used pupil consultation and participation?

The researchers found that schools used a variety of pupil consultation approaches, including:

- identifying pupils' general concerns - a 'wide-angle' approach
- 'spotlighting' issues of concern for particular groups of pupils
- supporting individual learners who find learning difficult
- helping establish a more democratic school system
- monitoring and evaluating new practices at classroom and school levels.

The 'wide-angle' approach

Pupil consultation was often used as a way of finding out what was happening in a school or classroom. Sometimes teachers had general concerns that pupils were not performing as well as they could be and, to help them understand why, they explored their pupils' responses to, and attitudes towards, particular aspects of teaching and learning.

Some schools have focused on particular concerns in detail, for example assessment, group work, science teaching, use of information technology and creative writing skills or year groups which were causing concern. For example, some schools looked at Year 3 and Year 8 because they had noticed a dip in pupil performance.

Supporting individual learners

Consulting pupils about their learning on an individual basis, focusing on talk about learning as a process, has been used particularly in special needs education.

Teaching about citizenship

The recently introduced curriculum guidance on citizenship education required that schools teach pupils about the nature and purpose of democracy and introduce them to the idea of the rights and responsibilities of membership of a democratic society. For pupils in Key Stage 3 and 4 this is a statutory component of the National Curriculum. The school council is the most common approach used for introducing pupils to the ideas of democracy.

Trying out new ideas

Some schools have used pupil consultation and participation to look at existing aspects of practice with 'fresh eyes' or to 'break new ground'. For example, finding alternative ways of tackling pervasive problems, such as pupil disengagement with learning, boys' underachievement and truancy. In some cases, individual teachers consulted with their pupils to help them understand these problems or they used the insights they gained from pupil consultation to experiment with new approaches.

Practitioners wanting to try pupil consultation in their own classrooms may find it helpful to consider the various tools for consulting pupils developed by the researchers as part of the project. We have included details about the toolkit for consulting pupils in the case study section.

The researchers stressed that consultation should be guided by the following principles:

- a genuine desire to hear what pupils have to say
- the topic is not trivial
- the purpose of the consultation is explained to the pupils involved
- pupils know what will happen to what they say
- pupils are confident that expressing their opinion or describing their experience will not disadvantage them
- feedback is given to everyone who is consulted
- when actions are taken and decisions made, pupils are able to understand the wider context in which their views are placed.

We also advise that practitioners consult the National Children's Bureau Highlight 193 (see Further Reading) which explains the practical, methodological and ethical principles that should guide pupil consultation.

How was the research designed?

This RfT summary is based on data gathered from 48 primary and secondary schools located in different parts of the UK which took part in a three-year research project completed between 2001 and 2003.

The project consisted of a network of six sub-projects that investigated:

- ways of consulting pupils about teaching and learning
- how teachers responded to pupils' ideas about improving teaching and learning in different subjects
- the potential of pupils to act as (co)researchers into the process of teaching and learning
- how the conditions of learning in school and classroom affect the identity and participation of different groups of pupils
- ways of sustaining the process of pupil participation and gathering pupil perspectives
- innovative initiatives involving pupil consultation and participation.
- The aims of the project as a whole were to:
 - identify strategies which would help teachers consult pupils about teaching and learning
 - gather evidence of the power of pupils' comments to improve teaching and learning
 - gather evidence of the impact of consultation on pupils, teachers and schools
 - develop ways of building consultation into the organisational structure of schools.

Two of the projects were researcher-led, with the agenda set by the project team. In three of the projects, the team worked with schools which already had some experience of pupil consultation. One project offered small grants to schools to support the development of new initiatives. Hence the project as a whole was designed to gather evidence to support the development of pupil voice-based strategies in schools, based on sound evidence of their capacity to enhance teaching and learning.

The main sources of data were recorded interviews and group discussions. These were supplemented, where appropriate, by classroom observation (with some sequences captured on videotape), data from pupil questionnaires, and by school and classroom documents (including reports produced by students as researchers teams). The analysis of the impact of consultation was checked out through an end of project survey, which gathered data from a sample of 96 teachers involved in the Network Project or in other pupil voice initiatives.

In preparing this Rom we have created a synthesis of the evidence from five of the project publications within a framework of questions designed to help teachers' assess the potential of pupil voice for their own practice and contexts and to offer some practical examples of appropriate strategies.

What are the implications for practitioners?

Before embarking on pupil consultation projects, we suggest practitioners consider the guiding principles we outlined at the end of the page 'How have schools used consultation and participation'.

School leaders may find the following implications helpful in acting on the messages in this RfT:

- do pupils have a voice in your school related to teaching and learning?
- are there issues of particular concern in your school that your pupils could help you with - such as the drop out rate for certain subjects, or ways of reducing disruptive behaviour etc?
- teachers involved in the research project commented on how the insights they gained from their pupils were a powerful form of professional learning. In what ways might your colleagues find consulting pupils a useful professional development activity?
- could you do more to support colleagues wanting to try consulting their pupils or initiating Students as Researchers projects for the first time? For example, through organising workshops and recruiting external help from colleagues with experience of such work from university education departments or other schools?
- the researchers gave examples of what happened when teachers tried implementing their pupils' ideas for teaching strategies they felt would help their learning - some were more successful than others. Would teachers in your school find it helpful to be given the opportunity to evaluate and share with each other their experiences of responding to their pupils' suggestions?
- researching pupils' perspectives on school life involving pupil voice has the potential to situate their learning about democracy. Does your school make the connection between pupil voice, the school council and the citizenship curriculum regarding democracy?

Teachers may wish to consider the following implications of the findings of this research project:

- do your pupils feel that their views are respected or do you need to raise their expectations about what they can contribute? If so, would consulting them about learning make a difference?
- from their discussions with pupils, the researchers identified a number of factors which pupils felt positively affected their engagement with learning; have you considered using pupil consultation to find ways of improving the aspects of schooling that would make a difference to your pupils in this way?
- pupil consultation has also highlighted social, ethnic and gender differences. Could pupil consultation data help you to identify the kinds of difficulties encountered by different groups of pupils and enable you to develop strategies to support these groups?
- many of the pupils involved in the project said that difficulties with writing affected their ability to learn. Could you do more to engage pupils in learning activities that support writing work with the use of usual cues (such as posters and spider diagrams etc) or provide support with the writing process (perhaps through paired work or using computers)?
- friendships clearly exerted a strong influence on pupils' learning and achievement although the pupils did not agree about whether friendship or non-friendship groups worked best. Would it be helpful to consult your pupils about the best mix for their particular situation?
- pupils involved in the study suggested that having someone to talk to (an older peer or an adult) about their learning helped raise their confidence in themselves as learners. Are there pupils in your class who would find having a mentor or peer support helpful? Could some of your pupils act as a mentor to others and benefit from the process?
- the pupils involved in the project did not have a clear understanding of how assessment could help them improve their work. Do all your pupils understand how they could improve their work and what they are aiming for?
- the researchers found that some pupils wanted to be allowed more time to complete tasks, whilst others wanted to work at a faster pace. Do you find juggling the needs of slower and faster learners a problem with the classes you teach? Would you find it helpful to give your pupils greater choice in deciding how to balance their time?
- how else could pupil consultation help you in your classroom?

Filling in the gaps

Gaps that are uncovered in a piece of research also have a useful role in making sure that future research

builds cumulatively on what is known. But research also needs to inform practice, so practitioners' interpretation of the gaps and follow-up questions are crucial. The researchers highlighted several areas of research which were not explored by the project:

- the impact of pupil consultation on pupils' progress on particular courses of study or in particular subjects
- the extent to which consultation and participation could turn around schools where considerable numbers of pupils are disengaged and where pupils are performing below their potential
- gender differences in responses to consultation and the kinds of issues raised
- parents' attitudes to consultation - the extent to which the practices and values that consultation embodies are in conflict with those of the home, and where they are, possible ways forward.

Do you think that research exploring these questions would help you inform your practice? Which issues are of most interest to you?

What is your experience?

Do you have any evidence regarding the impact of pupil consultation on pupils' performance or do you have action research or enquiry based development programmes running that explore, for example, disaffection or transfer post-11 and post-16? We would be interested to hear about examples of pupil consultation and participation in schools, which we could perhaps feature in our case study.

[Back to top](#)

Case studies

We have chosen five case studies to illustrate different aspects of the 'consulting pupils' project featured in our RfT summary. Case study 1 is an example of a school that consulted pupils about a specific issue identified by the school - target setting. Case study 2 relates the experiences of two teachers who tried implementing their pupils' suggestions for teaching strategies. The third case study describes how a teacher trained a group of ten-year-old pupils to enable them to conduct their own research and the fourth case study is an example of a school which evaluated the impact of students participating in research projects on their learning. Finally, we have summarised the different approaches for consulting pupils developed through one of the network projects.

Consulting pupils about improving the school's system of target setting

We chose this case study because it is an example of how a school consulted with pupils about a specific school issue - target setting. In the process, the teachers involved also increased their understanding of the conditions of learning as their Year 10 and Year 11 students experienced them. This school project was supported by academic researchers from the 'Consulting pupils network project'.

Nine students from Year 10 worked with six of their humanities' teachers for two years to investigate students' views and attitudes towards learning, and how the school's work on target setting could be improved. The students were selected to include a representative mix of boys and girls and top/middle/bottom ability ranges. The teachers included an assistant headteacher (who coordinated the project), a head of Year 10, the heads of geography and religious studies and the seconds in departments for history and geography.

The teachers met with the students regularly to discuss their progress and attainment, and focus groups of students and teachers worked to improve the aesthetics of the key areas of school where geography, history and religious studies were taught. A university researcher conducted interviews with the students at the start of the project to find out how they wanted to learn and organise their learning. During these interviews the students indicated that they:

- wanted respect and wanted to be involved in their education
- did not tolerate poor learning environments
- had clear ideas about what good teaching and learning looked like in their classrooms
- had mixed feelings about the value of target setting
- wanted to know how to improve their work as well as what required improvement.

The interviews highlighted some specific drawbacks of target setting from the students' perspective. For example, some students felt that being told that they would receive a poor grade affected their confidence; they seemed to think that the target setting grades delimited what they could achieve and so they tended to feel that there was little point in trying harder because they were unlikely to do any better. As well as pointing out the drawbacks to target setting, the students made constructive suggestions for how the system might be improved:

I've spoken to other people and they find it difficult if they're quite clever, but their target grades are all A*s. They still find it difficult to achieve it and if they're not achieving it, well, they think, 'Well, why can't I be achieving it? This thing says I can, but I'm not', so it puts pressure on a lot of people. Someone that knows you should sit down and speak to you and discuss where you are now and what you think you can achieve. So if you did it like that then I think it would work'.

(Y10 student)

I don't think target setting's very useful because I don't think students themselves feel strongly about target grades and think, 'Oh I'd better go home and do things better'. It's easier if the teacher has a word with you and says, 'Look, you're slipping in this' rather than having to set the grades'.

(Y10 student)

By the end of the project, the school had begun to develop a whole-school approach to target setting and was giving a more active role to Year 10 and 11 students in deciding their targets. In addition, teachers were offering clearer guidance on ways of raising attainment in specific subject areas. The school found that the students had a much clearer understanding of their targets and seemed motivated by the increased ownership and choice, while remaining realistic about their capabilities.

In addition, the teaching environment in the Humanities block was improved in ways suggested by the students - desks and table arrangements were changed, student work on display in the corridors included posters, rooms were painted in colours chosen by the students and students started to be involved in more subject planning and evaluation than before.

The project appeared to have a great impact on one particular student for whom permanent exclusion was avoided. This was because the student felt he could talk to staff and the kudos of being involved in the research project enhanced his own self-esteem and tolerance of school systems. The assistant headteacher commented that 'he walked proudly forward to collect his research certificate at the senior presentation evening'.

The Head of Year summed up the impact he felt the action research project had had in these words:

'As I write this, I have today (2003) gone through the new target setting progress where students are invited to set their own targets based on their average KS3 points and chances graphs. They had a much clearer understanding of the targets and were motivated by the element of ownership and choice yet realistic about their capabilities. We will now introduce "Progress File" to support their action points and learning. It is surprising what nine students can achieve and I am sure they are probably unaware of the effect their work has had on school policy. I am proud of the way they responded to interviews and the mature reflection they presented. At one point there were several tensions between them but they overcame any difference of

opinion and came to respect each other's point of view. They were certainly proud of the fact that they had participated and although their results may not have significantly improved their gain in experience, confidence and social interaction cannot be measured. Their views were taken into account in the development of the PSHE programme and their rewards system. It certainly opened my eyes toward the effectiveness of "pupil voice" and has influenced the way I now encourage teams of staff to include "pupil feedback" in the departmental procedures'.

Reference

Ingrid Cox (2004) Developing student leadership in a Networked Learning Community. National Teacher Research Panel (2004). Available at: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp/lib/word/Cox.doc> (Accessed 28 February, 2005)

Implementing pupils' suggestions for teaching strategies

We have chosen two examples of how teachers implemented their pupils' suggestions for teaching strategies they felt would support their learning - a successful and an unsuccessful experience - from the project we reported in the main study. The researchers suggested that the difference in the two teachers' experiences was due to the choice and interpretation of the pupils' suggestions the teachers made.

Laura, a mathematics teacher, planned to incorporate the following pupil suggestions into her teaching:

- include more difficult problems as extension work
- use computer facilities more
- have more competitive games
- increase the opportunities for pupils to share their ideas with each other.

The first lesson where Laura planned to make use of ICT and interactive pair work were 'sabotaged' by technical problems. In the second lesson, Laura found that the pupils' ICT knowledge was not as good as she had expected, so that basic tasks took much longer and she made less use of the extension work than she had planned. However, in the third lesson, Laura was pleased with the way the pupils settled into the task:

'They were all fully focused most of the time ... clearly [using ICT effectively] does make a big difference'.

Laura also felt that using ICT had created an opportunity for pupils to work together and to learn from talking to each other. Despite encountering considerable practical and organisational difficulties, Laura was enthusiastic about the experience. She said that consulting pupils had encouraged and reinforced her use of 'very fun' activities that were both enjoyable and catered for visual, spatial and active learning styles:

'these interviews gave me a chance to listen and hear that they were getting something out of it ... I've found it surprisingly useful, much more useful than I expected it to be'.

Jane, an English and Drama teacher, had more ambitious plans for following up on her pupils' suggestions - she planned to delegate decision-making to her pupils. She aimed to make group discussions a central part of the decision-making, with class representatives deciding the groups' membership and leading the groups. The activity was unsuccessful - the pupils made clear their dislike of the composition of the groups and the tasks they were given, and Jane found it difficult to get the pupils to listen to each other. Hostility between the pupils led to two of the class representatives storming out of the classroom.

The researchers suggested that an important lesson could be learned from Jane's experience - for pupils to be able to share in classroom-decision making, they need to be given opportunities to develop the necessary expertise in planning and managing their own learning activities.

Reference:

Arnot, M. et al. (2004) Consultation in the classroom: developing dialogue about teaching and learning. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing.

Empowering ten-year-olds as active researchers

We chose this case study because it shows how, with training and support, quite young children were able to undertake active research. This study was undertaken by a practitioner independently of the network project described in the main study section.

The teacher-researcher undertook her study with seven able children (aged ten years) from a large county primary school in Oxfordshire. She set up a 'Research Club' that met every Friday lunchtime for two terms. The children took packed lunches and worked through the first 20 minutes of the afternoon reading session (this gave the group about an hour and a quarter each week). The researcher spent the first six weeks teaching the pupils about research design and methodology, drawing upon knowledge she had gained from completing research at postgraduate level. She covered the following topics:

- following a rigorous, valid and ethical research design
- formulating a hypothesis
- choosing an appropriate methodology crafted to the nature of the enquiry, that takes account of confounding variables
- collecting data systematically to answer the hypothesis, using different techniques, such as observation and interview
- simple data analysis.

The teacher-researcher spent the remaining 14 weeks supporting pupils with their own research. The pupils had a completely free choice in what they wanted to research. Of the seven children, six opted to work in pairs and this led to the undertaking of four research projects in all. The topics the pupils chose reflected areas of their interest and concern, for example:

- 'Hey I'm nine not six!' A small-scale investigation of looking younger than your age at school
- Using observation and interview the pupils investigated what life in the playground was like for two girls who looked a lot younger than their age. Their findings pointed to some common themes such as being 'babied', being treated like dolls and being bullied by younger children. They noted some strategies that the two girls developed to help get them noticed.

Gender differences in the way Year 5 pupils use computers

The pupils designed a questionnaire using a Likert-style scale to elicit responses about how girls and boys of their age used computers. They found some clear gender differences particularly in the stronger preference of boys for playing games on computers. Girls liked doing Internet searches more than boys and used computers for homework more often than boys.

The teacher-researcher suggested that enabling these pupils to become active researchers resulted in three main positive outcomes. The first outcome related to the development of the children's learning through their engagement with the research process. Post-study interviews with the children revealed that they themselves thought their organisational and management skills had improved through handling and sorting large amounts of data and their thinking skills had developed through critiquing their own and other people's work.

Secondly, the children argued strongly that, although not as experienced as some adults, their research uncovered data that might not have been possible for adults to obtain. They argued that being party to playground subculture and being on the same wavelength as their peers enabled them to design studies that better accessed the child perspective.

Thirdly, the pupils' work added to the body of knowledge about children and childhood from a genuine child perspective. The pupils wrote up their studies (two of which were published) and all seven of them presented their research at a conference at the Westminster Institute of Education.

Reference:

Kellett, M (2003) Empowering ten-year-olds as active researchers. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, September 11-13, 2003. Available at: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00003340.doc> (Accessed 28 February 2005)

A free set of materials for training secondary pupils as researchers is available from the Network Project team, or you can email Julia Flutter for an electronic copy at: JAED100@cam.ac.uk

Evaluating the impact of being a student researcher on learning

We have chosen this case study because it is an example of a school which evaluated the impact of students participating in 'Students as Researchers' (SaRs) research projects on their learning. The study took place in an LEA multi-ethnic 11-19 comprehensive school of 1050 girls in North London. Ninety students from years 8 -12 carried out a number of research projects they designed themselves in cohorts of 15 - 30 per project. The students carried out the bulk of their research outside lesson time. Training in research methods was provided in school-time by academic experts from the School of Education, Cambridge University and school staff provided the students with support and mentoring throughout the projects.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of participating in SaRs research projects on the students in terms of their:

- attitude to the SaRs initiative
- social skills
- academic skills.

The issues the student researchers investigated included:

- Inside the classroom
- Students' views of KS3 PHSE
- What do students think Citizenship consists of?
- How do Year 8 students define learning?
- Do pupils have good relationships with their teachers?
- The Wider School Environment
- Are students happy with the school environment?
- How healthy is the food available in school?
- Student Welfare Issues
- What extra-curricular activities are available to students? Would additional team
- building activities help to resolve problems?
- Do students find the system of rewarding achievement satisfactory?
- What opportunities are there to express your views and be listened to?
- What does the school do to help us to develop as individuals?

The training for the SaRs projects took place over three days and included:

- an introductory day to discuss and agree research questions
- a day focusing on research ethics and methods, particularly in constructing questionnaires and conducting interviews
- a day spent on analysing data and presenting findings.

In-school support and mentoring about the process and any difficulties encountered by the students was

provided by the Teacher Research Co-ordinator, Heads of Year and subject staff associated with the particular projects selected by the students. All the groups wrote-up their projects and made oral presentations of their findings to the school council, a selection of staff and governors within school and other students and teachers at conferences. At the end of their projects, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire to assess the impact of the project. Semi structured interviews were conducted with a small sample of students to expand on their written answers to provide examples to illustrate the factual data.

The students' responses to the questionnaire suggested that the SaRs initiative had had a powerful impact on the students' learning in both the academic and social domains. Most students indicated that they felt they had benefited in the following ways:

- social skills
- working and learning as a team
- sharing ideas and tasks
- enhancing self confidence in presentations
- acquiring and applying research skills to subject learning
- academic skills
- learning how to manage time effectively
- applying research skills to school subjects.

They also welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the improvement of the learning environment of the school through the projects, commenting:

'it's a chance for students to improve their school rather than teachers and adults doing it for them.'

'It's about having a say in what we do, being involved in the school not just attending'.

Most students recorded a very strong endorsement of the value of doing research by suggesting such opportunities should be extended to more students. The minority of students who did not think that research opportunities should be offered to other students gave a variety of reasons, including doubts as to whether students would enjoy it or the added pressure that came from being a student researcher.

The majority of students saw the process of being selected and trained to carry out research as a positive experience and emphasised their delight at being chosen to carry out such a demanding task. However, some students felt awkward about being singled out to participate. They indicated that they thought student researchers should be volunteers. A significant number of students, remained unclear about why they had been asked to join the SaRs initiative and how they were then expected to include all of their peers as data sources, despite the adults' attempts to explain their rationale fully. A number of students also drew attention to problems they had encountered, such as getting information back via questionnaires so that they had sufficient data and issues of when and where meetings could be held in an already crowded schedule.

Nevertheless, overall, the students felt positive about their experience of participating in SaRs projects. Two of the students summed up the benefits of participating in these words:

'I think the experience has allowed me to learn valuable skills in teamwork and oral presentation. It has helped me to appreciate how much can be achieved with good student-teacher relationships. If research is conducted it allows everyone to benefit from the results.'

'Other people benefited from our research. It inspired other people to get involved with it. We were able to make a difference to the school.'

Reference:

Naylor, A. & Worrall, N. (2004) Students as Researchers: How does being a student researcher affect learning? National Teacher Research Panel (2004) Available at: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp/lib/pdf/WorrallNaylor.pdf> (Accessed 28 February 2005)

How might teachers collect their own pupil voice data?

The researchers suggested that the key challenges with pupil consultation are ensuring that all pupils feel that what they say matters and that all voices will be heard - that consultation does not privilege those pupils who are more articulate. They collected together a variety of approaches for consulting pupils' views about their learning, which teachers could adapt to suit their pupils' age and confidence in reading, writing and speaking.

Questionnaire-based approaches

Questionnaires can take a number of different forms:

- quick response questionnaires are the simplest questionnaires. They usually offer statements and ask pupils whether they agree or disagree - pupils record their answers by ticking boxes, underlining a word such as always/sometimes/never or circling numbers etc.
- two-dimension questionnaires gather information about two aspects of an issue and allow for comparisons to be made - for example, pupils could be asked to give a response that says what they think about 'X' and what they think other pupils think about it
- the double checklist allows pupils to say for example, how often something happens in class and whether it helps them to learn - the outcomes can be plotted on a frequency graph
- the spot check gives a snapshot view at a given moment of a pupil's motivation and engagement with the lesson - for example pupils can be asked to indicate on a three-point scale whether time is passing quickly or slowly.

Writing-based approaches

Approaches requiring minimal writing include:

- questionnaire with some open questions - for example, pupils first record their answer to a question by ticking one of three boxes (yes, sometimes, no) and then write a short paragraph to explain their response
- sentence completion provide pupils with a degree of focus and structure whilst encouraging pupils to offer a personal perspective - for example 'I wish teachers would ...' or 'I feel bored in lessons when ...'
- self-evaluation log combines a quick self-evaluation rating scale with the opportunity for pupils to make extended comments - for example, pupils evaluating group work can be asked to rate themselves from 1 to 4 for items such as 'I listened to other people', then write about what they thought of the discussion and their role in it
- the force field - taken from physics, the model is one of opposing forces, pushing forwards and backwards. For example, pupils can be asked to write down three things that help and three things that hinder their learning
- the quick 'postbox' evaluation is a quick way of gathering feedback on lessons - pupils can be asked to write a sentence or two at the end of a lesson about what they enjoyed or what they did not understand and post their comments anonymously in a special box.

Logs involve more extended writing. For example, pupils can be asked to record particular aspects of learning for a day or a week, such as any successes they experienced in lessons, or homework when they felt they really made progress and did well.

Talk-based approaches

- conversations are an informal way of tuning in to pupils' concerns - all pupils are given the opportunity to initiate and engage in group conversations about teaching and learning with the teacher and with each other
- discussions contrast sharply with the informal nature of conversations - they tend to be more focused, involve small groups of pupils, a topic that pupils are concerned about and a chairperson or leader
- interviews are a formal way of finding out about what pupils think or feel. They can be conducted by a teacher, a

researcher or a pupil. They can be tightly structured, requiring short answers to a number of pre-determined questions or designed to open up an issue and encourage longer, more reflective responses.

Image-based approaches

- drawings and paintings - for example pupils can draw or paint a picture of what they particularly like or dislike about a place such as a playground or what they are most looking forward to when they move to a new school. With this approach it is important that teachers encourage pupils to talk about their work, rather than rely on an adult interpreting what a child is trying to say through art
- photographs - for example, pupils can take photographs of the 'good and bad things about doing schoolwork at home'
- posters - for example, pupils can display their ideas for 'How we like learning in geography' on individual posters using a combination of drawings, graphs and text.

Reference:

MacBeath, J. et al. (2003) Consulting pupils: A toolkit for teachers. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing

(Sample pages are available from:

http://www.pearsonpublishing.co.uk/education/samples/S_498461.pdf)

[Back to top](#)

Further reading

What else might I enjoy reading?

Annot, M., McIntyre, D. Pedder, D. & Reay, D. (2004) Consultation in the Classroom: Developing Dialogue about Teaching and Learning. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing

MacBeath, J. Demetriou, H. Rudduck, J. & Myers, K. (2003) Consulting pupils: A toolkit for teachers. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing

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

Mitra, D. (2001) Opening the floodgates: giving students a voice in school reform. Forum, 43 (2), pp. 91-4).

Silva, E. (2001) Squeaky wheels and flat tyres: a case study of students as reform participants. Forum 43(2), pp. 95-9.

Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2003) How to Improve Your School: Giving Pupils a Voice. London: Continuum Press.

Harker, R. (2002) Including children in social research. The National Children's Bureau. Highlight 193. Copies can be obtained from: NCB Library and Information Service, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE.

Hickman, R., Morrison, M., Nicholl, B. & Rudduck, J. (2005) Rebuilding Engagement Through the Arts. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing.

Lewis, A. & Lindsay, G. (eds) , (2000) Researching Children's Perspectives. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Taylor, M. J. & Johnson, R., (2002) School Councils: Their Role in Citizenship and Personal and Social Education. Slough: NFER.

Rudduck, J., Chaplain, R. & Wallace, G. (eds) (1996) School Improvement: What Can Pupils Tell Us? London: David Fulton.

Fielding, M. & Bragg, S. (2003) Students as researchers: Making a difference. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing

Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2004) The Challenge of Year 8: Sustaining a Commitment to Learning. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing.

Pollard, A & Triggs, P. (2001) What Pupils Say: Changing Policy and Practice in Primary Education. London: Continuum.

Riley, K. (1998) Whose School Is It Anyway? Bristol: Falmer Press

DfES (2003) Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say

Where can I find out more online?

Consulting pupils

<http://www.consultingpupils.co.uk/>

Ten project Newsletters (many written by teachers), articles and an outline of the consulting pupils project featured in this RoM can be found on the project website.

ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme <http://www.tlrp.org/>

Information about the programme.

Meaningful student involvement - an idea guide

<http://www.soundout.org/frameworks.html>

What kids can do <http://www.whatkidscando.org/>

Has interesting articles and useful resources.

Developing Pedagogies for E-learning Resources (PELRS) <http://www.pelrs.org.uk/>

Details about students as researchers in a Vygotsky based project.

Pupil voice <http://www.pupil-voice.org.uk/>

Details of a seminar series about pupil voice.

SoundOut: Students as researchers <http://www.soundout.org/research.html>

Examples of American student-led research reports.

Professional Association for Citizenship Teaching <http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/>

Case studies about teaching citizenship.

[Back to top](#)

Appraisal

Robustness

This network project was built around six smaller-scale projects. As the researchers collected evidence about the processes and outcomes of the consultation activities, the research team fed back the evidence to schools through a network of over three hundred schools and contact with hundreds of teachers through conferences, workshops, seminars and other networking activities.

Two projects aimed to provide a framework for interpreting and classifying observations made in relation to consulting pupils about a variety of issues. The other four projects were designed as research and development efforts. They sought to engage teachers in developing consultation with the researchers and in

supporting the researchers, documenting procedures and constraints, and helping monitor impact. These projects focused on teachers and their classes in forty-eight primary and secondary schools in the UK (mostly in England, but including Wales and Scotland).

The projects operated at different times, to different time-scales and used different combinations of methods, including interviews with teachers and pupils, classroom observation, focus groups, meetings and questionnaires. In these strongly developmental activities, multiple data sources offered a degree of triangulation. Extensive networking and communication with teachers also helped the researchers to develop confidence in their findings. Finally, teachers provided complementary evidence through a questionnaire administered at the end of the project.

Relevance

The researchers reported a number of findings which have the potential to inform policy-makers and practitioners including teachers, head teachers and local and national government officers. The findings from the research projects provided information about pupils' responses to consultation activities, how teachers have used feedback from pupils and the conditions which make for effective consultation. The findings from the four research and development projects gave evidence about the impact of consultation and of student-as-researcher activities on pupils and teachers. They showed that these pupils gained a greater sense of inclusion, felt that what they said was important and developed a more positive view of themselves as learners. The evidence suggested that teachers developed better understanding about how their lessons were received by different types of pupil in their classrooms and about the factors which supported engagement or led to disaffection. In many cases it was reported that teachers reflected on, and changed their practice, such as limiting teacher talk and increasing opportunities for collaborative working.

Applicability

Teachers in all phases may find the activities reported helpful for reflecting on their own practice and when seeking to create more collaborative classrooms. Specific tools were developed by the researchers to help teachers develop their own approaches to consultation and to set up students-as-researchers activities. Teachers and curriculum planners may find it helpful to consider how consultation and students-as-researcher activities might fit in with PSHE and citizenship education, particularly in relation to participation and responsibility, contribution to discussion and participation in school events. The many quotes and illustrative examples site the research in school contexts that most teachers will identify with.

Writing

The different time-scales over which the research was carried out led to a large number of outputs during the lifetime of this network project and to a number of publications at the ends of the individual projects. The final publications are aimed specifically at a teacher audience. The writing is accessible and engaging; there are many headings which make it easy to navigate the work and there are a large number of quotes and illustrative examples of the various activities to help teachers relate them to their own classroom situations.

[Back to top](#)
