How the Actions and Experiences of Teachers Engaging in Student Voice Can Enrich Our Thinking About What It Is and the Factors that Influence It

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Abstract

Student voice practice is varied and the literature associated with it has largely been written by professionals outside the school contexts in which it occurs. This research explores how the ideas, actions and experiences of secondary school teachers in one school can enrich understandings of what student voice is and what influences it.

Four teachers were engaged through semi-structured interviews over a twelve month period as they developed student voice practice within their own contexts. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach is used to uncover the participants' experiences and consider how they understood student voice, the potential it had, and the factors that influenced it.

Findings suggest that student voice is understood as part of something bigger, that it needs to benefit those engaging in it, involves collaboration and compromise, develops and evolves within context, and can take different forms. Models are constructed from the accounts to illustrate how participants understood and experienced student voice, and the psychology of self-defence theory is offered as a way of making further sense of the findings. General observations of impact are revealed, and three areas of practical challenge are identified in respect to enabling engagement, developing something bespoke, and making sense of what emerges.

The findings are argued as significant as they add a teaching professional perspective to the wider literature, and offer conceptualizations that open up awareness of the challenges teachers face in engaging in student voice work. The importance of further research into how different styles of management can enable students and teachers to work more collaboratively together, alongside how teachers can be supported to make sense of what emerges from student voice engagements, are emphasized.

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Finally I want to say a big thank you to my family. A significant amount of time has gone into this work and their support has been invaluable. I could not have completed it without you.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the content of this dissertation is entirely my own work, and that it has not previously been used for any other academic purpose.

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Chapter 1- Introduction

This dissertation studies the experiences of four teachers in a maintained secondary school as they developed student voice within their everyday practice. The aims of this introduction are to:

- Provide an indication of my perspective in approaching the research undertaken;
- To establish the context to the research itself in terms of the focus and the persons, places and processes involved within this.

The research questions that will provide a structure to illuminating the practices under study will be outlined, along with a brief initial outline of epistemology which has guided my approach in this research.

1.1 A Personal Perspective

I was drawn to Educational Psychology as a result of an interest I had in supporting vulnerable pupils and a belief that with the right approach and attitude positive change and better progress was possible for these young people. Psychology seemed an appropriate vehicle for influencing the approaches and attitudes that could be brought to bear where there were concerns. I saw psychology as something that was essentially made up of a knowledge base that could be relied on to inform in evidence based ways; and a process skill that could be harnessed in support of applying these ideas. A psychologist was a professional who could engage others reflectively about their concerns, and support positive change.

After qualification I pursued training that allowed me to develop those areas that I felt fitted with this agenda. Over time and through my own experience of working with children, families and schools I started to believe that if anything the process skills seemed the more important. Offering advice in either written or verbal form rarely seemed to make much difference unless it was established within the context of the perspectives and motivations of those I was engaging with, and was

adequately supported through the personal connection between us. I often experienced feelings of disappointment that there was not more of a research base to inform my actions, and anxiety that where more explicit accounts existed that my own practice did not always closely relate to these.

These thoughts and concerns led me to start this doctorate. I hoped that by the end of it I would better understand how research worked, and would be skilled up and more able to effectively link thinking about how we explore the impact of our work to research and an evidence base. I believed there was a type of 'truth' even if it was relative and open to criticism, and that it was often constructed between parties in response to experiences within specific contexts. I hoped this journey would equip me with the tools to build a bridge between the micro and the macro whereby, as noted by Cameron and Monsen (1998), potentially useful ideas coming from a broader and growing psychological knowledge base could be linked with the human interpersonal processes that enable psychologists to support positive change in the lives of children and young people.

The assignments I completed in the early stages of this doctorate were planned to support me in various projects I was involved in at the time. In particular I wanted to explore how it was possible to evaluate a psychological intervention such as coaching; and the validity of school initiatives that aimed at raising awareness of the social and emotional aspects of learning within primary and secondary schools. My starting point was to assume that you could identify and capture the sorts of data that would tell me something worthwhile about a social phenomenon. I had been taught that rigour was essential in research, and instinctively believed that there was an important role for both quantitative and qualitative research. I became more aware through the work and writing up of the assignments that a lot of research uses measures that are not conceptually well aligned with the topic studied, and that this was particularly the case where there were large numbers of 'subjects'. I also experienced disappointment at how much of the research at best only vaguely referred to psychological theory; and that psychological theory only

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vaguely referenced research. It appeared to suggest that we are not consistently meeting the challenge described by Lowman (2005) of generalizing from experience to theory, and then testing theory at least against phenomenology and a pragmatic sense of what works and does not in the real world practice.

MacKay (2002) argues that the future of psychology, and educational psychology as part of this larger discipline, must be evidence based and build on its success in raising achievement and social inclusion. He argues that the concerns of educational psychologists should extend beyond the narrow functions of special educational needs, and that educational psychologists are uniquely qualified to carry out the research that is likely to be of most benefit within this context. Fox (2003) reflects on the developing pressure on psychology to practice in evidence based ways, but questions the adoption of research models that do not reflect the epistemological basis on which many psychologists practice, and more specifically methods that ignore the role of the psychologist as practitioner, and the relationship of the psychologist to the client. Experience as an often ignored evidence base is positioned centrally in the proposal for *practice-based evidence*, rather than simply a reliance on more detached and context insensitive *evidence-based* literature bases.

Wampold and Bhati (2004) similarly critique research methodologies within psychology that do not attend to role of the psychologist and the experience of the client. They also warn that while the goals of evidence-based practice movements are laudable, the methods for achieving these goals must reflect the philosophy and practices of the profession. Fox (2011) follows up on his 2003 paper in further exploring ideas related to practice-based evidence. The danger of psychologists using theories that have little or no evidence is considered, and the risks posed by defensive biases to the development of true expertise. He argues that it is beholden to the profession:

"… to search for that evidence to try and falsify its claims. It is important to distinguish between holding onto a theoretical perspective because research and one's own experience is showing that it is benefitting one's clients, and holding onto a framework because individually and institutionally it has been woven into the emotional fabric of one's life as a strongly held belief."

(Op cit., p. 332)

1.2 A Developing Focus

In an initial attempt to explore the relationship between theory and evidence I worked with a large secondary school to open up how students understood the concept of being successful. The involved school had been wary of the National Strategy agenda relating to *Social and Emotional Aspects to Learning (SEAL)* (Department for Education and Skills, 2002b; Department for Education and Skills, 2005; Department for Education and Skills, 2007). I designed a process with a colleague for exploring this using student focus groups, and the views expressed by the young people involved were shared with staff with the explicit intention of informing the school's development planning. I hoped that in addition to validating the agenda of social and emotional aspects of learning more generally, this work would also allow for real and specific change in respect to aspects of what the students had to say. Staff were interested in the findings that emerged, and appeared to respond positively to what the students had to say. In addition to this it seemed that the school experiences shared by students related to the broader framework outlined by the SEAL agenda.

Although the idea of pupil consultation or pupil views was well established when I qualified, I understood it in a relatively superficial sense of it being what pupils thought about things- for example school lessons, friendships,or lunchtimes. It could therefore be accessed by asking the right questions, and in fact much of my training post qualification had reinforced this. Solution Focused frameworks (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995), cognitive behavioural approaches (Beck, 1976), and consultation approaches (Wagner, 2000) to name but a few all seemed to suggest that asking the right question at the right time and in the right way was a powerful

way to support change; empowering, unlocking or resolving any number of issues identified by those we came into contact with. My interest often stopped at a literal level of response, the position stated by the person I was working with.

Working with the student focus groups gave me a chance to immerse myself much more deeply in the 'experience' being communicated rather than just the 'views'. I started to consider this idea of *experience* mattering, and that perhaps I had been distracted or certainly limiting in the approaches I was applying. I had encountered some of the education specific literature around pupil voice in the course of this work (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007) and was struck by the similarity between what was described and what I had experienced. It felt like a real connection between the theory and practice I had been seeking. It offered reassurance and provided practical ideas for how it could be developed further. It didn't seem particularly well evidenced from an impact perspective, and there was a vagueness of definition as to what it was and how it might work. There were cautions about the dangers of using it manipulatively or superficially, and references to concerns that it was falling short; but its promise seemed considerable.

I wanted to take the work I had undertaken up to this point and build on it further. I was disappointed with the impact the initial work had had. After the staff enthusiasm subsided relatively little seemed to change. My sense at this time was that although staff had recognized that what the students had shared was valid, it did not fit easily with the school improvement culture. Senior managers wanted to run the councils and have students complete the questionnaires that they associated with this agenda, but they did not want the dialogue and struggled to see how it could be developed in a sustainable way or without risk to the standards agenda that was being prioritized above all else.

My focus at this point then changed to finding a school that would work with me on this agenda but this time from their own starting perspective. How might this

operate? What difference would that make? What factors would influence its success or failure?

1.3 A Developing Research Context

A colleague suggested I approach the school that became involved as they had an interest in the area. The school had been working on the agenda of student voice (SV) for some time but wanted to take it forward within the context of school development. Four members of staff subsequently volunteered to become involved in the research following a meeting with senior managers and a briefing for interested staff (see p.42 for more detail).

What drove my interest at this point were questions about how an idea like SV could be sustainably and meaningfully developed; what difference that might have on the areas where dialogue became focused; and what that would be like as an experience for the staff involved. My review of the literature up until that point had revealed gaps with regard to how SV was understood and experienced by teachers engaging in it; and what difference (impact) it actually had where it was successfully established. I hoped that my research would make an original contribution by starting to illuminate these areas.

The remainder of this introduction will outline some of my research assumptions, including a brief outline of the conceptual framework I had adopted for boundarying the focus for this study; and the research questions that guided the enquiry.

1.3.1 My Research Assumptions and the Evolved Boundaries for this Study

At the outset of this study I was aware that I had adopted the idea of Pupil Voice as an idea that up until that time had fitted with my previous work and research experience. My use of the term Pupil Voice changed to [1]Student Voice (SV) over the course of the research, as this was the main term of reference used by the participants within their school context. It appeared to me to be both well enough

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[1] In the course of reviewing literature in this area I will at times refer to both terms, as pupil voice remains the more common term of reference within this context.

established to be professionally credible; but also crucially of sufficient professional interest and value to staff working in schools to make it possible for me to attract interest in my proposed study. In a sense I had readily accepted that this thing called Student Voice existed and would be understood and equally accepted by staff engaging with me as part of the research. I will deal with this in much more detail in the literature review and discussion; but some of these assumptions did not bear out and consequently led to an adjusted focus for the study early on in the process.

The assumptions that motivated the approach adopted were that:
a) Student experiences of being in the classroom, where shared, could support better engagement in learning, a developed sense of confidence and motivation, and ultimately better learning outcomes over time as the teaching and learning became more responsive to the needs of the young people.
b) The dialogue that emerged as part of this process would also empower and acknowledge the contribution of the staff taking part, and lead to sustainable cycles of professional learning.
c) SV relates to focused activity that is both purposeful and respectful of individuals.
d) It would be possible to tailor approaches to SV to fit within each member of staff's role and work context, and identify in advance both the hoped for outcomes and some measures that would allow for any impact to be gauged.

The overarching assumption was that SV was something that could be designed sensitively within a context, implemented and evaluated over time. This assumption had me as a catalyst and facilitator of change initially. As it quickly became apparent that there was considerable diversity within the group of staff involved, and that they found it difficult to think in terms of concrete and specific outcomes at the outset, I quickly amended the process and adjusted my role to

allow me to step back and focus on illuminating the working definitions of what SV was for each of them as individuals; how participants encountered and enabled it in everyday situations; and what their experience of this was like. Although I listened out for and occasionally enquired about any observed impact in regard to the SV undertaken, this became of secondary interest at this point as there was no longer any straightforward way of assessing this within the research design and timescale available.

This change crucially reoriented me to see SV as something much more individually constructed; that while existing within a broader shared context of academic literature and OFSTED type definitions, also evolved out of the many more pressing and immediate pressures and agendas within everyday school life. The assumption I made at this key point in my journey was that this was still a worthwhile area of study to illuminate, and that doing so within the new boundaries and evolved research design could still contribute to the existing field and shed light on how SV could be understood by those engaging with it, and what helped and hindered its development within a secondary school context. Justification for this will be put forward within the literature review in Chapter 2.

1.3.2 Epistemic Perspective

This will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3, but I have provided a brief overview of my own epistemic perspective in advance of this in order to support the reader in gaining a fuller understanding of how I have approached the research design.

Over the course of earlier assignments and the development of the research proposal I came to understand that a more interpretative and critical realist approach best reflected my own epistemic cognitions, and by extension the way I was developing the research design and method. I consider myself a participant within the research design, and also conceptualize myself as a learner within the research process, acknowledging the influence of experience and reflection on

developing my awareness and understanding with regard to epistemic cognition throughout this process. This is illustrated in part by changes to the research questions outlined in the next section.

Within this framework I make the claim that independent realities exist, but do not commit myself to the view that absolute knowledge exists, or that I can capture or present it in any positivist sense. Rather, my approach is to directly and actively engage in the construction and interpretation of the data, within the unique context in which it was generated. In this sense I am a part of the research in the same way that the participants were part of the research, and although I have tried to maintain as open a mind as possible I do not believe that this is truly possible and the findings are limited by my own filtering of the data and experiences.

I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a suitable method for this form of research. IPA aims to produce knowledge of what and how people think about the phenomenon under investigation, and in this sense it can be conceptualized within a realist tradition. It recognizes, however, that a researcher's understanding of the participant's experience is necessarily influenced by his or her own way of thinking, assumptions and conceptions. These are not considered biases to be eliminated but rather a necessary precondition for making sense of another person's experience. An open and reflexive stance is required to enable this to be undertaken in a way that will allow others to make judgments as to the validity and trustworthiness of the accounts that emerge. I have attempted to do this throughout.

1.3.3 The Research Questions

As noted, the questions and research design put forward in my proposal had to be adapted to take into account assumptions I had made that did not fit the research context in which I found myself, and the evolved understandings that had emerged with regard to what SV was, and the way in which the participants had begun to engage with this agenda (see p.42 for further detail).

By April 2011 two questions had emerged within the context of how the research was developing, and how my thinking had begun to change. As part of preparing for a Progress Panel in July of that year I used these to help clarify my thinking in relation to epistemological considerations:

1. Are the original research questions worded in ways that align with my developing research design and methodology?
2. Is it possible to answer the original research questions now that the 'real world' and my experience have influenced the way this study has developed? If not, how do these questions need to be adapted?

This was discussed in detail at my Progress Panel in July 2011, and changes were made at this time. These are summarized in Appendix A (p.205). During my final Progress Panel in September 2013 I had a further opportunity to reflect on the key research questions. I was at the point of starting to prepare for the final write-up of the findings, and a suggestion was made by a panel member that the questions were too wordy and needed to be more 'nuts and bolts'. I found this helpful as conceptually I had moved from the questions needing to reflect my area of research, to a point where in addition to doing this they also needed to support me in structuring and communicating my findings. With this in mind a further reworking of the questions was agreed and the final questions that follow now reflect this:

- How do teachers understand student voice?
- What is the potential for student voice?
- What are the challenges in developing the potential of student voice?

Chapter 2- Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the research focus, more specifically the activity of student voice and dialogue within the context of schools and education, and how this is understood. I will begin with some general impressions of the wider literature, and my understanding of the context to the agenda of student voice within schools in England. I will then explore some of the ways in which the agenda has been justified and conceptualized, before going on to problematize the area. Out of this I will situate my own research, and the way in which I hope it will add to the literature at large.

The literature drawn on in this chapter is a reflection of my reading up to the early stages of actually engaging with the research in the autumn of 2010. More recent reading is incorporated later within the context of my findings and discussion sections in Chapters 4 and 5.

The way in which I approached the literature review was informed by the following questions (Hart, 1998):

- What are the key sources?
- What are the key theories, concepts and ideas?
- What are the epistemological and ontological grounds for the discipline?
- What are the main questions and problems that have been addressed to date?
- How has knowledge on the topic been structured and organized?
- What are the major issues and debates about the topic?

Hart recognizes that it is the ideas and work of others that will provide the researcher with the framework for their own work; including methodological assumptions, data collection techniques, key concepts, and ways of presenting the research. I would add to this that it is the assimilation of my own professional experience into these wider ideas and works that has allowed me to focus more

meaningfully and boundary the topic; rather than remaining more broadly diffuse in my approach to this task. The terms boundary, boundaries and boundarying are used to signify where and how I have targeted or contained my research focus, literature review or methodology. It has been adapted from the term 'bounding' used by Miles and Huberman (1994).

In reviewing the literature I wanted to clarify my own thinking through the creation of a 'map' of the established area. The intention was to use this to familiarize myself with the topic, and to be able to justify my research within this context as something that had an original contribution to make.

2.1 Review Criteria

To achieve the above I needed to be able to search the existing literature. The following criteria were used:

- No restriction of date. Initially any relevant studies up to 2010 when the research process began; later up to 2013 while the dissertation was being completed.
- A primarily but not exclusively UK education focus, to more closely reflect my own research and cultural context.
- Peer reviewed literature on student consultation (including pupil 'participation' and 'voice').
- Literature that was both empirical and descriptive.

The review included searches of major educational databases and web search engines (Education Resources Information Center, Bath Information Data Services, and Google), using variations on key terms to access as wide a range of potentially relevant material as possible. These included pupil voice/consultation/participation; teachers consulting/responding to pupil views; and in all instances the word pupil was substituted with 'student'. Relevant newsletters and conference papers were also drawn upon. The main search was carried out in

October 2010. I stayed alert to new publications throughout the research period, and then updated the review in November 2013 using the same search criteria. Out of this process I identified references that related to my own research interest, as reflected by the research questions (p.10), thereby boundarying the focus for the literature review.

2.2 Some General Impressions- A Basic Mapping of the Topic

As noted, I approached the literature identified through the search with some key questions in mind. Within the context of the initial mapping these included:

- What are the key sources?
- What are the key theories, concepts and ideas?
- Where has this topic come from?

2.2.1 A Broader Perspective

In responding to these questions I need to acknowledge that my own journey created a series of 'filters' that make it impossible for me to claim that this is an objective or definitive overview. Rather it is my personal impression following considerable reading and reflection that determines my presentation of the area, and it is to this extent unrepresentative although attempts have been made to be otherwise. I would suggest that this is a natural outcome from reviewing an area. The significant reviews offered by Coad and Lewis (2004) and Bragg (2007a), although adopting a young people as researchers approach to the agenda of participation, highlight and emphasize different concerns- Coad and Lewis with issues around 'method' and 'technique' with less of an exploration of philosophy and conceptualization of the topic; Bragg with considerations of motivators and drivers, and the importance of power, identity and relationships.

Similarly doctoral reviews by Morgan (2007) and Whitton (2011), although both teachers familiar with school contexts and interested in the development of teacher led pupil voice, pick out overlapping but different themes in establishing the credibility of the topic. They both refer to the legal frameworks that underpin the

notion of young people having a substantive say in matters that affect them. They recognize the potential of young people's views in enhancing teaching and learning, and therefore in supporting the agenda of school improvement. They also refer to ideas about citizenship and democracy, but briefly and in ways that suggest it is the idea of school improvement that argues loudest for these researchers in justifying the notion of pupil participation in schools. Whitton picks up more on ideas of young people as researchers, and the need for long term commitment to developing this; Morgan on empirical research in the area, particularly that relating to how teachers use and respond to consultation. In short, the process of carrying out the literature review is heavily influenced by the researcher's personal and professional experience of the topic; as is the focus for research that emerges as the wider review unfolds. This was certainly the case for me.

Within this context, my previous research led me first to the extensive and education specific literature that has been generated from the late 1990s through to the current time; and subsequently to the wider literature that conceptualizes children in society, and allows for different and deeper considerations of 'why' we would want to encourage the active and meaningful participation of young people.

The legal context is commonly referred to within the literature, and the bedrock referred to in this respect has been the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN in 1989 and by the UK in 1991. As summarized by Bragg (2007a), it brought together the familiar view of children as in need of protection and provision with a different view of children as individuals in their own right, as 'social actors' who could form and express opinions, participate in decision making processes and influence solutions. This in turn supported political initiatives and professional frameworks within the UK. The Children's Act of 1989, implemented in 1991, makes it a legal requirement that young people are consulted and involved in the process of decision making on matters that affect them, and that professionals whose work has an impact on the lives of children

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consider how this is carried out. A Children's Commissioner was appointed for Wales in 2001 and for England in 2005. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) school inspection framework now requires inspectors and schools systematically to seek the views of young people. The Education Act 2002 places a duty on schools and Local Authorities to consult pupils about decisions affecting them. As noted by Bragg (op cit.), however, in policy contexts participation by and consultation with young people is often emphasized as a means to an end, for example to make services more appropriate, to help overcome disaffection, or to improve school attainment.

With regard to the education specific literature, the works of Flutter and Rudduck (2004) and and McIntyre (2007) first caught my attention. These texts aimed to encourage educationalists to consider the benefits and implications of talking to pupils about teaching and learning. Arguments were grounded in research that the authors were involved in, primarily through the Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). A project entitled *Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning* was undertaken by a team of researchers who became almost a 'who's who' in this area- Donald McIntyre, Jean Rudduck, Madeleine Arnot, Sara Bragg, Nick Brown, Helen Demetriou, Michael Fielding, Julia Flutter, John MacBeath, Kate Myers, David Pedder, Diane Reay and Beth Wang. This project built on two earlier projects which foregrounded pupil perspectives, and supported a view that pupils could be a rich source of information about the relationship between teaching and learning (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; Rudduck *et al.*, 1996).

Within the main project, consultation was seen as a pathway to school improvement, but by 'school improvement' they argued for much more than a narrow focus on grades (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). Rather it was hoped that the process of pupil consultation would lead to not only a more effective but also a more meaningful and enjoyable experience for all, marked by genuine collaboration between teachers and pupils.

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The findings from the project were largely positive. Where consultation was thoughtfully introduced and developed it was claimed that it had the potential to strengthen pupils' commitment to learning. It was asserted that this appeared to relate to factors such as motivation, strengthened relationships, and evolved teaching approaches. The project also spoke of the importance of a coherent relationship between the school culture and the classroom culture. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) assert that perhaps the most important argument for listening to children lies in the potential for providing schools with a direction for constructing 'a better future' (op cit., p133). They refer to this as the transformative potential of the agenda, and argue that there are two dimensions to this:

1. In changing our constructions of pupils and the pupil role
2. In initiating change in the structure of schools

The collective experience of the team running the project also allowed for reflection on the obstacles and challenges that are likely to be encountered when embarking on this kind of agenda. Flutter and Rudduck summarize these as relating to observations of limited impact; the issue of the data collected only ever representing a partial perspective; the lack of support by staff and poor implementation where the ground had not been adequately prepared; and what they refer to as 'culture shock' where staff have felt threatened.

McIntyre *et al.* (2005) discussed this last issue in more depth in their paper 'Pupil Voice: comfortable and uncomfortable learnings for teachers'. They outlined their study which explored how teachers used the ideas that pupils offered when consulted. While observing that teachers generally responded positively to pupil suggestions they also noted that they differed in what they did. This was a small scale study involving six case studies/teacher accounts so any wider generalization needs to be done with caution; however the researchers did identify three teacher reactions within the study:

i.   Short term responsiveness;
ii. Growing confidence;

iii.   Problems with pupil consultation.

The importance of leadership and structure within the participating schools was recognized as a factor; as was the need for teacher belief, confidence, commitment and skill to combat the pressure of the workplace with all its competing agendas. The perhaps unique contribution of this paper is to highlight through detailed first-hand accounts and experiences the teacher as a thinking, feeling participant in a shared experience whose response will be coloured by attitude and beliefs about the perceived importance and acceptability of what pupils have to say; and the fit with existing practice as understood by the teacher. These observations are largely in passing, however, and offer little with regard to how to overcome the obstacles they pose. The risk identified is that without this being better understood the agenda and process is in effect limited as:

"However good pupils' ideas might be, it is the teachers' responsiveness to them that is ultimately important."

(Op cit., p151)

In summary, so far what might be best described as a pragmatic approach to consulting children has been outlined. In education it is primarily considered as part of a wider agenda to improve learning and therefore schools, and while acknowledging of the legal and ethical dimension it is clear that this is not the primary focus in regard to most of the associated literature; boundaried by an active interest in teaching and learning first, children second. This feels critical to an extent, but congruent with my experience of schools and education at the level of policy and planning. It also seems consistent with views around childhood and societal tensions between controlling and keeping safe, and enabling self-actualization (Prout, 2000).

Rudduck and Flutter (2000) identified some early constraints on the development of pupil participation and perspective. These included the influence of progressivism and politics which they described as associating negatively with the

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idea of pupil participation; and ideologies of childhood that are rooted in public perceptions that disempower and make dependent young people in society. They describe the legitimacy of pupil participation within these constraints in ways that perhaps suggest an assumption that if enough arguments can be found to justify it in the present then the scales can be not only balanced but perhaps tipped in favour of the empowerment and involvement of young people.

Fielding (2004a) in stating that too much contemporary student voice work invites failure and disillusion as a result of poor methodology, contextual circumstances or failure to recognize the extent to which young people are already incorporated into local cultures and practice, outlines a number of issues he asserts are central to the sustained development of student voice as a genuinely transformative set of practices. These include:

1. Problems of speaking about others
2. Problems of speaking for others
3. Getting heard.

Fielding categorizes these as relating to the need to deconstruct the presumptions of the present.

A second category of issues relates to the necessity of dialogue, and attempts to resolve some of these earlier issues by exploring the possibility of:

4. Speaking about/for others in supportive ways
5. The dialogic alternative of speaking with rather than for others
6. Developing this further through the use of students as co/researchers.

Fielding finishes with thoughts around current realities and future possibilities, and the threat of unpromising external frameworks (performativity and surveillance) and

limited shared teacher-student spaces for creative disagreement and dialogue to take place.

A significant contribution of Fielding's paper is to propose and justify a more [2]dialogic model of pupil voice, one that goes beyond more conservative notions of consultation towards a collaboration in which structures enable learning for all, despite power imbalances. The student as co/researcher approach he argues is a way of achieving this.

The benefits of the *student as researcher* approach, and a more dialogic approach to participation in schools, are echoed in perhaps the largest published literature review carried out by Bragg (2007a). She emphasizes the importance of 'intention' and 'purpose' when involving young people; and warns against policy contexts that often result in more instrumentalist (means to an end) approaches to participation. An important contribution of this work is that it highlights how funding, methods and aims affect outcomes. Bragg states:

> *"It is disingenuous to see children as finding, discovering, or being given a voice, as if we can simply access their authentic core being. What they say depends on what they are asked, how they are asked it, 'who' they are invited to speak as in responding; and then, in turn, on the values and assumptions of the researcher or audience interpreting their 'voices'."*
>
> (Op cit., p.20)

My impression to this point has been that the education specific literature has to a significant extent been led by external professionals and researchers, and that as larger scale projects completed a raft of guidance materials, professional development materials, and tools were produced to support practice in schools (Arnot *et al.*, 2003; Fielding and Bragg, 2003; MacBeath *et al.*, 2003). This has perpetuated a particular ideology around the agenda of participation and voice that

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[2] The term dialogic is used to distinguish forms of pupil voice which are characterised by dialogue and more active and sustained participation around the focus area, from forms of pupil voice that involve mainly the gathering and analysing of views by adults.

although populist (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006), is incomplete and at risk of being adopted superficially or to meet policy needs rather than to involve young people in more substantial ways.

2.2.2 Summary

The review so far is an attempt to start and answer the questions of:

- What are the key sources?
- What are the key theories, concepts and ideas?
- Where has this topic come from?

This has been approached in a way that also reflects how I encountered the literature, rather than in an artificially objective way. A number of issues had arisen for me by this stage in my reading and reflections. The first related to the fluid way in which writers were referring to pupil/student voice, pupil/student consultation, and pupil/student participation. In most instances these terms are not explicitly defined and rather vague references to rights, transformative potential, and citizenship as ways of justifying the term of reference are left to fill in the missing gaps as to what is actually being referred to.

Flutter and Rudduck (2004) briefly explore this and state that "Pupil consultation is nested within the broader principle of pupil participation" (op cit., p.5). In other texts (Rudduck, 2005) pupil voice is described as the consultative wing of pupil participation, and that consultation is about talking with pupils about things that matter in school.

The 'tension' between 'consultation' and 'participation' was further commented on by Rudduck and McIntyre (2007). They referred (op cit., p.8) to the then Children's Commissioner who had argued publicly in 2005 that consultation was not democratically acceptable because it implied teachers controlling the right of young people to speak, and setting the boundaries of what can be discussed. Rudduck and McIntyre's' criticism of wider DFES guidance was that the legitimation and

guidance schools needed to prioritise such aims for the 'here and now community of the school' were underplayed. They maintained that although *"more risky and difficult to manage"* (op cit., p.9) the capacity for consultation to helpfully destabilize habitual ways of behaving and familiar patterns of expectation was obvious.

A second but related issue for me emerged in regard to my own developing interpretation of these various terms, and the very different theoretical and conceptual foundations on which they were built. What did teachers think this agenda was about? What was their experience of engaging with it? Were the outside professional articulations of this area seen as valid and credible to those participating? With so much ideology being pushed at school based professionals was there room to construct for themselves a working model of what for me had become more an agenda of participation than one of voice or consultation?

2.3 A More Detailed Topology

2.3.1 A Matter of Interpretation?

By the time I was negotiating with schools to work with me on this agenda I was aware that far from being a well conceptualized and homogenous area of knowledge, the ideas relating to student voice/consultation/participation were at best loosely connected and often in conflict with one another. Despite this the guidance starting to emerge for schools from government departments (Department for Education and Employment, 2001; Department for Education and Skills, 2002a; Department for Education and Skills, 2004; Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008) presented ideas of listening to the voices of children and participation as relatively unproblematic. Participation was defined as:

> *"..we mean adults working with children and young people to ensure that their views are heard and valued in the taking of decisions which affect them, and that they are supported in making a positive contribution to their school and local community."*
> (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008, p.5)

The work of Shier (2001) is referenced as a way of better understanding levels of participation. The benefits, or what Rudduck might have referred to as the legitimation of the agenda, were described as relating to:

- Children's rights and wellbeing;
- Active citizenship;
- School improvement;
- Community enhancement.

Principles to enable the achievement of this agenda were reduced down to:

- Making a clear commitment to young people's participation;
- Ensuring that this is supported;
- Ensuring that young people have an equality of opportunity to be involved;
- Continually reviewing practice;
- Making sure that quality standards relating to codes of conduct, safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection are met.

A section on *Principles into Practice* (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008) lists ways in which participation can be enabled. The *when*, *how* and in which *areas* type considerations are not commented upon; and there is no acknowledgement of the cultural shift that would be required to allow this to happen in any substantive way.

Sinclair (2004) notes that when new ideas are adopted and operationalized with some vigour there is a tendency for terminology to lack precision; and that it is necessary to carefully consider what we mean by *participation*. She suggests four key dimensions that can support the exploration of this:

1. The level of active participation, often seen in terms of the degrees of power sharing between adults and children
2. The different foci for decisions that affect children, such as private versus public domains; individual or group; affecting planning or development; centrally or locally applied

3. How participation is enabled as in the *method* applied, and the timescale over which it occurs

4. The extent to which it is differentiated, and the implications of any findings in terms of generalizability.

These dimensions are described by Sinclair as complexities within which participation can occur. The implications for this appear to be that while attempting to define ideas about what participation is might be useful, it is in fact a very heterogeneous range of activities each with its own cultural context and socio political perspective- see also Bragg (2007b).

2.3.2 Some Common Ground?

Across the literature there are a small number of frequently referenced texts that I would suggest capture some of the substance that other accounts then seek to build on. These include Hart (1992), Shier (2001), and Fielding (2001) within the field of education; and if this is broadened to include parallel work that was exploring understandings of children as social agents within a participation context, then Prout (2000; 2001). These accounts put forward persuasive arguments for understanding participation in all its forms as part of a socio-cultural dynamic that needs to recognize issues such as power and responsibility; the role and conceptualization of individuals within a context; and the benefit of appropriate and differentiated *methods* as a way of enabling participation within the context of relationships and explicit intent.

One of the ways that the participation agenda has been taken forward is the *Students As Researchers* (SARs) approach. I initially struggled with the idea of this as it seemed to me to offer only 'the few' an opportunity to experience participation and in quite contrived ways; a perspective acknowledged by Hart (1992). He argues however that if one truly wishes to involve young people in decision making then it is necessary to involve them in the design of how something is to be explored and considered. This process needs to extend to the analysis and

reflection around what is revealed, which he argues is a definition of 'research'. Hart goes on to describe what he refers to as *Participatory Action Research* which stresses the need for research and action to be carried out by the same people. He argues that involvement in successful research and action encourages more of the same.

When talking of participation within a context, Hart asserts that one must speak of encouraging the participation of all, with the shared goal of improving the whole of society. These ideas of children being active agents within society is also promoted by Prout (2001) who in reflecting on a large scale project focusing on children as social actors identifies five areas that he felt were important to reflect around. These were:

i. Children as research subjects;
ii. The documentation of 'children's standpoint';
iii. Children as strategic actors;
iv. Children's exclusion;
v. The construction of children's voice.

The idea put forward by Prout is essentially that *voice* should be understood as a constructed identity that comes about through the interaction or alliance of different actors, and through the intersection of different practices. He suggests that we need to examine the practices that do or do not produce and elicit it. Prout claims that this takes us beyond children's own practices, though these remain very important, to the settings, practices and relationships that can enable or disable the production of voice. A key focus therefore must be given to what he describes as the *generational relations* between the children and the adults involved. Prout (2000) identifies a tension between the rights of children to be recognized and involved, and public policy and practice as marked by an intensification or control, regulation and surveillance of children. This tension is considered in relation to the

constitution of children in the public sphere as human capital and therefore as a means of controlling the future.

Across the literature there is a recognition of the desirability of children's participation, often for different reasons such as to uphold their rights, to fulfil legal responsibilities, to improve service or decision making, to enhance democratic process, to develop skills, or to empower and enhance self-esteem (Sinclair and Franklin, 2000; Bragg, 2007a; Cleaver *et al.*, 2007). The issues and tensions above are often acknowledged but rarely resolved either conceptually or through the adoption of particular methods. There is in this sense a gap between how we claim to be *viewing* this area, and what we are actually *doing*. In terms of the *doing,* Hart's ladder of participation (1992), Shier's alternative model which extends from this (2001), and Fielding's 9 questions and four fold typology models (2001) offer frameworks for both planning and reflecting on practice.

Hart's model was designed to serve as a beginning typology for thinking about children's participation in projects. The ladder metaphor was borrowed from Arnstein's (1969) article on adult participation, though new categories were added. An original image of the model is set out in Figure 1 (p.26).

The Ladder of Participation

8. Child-initiated shared decisions with adults

7. Child-initiated and directed

6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

Degrees of participation

Non-participation

Eight levels of young people's participation. The ladder metaphor is borrowed from Sherry Arnstein (1969); the categories are from Roger Hart.

Figure 1- Hart's Ladder of Participation[3] (1992)

The rungs on the ladder provide a continuum from non-participation where children do or say what adults suggest, or take part in ways that do not enable them to really understand the issues or choose how they express their views; to children being independent in having ideas, coming up with projects, and bringing in the involvement of adults by invitation. Shier's model (2001) does not have an equivalent to the non-participation rungs of Hart's ladder, and creates a five level model for participation that considers the level of commitment adopted by an individual or organization to empowering the child. At each level three stages of commitment are described in terms of *openings*, *opportunities*, and *obligations.* A simple question for each stage of each level is offered to allow reflection of both the current level of operation and also how it may be possible to move to the next level- see Figure 2.

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[3] Downloaded from www.youthpolicy.org

Levels of Participation

⇓

Openings>Opportunities>Obligations

5. Children share power and responsibilities for decision making.

| Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children? | Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions? | Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions? |

4. Children are involved in decision-making processes?

| Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes? | Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes? |

This point is the minimum you must achieve if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

3. Children's views are taken into account.

| Are you ready to take children's views into account? | Does your decision making process enable you to take children's views into account? | Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making? |

2. Children are supported in expressing their views.

| Are you ready to support children in expressing their views? | Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views? |

1. Children are listened to.

START HERE

| Are you ready to listen to children? | Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children? | Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to? |

Figure 2- Shier's Pathways to Participation Model (2001, p.111)

In discussing his model Shier makes a number of interesting points. He observes that to achieve level 5 requires an explicit commitment on the part of adults to share their power; but that there is no obligation under the United Nations Convention for adults to share their power with children. Decisions about how or when to share power he suggests must be based on the risks and benefits of doing

so, i.e. it is conditional on a range of other unspecified factors. Shier stresses the need at levels 4 and 5 of sharing not just power but responsibility for decisions.

Hart also recognizes the potential repercussions on lives of allowing participation without some checks and balances being brought to bear. Defining the conditions under which this can be done safely and appropriately is not specified by either Hart or Shier. Hart does state (op cit., p.11) that it is not always necessary for children to operate at the highest rungs of the ladder. Different children may participate at different levels and at different times. An important principle of choice is asserted, the challenge becoming that of creating opportunities in which the child can choose to participate at the highest level of their ability.

Fielding (2001) proposes a nine question interrogatory framework for the conditions necessary for pupil voice practices; and a fourfold typology of what he envisions pupil voice to mean. This model, developed primarily out of experience within the educational context and an explicit Student as Researchers perspective, is intended to allow professionals to examine arrangements and practices which seek to acknowledge and promote pupil voice. The typology distinguishes between:

- Students as data sources
- Students as active respondents
- Students as co-researchers
- Students as researchers.

The similarity with Hart and Shiers' models can be seen, and the questions offer a process through which awareness can be raised and reflective decisions taken- see Table 1:

Speaking	• *Who* is allowed to speak? • *To whom* are they allowed to speak? • *What* are they allowed to speak about? • What *language* is encouraged / allowed?
Listening	• *Who* is listening? • *Why* are they listening? • *How* are they listening?
Skills	• Are the skills of dialogue *encouraged and supported* through training or other appropriate means? • Are those skills understood, developed and practised within the *context of democratic values and dispositions*? • Are those skills *transformed* by those values and dispositions?
Attitudes & Dispositions	• How do those involved *regard each other*? • To what degree are the *principle of equal value* and the *dispositions of care* felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?
Systems	• *How often* does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur? • Who *decides*? • How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or *relate to other organisational arrangements* (particularly those involving adults)?
Organisational Culture	• Do the *cultural norms and values* of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? • Do the *practices, traditions and routine daily encounters* demonstrate values supportive of student voice?
Spaces& the Making of Meaning	• *Where* are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place? • Who *controls* them? • What *values* shape their being and their use?
Action	• What *action* is taken? • Who feels *responsible*? • *What happens* if aspirations and good intentions are not realised?
The Future	• Do we need *new structures*? • Do we need *new ways of relating to each other*?

Table 1- Questions for Evaluating the Conditions for Student Voice (Fielding, 2001, p.110)

As noted by Morgan (2007), while useful these and the others models outlined do not specifically relate to practice at a classroom or everyday level. More importantly, I think, this raises another question in relation to who is constructing these models, and how they might look were they to be developed by professionals and young people within the contexts in which it is or is not operating.

2.4 Problematizing the Agenda

2.4.1 Multiple Voices and Agendas

Noyes (2005) in reviewing the shift from outside-in to a more inside-out orientation in research to improve the quality of life, and more specifically the educational experience of young people, notes that a part of the thrust to develop pupil voice has been about enabling professionals to better support them. He comments that consequently much of the literature has been written to support teachers wishing to develop pupil voice approaches. In reviewing three key publications that emerged from the Economic and Social Research Council/ TLRP's Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning (Fielding and Bragg, 2003; MacBeath *et al.*, 2003; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004), Noyes observes that despite the common ground there are also some key differences that relate to distinctive philosophical positions in how they can be approached. While there is a strong common focus on teaching and learning, these positions would locate themselves at different points along the outside-in inside-out continuum.

Noyes suggests that towards the *inside-out* end of the scale are the processes of increased active citizenship and democratic engagement, with improved pupil attainment as a welcome by-product. Towards the *outside-in* end of the scale are the initiatives where control is more clearly located with the teacher, and the intentions bear a 'shadowy relationship' (op cit., p534) to governmental priorities. The importance of making visible explicit and implicit purpose in the different approaches, and through this underlying issues of power and potential, is emphasized. The assumptions inherent in these positions, Noyes suggests, relates to the contested nature and purpose of schools, but also to the realities of practice as reported in the wider field. The ongoing success of pupil voice research within this context is closely tied to the notion of power, and the relationships and tensions between the voice of the pupil and the voice of the teacher; and it is here Noyes claims that the 'generally undemocratic nature of schools surfaces' (op cit., p537).

Arnot and Reay (2007) make what I understand to be a related point by saying:

> *"The umbrella of student voice hides a diverse and complex alliance of reform agendas."*
>
> (Op cit., p.311)

They also raise issues in respect to what they describe as two traditions that theorize the notion of student voice. The first relates to the notion of silenced and marginalized individuals, and assumptions made by researchers (and I would suggest many practitioners) that by exposing the oppressive power relations that maintain these positions we change the power relations. The alternative tradition they put forward, based on the work of Bernstein (1990), offers a model of voice that is referred to as *pedagogic voice*. Pedagogic voice is understood to encompass different voices, identities and messages. Student voice by contrast is considered a limiting construct as it fails to acknowledge the context in which a voice occurs; and as a result of this cannot address any power issues that emerge. The suggestion is that wider literature observations that the agenda may be falling short of its transformative potential might be related to limiting constructs and understandings that do not make visible and therefore cannot effectively challenge the reality of everyday practice.

2.4.2 An Over-Emphasis on the Product?

Another issue that Arnot and Reay bring to the fore is the notion of *authentic voice*. They explore through the critique of Moore and Muller (1999) the questionable epistemological basis upon which much research is conducted. More specifically, they explore the idea that there is one authentic voice within a single social category; the argument being that this has no basis in reason and constructs only a weak knowledge edifice. In reviewing this critique Arnot and Reay propose and, drawing on the work of Bernstein, further argue that the real task in pedagogic voice is to construct theories and understandings that shed light on how it is that voice is produced, rather than just focus on what is produced in terms of the

content. They go on to suggest in line with Bernstein's work that a distinction should be made between *voice* and *message*, the voice represents recognition of the pedagogic rules, whilst the message relays the outcome of these rules being applied in a particular context.

The implication then is that the pupil voice heard in so much of the literature, particularly that gathered through consultation, is not in fact independently constructed "voice", but rather "message". It is suggested that teachers can not separate out student voice from message, and that it is not possible to identify uniquely expressed or authentic and socially distinguishable voice, as all voices are invisibly present in any one voice. It is not argued that voice cannot change power relations, but rather that shifts in power relations are likely to change "voices". My own research interest in exploring the idea of student voice within the context of the school, and more particularly the staff perspective and experience, evolved out of observations of how difficult it could be for staff to allow student voice space to genuinely affect change.

Hill *et al.* (2004) point out that while consultation can take the form of dialogue and enable participation, it can also act as a substitute for it. They also pick up on ideas of *representativeness* when it comes to any participation activity. A distinction is drawn between what is *representative* in a statistical sense; and what is representative in a political sense- where one person is selected by others and responsible for voicing their views. Both may be important depending on the objectives of the activity. A different approach they suggest might involve voice that is premised on *participative* rather than *representative* principles; in which young people themselves determine the ways in which they choose to participate. Such an approach is considered to be less easy to manipulate by adults, but is also recognized to be unpredictable in terms of the direction and focus it develops. This uncertainty in Hill *et al.*'s claim makes it a less attractive proposition to risk averse public services and, I would argue, to schools under pressure to perform.

Hill *et al.* also observe that power itself is a contested concept in the literature. It can be seen as a negative or a positive phenomenon- the distinction between being able to control others (or be controlled by them) as against having the capacity to act in a desired manner. The possibility exists that if power is seen positively as the ability or capacity to act then power emerges as a variable rather than a win/lose in any absolute sense; as power is diffused throughout society and can be shared by many. The issue when it comes to children's participation is that while there is a general recognition that power influences the degree and nature of the participation that can occur, less often does it involve explicit identification, clarification and deconstruction of what is meant by power and how it operates.

Adding to the discussion so far, but also adding to the challenges we face in developing this agenda, are Hill *et al.'s* arguments that situate participation as essentially a form of social inclusion. They observe that refusing to accept children and young people as competent witnesses to their own lives has confined them to a state of impotency, and at the mercy of adults. They suggest an evolving framework to guide practice that co-ordinates developments in policy, practice, theory and research. Who should do this or how this might be done is not explored, but the lack of it at present is proposed as at least part of why the rhetoric outstrips the reality of this agenda.

2.4.3 Making Progress?

Cleaver *et al.* (2007) in reviewing the area of participation ask questions relating to why this agenda matters and how it is justified; how far it has come; and how it can be taken forward. Again there is a stated recognition of the potential challenge faced and the dangers of falling short. They assert the view that to succeed it is likely to need a cultural change at both a national and local level in order for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to influence public life. The 'why' question is seen as particularly important as it is the means by which we can debate concerns about whether it is appropriate for young people to participate, whether they are capable of participating, and what forms of

participation work best. It is from these debates that progress can be made, but to have the debates it is suggested we need a clear definition of participation and a statement that outlines the rights and the benefits of children and young people's participation for all involved. Again who and how this can be agreed is unclear, the implication perhaps being that there is ideology already established with regard to what it is that can be adopted for these purposes; and that this can be applied across different social contexts. This raises for me a chicken and egg type consideration with regard to student voice in regard to the question of whether you need a defined construct of student voice to develop practice; or whether practice constructs the definition. This Cartesian approach, so common in psychology and education, leaves little room for a third possibility, the possibility of a situated, dynamic and evolving development of construct and practice.

The argument for an *architecture* to move practice on, as described by Cleaver *et al.* (2007), was debated at a related workshop in November 2007 (Cleaver and Kerr, 2008). A broad range of drivers for the participation agenda was identified including:

- Societal (for example ageing populations, desire for happy fulfilled lives, economic and business needs);
- Technological (for example media and ICT);
- Policy (for example legislation that provides frameworks and regulations that establish an entitlement);
- Infrastructure (for example strategic plans, appointment of champions, developing evidence bases to suggest benefit);
- Demand drivers (for example young people wanting a say).

Offset against these were identified barriers, including:

- A perceived culture of non-participation across society;
- Lack of equality for and inclusion of young people in participation, and a perceived lack of relevance of the agenda to their lives and interests;
- Lack of real commitment and support from leaders and senior managers for participation;

- Competing priorities that often see participation lose out to more immediate policy directives;
- Lack of clear standards and accountability concerning participation across society;
- Lack of training and development opportunities, and of adequately trained people, to take the agenda forward;
- Hijacking by commercial forces that encourage the *"individual, sensationalist and banal"* (op cit., p.8).

The proposal for an *architecture* developed through the workshop included the following elements:

Element	Brief Description
Identity	A definitive voice and single language for young people's participation
Standards	A national framework for standards
Champions and leaders	Identified champions across national and local government and third sector organizations who have political and social stature to lead
Training and development	Available and centred on national standards
Recognition and value	Of young people's participation by the media and central and local government
Acknowledgement	Of young people's contributions through awards and other celebrations
Evaluation and accountability	Using rigorous methods with a clear focus relating to standards
Sharing and dissemination	Good standards and examples of practice referenced and seen in action

Table 2- Workshop developed elements for progressing participation (Cleaver and Kerr, 2008)

2.4.4 Summary

The challenges within this agenda are enormous, and complicated by competing and complex ideologies and agendas. Far more questions and problems have been identified than resolved. Knowledge in regard to the area is loosely structured

and it requires determination to get a sense of the broader issues that need to be considered in developing participatory approaches. Much of what has been written about has been undertaken without adequate or at least explicit conceptualization of voice, and from a largely academic and external professional perspective with regard to student voice agendas in schools.

In terms of my own engagement with this agenda I had developed mixed feelings towards the idea of participation. I instinctively wanted to be unconditionally supportive of it, something that I suspect relates to my own professional identity in terms of advocacy for vulnerable children. My experience of it, and the literature now reviewed, however, suggested to me that my own very limited constructs of voice and participation were also at odds with both real world practice and potentially the assumptions and beliefs held by school based professionals engaged in the agenda.

2.5 My Research in Context

By the time that I was developing my proposal for the research undertaken a number of experiences from my own practice, and observations from the reviewed literature had started to come together. These in essence related to:

- Questions about why if teaching professionals appeared to both accept the need for student voice, and (in the context of the focus group work I had been involved in) the relevance and validity of what students had to say, did they not then take ideas forward though on-going dialogue and change;
- Questions about what teaching professionals understood student voice to mean, and the place it had in schools;
- The impact well developed models of student voice might have.

The apparent lack of teacher accounts and teacher informed perspectives on the agenda of student voice and participation was striking. As noted in Chapter 1, however, I quickly realized that I could not easily focus on exploring the impact of

student voice without taking a much more leading and active role in how it was developed. As a consequence I made the decision after the initial group meetings not to emphasize this element, but rather to focus on illuminating the experience of the teachers involved in engaging more naturally with the agenda. The assumption within this was that by doing so I would be able to shed light on how the ideas around student voice were understood, and how these understandings along with wider context variables might enable or disable the development of student voice within that situation.

Having made this decision the challenge became one of ensuring that the adopted methodology would allow me to explore these areas with integrity, and this is explored in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 3- Methodology

In this chapter I will outline the methodological positions and decisions that I took in relation to the literature review and personal experience presented so far; and more particularly now the research questions that frame the study.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a context in which the research can be judged in terms of its validity and trustworthiness. I will begin with my broader thinking (epistemology) in terms of the research approach, and how the research questions align with this. This will lead into a description of the research design, where the actual 'doing' of the research will be described. Some detail with regard to the research context (school and participants) will then be presented. The final section of this chapter will then detail the process of analysing the data, and I will relate this back to concepts such as validity, reliability and generalizability in Chapter 5 (p.185).

3.1 The Research Approach

In considering ideas such as truth, knowledge and knowing I quickly became aware of the temptation of trying to find a *best fit* approach as almost a short cut to being able to focus on method, or the *doing* of the research. Within this context I would describe myself as a learner, both in terms of the focus for the research and in terms of my development as a researcher. Greene *et al.* (2008) argue that learners come to know in their own ways, with their own prior experiences, theories, and frameworks shaping how knowledge is formed. My own observations of much of what I read about this area in the earlier part of my research was that epistemology was often discussed in an objectively detached way that did not allow for much recognition of these personal dimensions; and that it often presented ideas as relatively well defined and fixed.

While researchers may have beliefs about the study of knowledge (epistemological beliefs), Greene *et al.* (op cit.) argue that students are likely to have beliefs about knowledge and knowing as such. They prefer the term '*epistemic beliefs'* to reflect this distinction. They also note that it is these beliefs that consciously and subconsciously influence an individual's task definition, selection of strategies and metacognition. In agreeing with Kitchener (2002) they suggest that the term epistemic cognition, a term that emphasizes both knowledge and processes involved in its definition, is a more accurate term for this area of research.

Conceptualizing my own thinking in this way allows for cognitive shift over time, or the construction of more carefully reflected understandings that have been tested by experience. A personal example of change of this kind came as the result of supervision I had during the early stages of my research. At that time I was arguing that a postmodern, social constructivist framework seemed to best fit my thinking. I was also aware that it was considered credible both from a research and practitioner perspective (Moore, 2005). Questioning used during my supervision, primarily focused on my use of language, both written and oral, in describing my developing research and thinking, challenged this perspective. It became clearer to me that I did believe that the social phenomena I was interested in existed whether or not I was present, albeit constructed by those that were present within a context that was dynamically changing as a result of a myriad of factors.

The more I considered my earlier research within this context the more I came to understand that perhaps a more interpretative and critical realist approach better reflected my own epistemic cognitions, and by extension the way I was developing the research design and method. This in turn has raised questions for me about how these elements fit together. Scott (2005) observes that the idea that there is a straight forward logical relationship between ontology, epistemology, strategy and method has been disputed on the grounds that it fails to recognize that a whole cluster of considerations is likely to impinge on decisions about methods of data collection. As asserted by Scott (2005), to argue against the need to foreground

philosophical concerns is to suggest that issues of validity, reliability and truthfulness should not be central to the work of researchers. My own attempt to more mindfully approach and foreground some of this within my own research approach is intended to allow others to make judgments as to how trustworthy the accounts provided in the following chapters are.

Scott (2007) notes that the researcher's self-appointed task is to find out about something in the world. We are born into a world that is already resourced, and in the case of methodology this consists of conflicting arguments for the use of different approaches. The researcher therefore has a choice to make but may only be aware of a limited number of options from which to choose. In choosing that approach, Scott argues, the researcher is implicitly claiming that their version of reality is better than other possible versions, and that it will lead to a more truthful representation of what they are trying to portray. This again suggests the possibility of change over time as experience enables learning, and a broadening of awareness.

The idea of ontological shift over time and across contexts further supports the proposals of philosophers such as Kuhn (1996) that a person must have a sophisticated ontology of domain before epistemic cognition and issues of justification become relevant at all. Greene *et al.* (2008) provide some helpful examples of how while knowledge is justified true belief (epistemology), the nature of learning factors, while related, is in fact better construed as ontological. Philosophical ontology, in their view, is:

> *"…'the study of the mutually exclusive, necessary, and sufficient categories (also called classifications) of reality. These categories can include, amongst other things, substances (i.e. water, dogs), processes (i.e. heat exchange), and relations (i.e. is caused by, has a reciprocal effect with)."*

(Op cit., p.149)

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They note that when a student (myself in this case) learns a new concept they make an ontological commitment that guides their understanding of that object. These initial commitments are often 'incorrect' because of an inappropriate classification - for example thinking about heat as a substance rather than a process. In terms of personal epistemology, Green *et al.* argue that within academic domains views regarding the nature of knowledge are better described as a person's ontology, which can range from simple to complex. These views can change with experience, becoming more sophisticated and including ideas such as time, perspective and context. I feel my own journey as a researcher has certainly followed this path, as have my understandings of the phenomenon under scrutiny, i.e. student voice.

A main point I would want to make therefore is that my belief that independent realities exist, does not commit me to the view that absolute knowledge exists, or that I can capture or present it in any positivist sense. Rather, I have been directly and actively engaged in the construction and interpretation of the data, within a unique context. In this sense I am a part of research in the same way that the participants were part of the research, and although I have tried to maintain as open a mind as possible I do not believe that this is truly possible and the findings are limited by my own filtering of the data and experiences. In this regard the foregrounding provided in the Introduction and Literature Review is also key for anyone wishing to draw conclusions about the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.1.1 The Research Questions within the Research Approach

The unit for analysis within my research was always intended to be the experience of the participants in relation to the agenda of student voice and the school context. As noted in Chapter 1, my research questions were amended as the research unfolded to fit more in line with my own developing epistemic cognitions, and the experience of working in the real world environment of a school with participants whose priorities reflected their own everyday roles and pressures. The research

questions that will be used as a touchstone for boundarying the data in the final discussion are:

- How do teachers understand student voice?
- What is the potential for student voice?
- What are the challenges in developing the potential of student voice?

3.2 The Research Design

3.2.1 The Process Outline

The research was planned to take place over a one year period. There was the initial phase of negotiating with the school and recruiting volunteer staff as participants within the study. This in effect had to happen twice as the first school I negotiated this research with pulled out at the last minute as a result of competing school improvement priorities. This was a reminder to me of both how much pressure exists within school contexts with regard to a performance agenda; and also how even when initiatives are carefully and collaboratively evolved they can take unexpected turns, and that essentially as a researcher there was only a certain amount that I had any real control over.

At that point two new schools were approached, and I met with key staff from both to discuss whether the research focus would fit with the interests they had to explore student voice. Although both schools wanted to proceed only one could do so within the timescale I needed. Again the reality of wider priorities and pressures on the staff influenced the availability of time and resources to enable the research project. This is an example of what Robson (2002) refers to as *purposive sampling*. No attempt was made to seek a 'representative' sample, and the participants engaged were chosen to support the researcher to formulate rather than test theory. The criteria for me were that participants selected:

- Were typical or at least not obviously atypical of their profession;
- Were interested in student voice as a practice within their setting.

Interested staff in both schools had been invited to a briefing to outline the research aims, to meet with me, and to explore the timescales and process should they wish to engage. It was set up as entirely voluntary, and the level of commitment made as explicit as possible in an attempt to avoid withdrawal later on. This resulted in four members of staff from North College confirming an interest- see *Research Context* for a fuller profile (p. 53).

Once participants had confirmed their interest three group meetings were arranged. The first two allowed for staff to share with me their initial thoughts and experiences of engaging with student voice; the third was run as a workshop to enable participants to familiarize themselves with a Theory of Change planning process. Combining these components allowed for quite a detailed sharing of the school context and history with regard to student voice, and the initial ideas and hopes of the participants with regard to the research agenda.

The Theory of Change framework (Anderson, 2005) was introduced primarily to enable a more careful evaluation of the impact that any student voice activity may have had. This focus had significantly softened by the time I was moving into the individual meetings with the participants, as to have continued would have cast me in a lead role that would have required me to actively manage what participants focused on, and how they progressed their interests. I discussed this with my supervisor and it was agreed that the primary focus would be on the illuminative rather than the evaluative aspects of my research proposal.

This also meant that the emergent findings from focus groups that I had run with two groups of Year 9 students, although shared with the participants, were not used to drive the development of further practice. Rather it was presented as an example of student voice within school, which alongside other examples of student voice in school could inform and stimulate ideas for how participants wanted to proceed. A member of the school senior management fed back to the young

people who had been involved, and ensured that there was follow through. I considered this crucial in terms of maintaining the ethical standard of the research.

The main focus from my perspective was now on the ideas and experiences of the involved staff as they engaged in student voice over the period of my involvement. There was no deliberate attempt to direct or influence how this was done, and meetings with each participant were held half-termly. A final group session was organized at the end of the project to allow for final reflections on the process, and some sharing of the experiences that each participant had had. A full process outline is included in Appendix B (p.206).

3.2.2 The Research Strategy

My research strategy was to develop, through the engagement of participants, a number of case study accounts that would provide the data I needed to answer my research questions. The questions in this regard acted as a way of both focusing the process, and boundarying the data that emerged. The data consisted of:

- The dialogue that took place between the participants and myself through semi-structured interviews over time;
- My research notes;
- Some profiling documentation produced by the participants in the early group sessions.

In deciding to adopt a case study and semi-structured interview strategy I rejected the use of questionnaires or surveys as the main approach on the basis that the level of detail I was interested in could not be accessed by these methods. As noted, I also rejected a more experimental strategy with regard to evaluating the impact of student voice undertaken; as to do so would have placed significant constraints on how naturally evolving the process could be for each participant, and the role I would have been able to adopt. Case study using semi-structured interviews appeared the most appropriate strategy therefore on the basis that it would allow for an illumination of participant led practice and experience with

regard to this agenda. It would also allow this to be undertaken at a sufficient level of detail to enable more meaningful reflection on the research questions. As noted by Yin (1994), case studies are more appropriate when questions are being asked about events and experiences over which the researcher has little or no control.

In taking the decision that a case study, semi-structured interview approach would be an appropriate way to generate data that illuminated the research questions, it is also important to recognize the limitations of this approach. Denscombe (2007) highlights a number of potential disadvantages to a case study strategy, including (i) weak generalizability of findings; (ii) perceptions of producing 'soft' data; (iii) lack of clear boundaries; (iv) difficulties of negotiating access; (v) observer effects due to sustained researcher presence.

The *Research Approach* already outlined (p.38) in terms of the underpinning philosophy or epistemology accepts that ideas around generalizability, soft data, and researcher influence in the process of producing data have to be understood differently to that argued for in more positivist and empirical research. My understanding of case studies is that they represent examples within a broader class of things rather than claiming to be representative, in any holistic sense, of a broader class of things. In this regard, and as suggested by Denscombe, making generalizations on the basis of case studies is partly the responsibility of the reader who will need to make informed decisions as to how far the findings have implications across a wider range of situation and circumstance, or whether in fact they can only represent the specific situation and circumstance they emerged from. Ensuring a sufficient amount of detail is present in accounts is therefore essential in enabling informed decisions of this nature to be taken.

All findings are filtered through me and in that sense there is considerable potential for me to influence what emerges. Denscombe (op cit.) also notes that case study approaches allow for the use of a variety of research methods. As will be discussed in the *Data Analysis* section (p. 62), the method I adopted and the

process that was implemented as part of this were very conscious attempts on my part to ensure that this was done as reflexively as possible.

The potential effect I had on what emerged was of particular concern to me. As Denscombe notes, research on interviewing has demonstrated fairly conclusively that people will respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions. The data in this sense is affected not only by the process and questions adopted, but also by the personal identity of the researcher. Denscombe suggests that this may particularly be an issue where sensitive issues are being explored. My hope was that the fact that the subject matter was not particularly sensitive, and that I was meeting regularly with participants over time, would increase the opportunity for the kind of relationship to establish that would enable sharing without fear or anxiety in this regard. Nevertheless, my analysis of the data has included an attempt to stay alert to the influence I had on what has emerged. I will also relate to this within the *Ethical Considerations* section (p. 47); and finally in my reflections on the research limitations in Chapter 5 (p.181).

As with case study approaches, semi-structured interviewing also has a number of recognized disadvantages. Denscombe describes these as relating to (i) being time consuming; (ii) demanding in terms of researcher skills; (iii) potentially more difficult to analyse because of the open format; (iv) difficult to judge in terms of reliability of what emerges from them; (v) subject to the interviewer effects mentioned; (vi) potentially invasive; (vii) and expensive in terms of time and resources. The attraction of them for me, however, was they also allow for a much more in-depth and natural exploration, that could adapt flexibility to each participant, and enable a process of checking out that I hoped would increase the validity of the findings that emerged. The disadvantages raised by Denscombe can only be addressed or offset through the method and data analysis discussed later.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

My initial points of reference when planning this research were the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines for researchers[4], and the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct[5]. The BERA guidelines highlight the responsibilities that researchers have to the participants, any involved sponsors, and to other researchers, educational professionals and the community at large. The BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct relates more generally to any professional activity that I might engage in, and defines the four ethical principles of:

- Respect;
- Competence;
- Responsibility;
- Integrity.

As I began to reflect more carefully on ideas around what professional organizations such as BERA and the BPS described as underpinning ethical professional activity, and completed the process of applying to the university for research approval, I was quite focused on avoiding doing anything that might mislead or do harm. As Robson (2002) puts it,

> *"How is our 'right to know' balanced against the participants' right to privacy, dignity and self-determination?"*
>
> (Op cit., p.65)

Ethics, Robson suggests, refers to rules of conduct; typically to conformity to a code or set of principles. These codes are frequently developed by professional bodies such as those already mentioned. In referencing the work of Craig *et al.* (2000)[6] on safety within research contexts, Robson list the following types of potential risk:

- Physical threat or abuse;
- Psychological trauma or consequences;

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[4] Available at http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guides.php
[5] Available at http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards
[6] Available at http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU29.html

- Compromised behaviour;
- Increased exposure to general risks of everyday life and social interaction.

Denscombe (2007) states that social researchers should be ethical both in the collection of their data, and in the process of analysing and reporting on the data. This is defined as:

- Respecting the rights and dignity of those who are participating in the research project;
- Avoiding harm to the participants arising from their involvement in the research;
- Operating with honesty and integrity.

Denscombe observes that there is a large degree of overlap between various disciplines' codes, and agreement about principles, that fall under three headings- (i) that the interests of the participants should be protected; (ii) that researchers should avoid deception or misrepresentation; (iii) and that participants should give informed consent.

The implication is that following these codes of conducts with their rules and principles should help to ensure ethical research practice. Brown (1997), however, brings this into question. Employing a feminist perspective to the area of ethics, and more particularly the codes that have been produced, she notes that although these started to appear in the early 1950s as an attempt to protect participants in research, they can also be accused of primarily serving the purposes of large organizations and professionals. A number of underlying problematic assumptions are blamed for this state of affairs. Firstly, that what we do professionally is basically benign and inherently of value because it is based on 'science'. Ethical research based on 'science', she argues has a long history of doing harm, particularly where it has focused on persons and populations. Codes, it is suggested, focus narrowly on the risk to the individual research participant, but often neglect questions about risks to the group to which the participant belongs.

A second misassumption identified by Brown relates to the artificial separation between the psychologist as psychologist, and the psychologist as person. Codes do not require that the two interact at an ethical level, i.e. psychologists need have no personal commitment to certain ways of behaving as long as they remain within the rules while at work. The ethical code is therefore in a sense value free and instead focuses on ensuring overt behavioural restraint on the job.

A third major criticism of professional codes of ethics is that they tend to be written at the lowest common ethical level. In Brown's words they are laden with *'thou shalt nots,'* but weak on *'thou shalts,'* (op cit., p.59), a circumstance that in her view prevents psychology ethics from being truly liberatory and transformative. The final problematic assumption relates to a failure to recognize issues of power and power relationships. Brown observes that while codes tell us that power imbalances are present they fail to question their presence or manage their impact properly.

In response to these concerns, Brown references the Feminist Therapy Institute Code of Ethics[7]. It is described as aspirational, and ethical behaviours as being on a continuum rather than reflecting dichotomies. The five key areas relate to:

- Cultural diversity and oppressions- for example recognizing and taking steps to minimize the impact of our own identities, and limited understandings of others; uncovering and respecting cultural and experiential differences; and through reflection accepting responsibility for confronting and changing any interfering, oppressing or devaluing biases held
- Power differentials- for example acknowledging their presence; ensuring appropriate information disclosure; negotiating and renegotiating involvement; informing participants of their rights
- Overlapping relationships- for example recognizing potential conflicts; ensuring appropriate confidentiality
- Professional accountability- for example remaining accountable to all stakeholders, especially participants; working within the realms of

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[7] Available at http://www.crysaliscounseling.org/Feminist_Therapy.html

competence; maintaining reflective and supervisory arrangements, with a commitment to improving; engaging in self-care activities outside of the work setting, and recognizing researcher own needs and vulnerabilities

- Social change- for example questioning community practices that appear harmful; and recognizing that the political is personal in a world where social change is constant.

This framework is suggested as an extension to, rather than a replacement of, professional codes of ethics. The implication is that by identifying within the specific research context areas that may be problematic, and by actively reflecting on these against the framework, it may be possible to go beyond minimum standards, and in doing so ensure that the wellbeing of the participants is more at the heart of any activity undertaken.

These, in addition to the support I received through supervision and the process of submitting the Ethics Application to the University, provided some useful benchmarks and reflection points through which my research developed. Ethical considerations, however, extend beyond the planning, through the process of collecting the data, and into the analysis and reporting of the findings. I therefore hope to establish the ethical standards to which I worked through the Findings and Discussion chapters as much as through this section. A brief overview of considerations and steps taken at the planning stage however will now follow.

3.3.1 Identification of Participants and Consent

When I made initial contact with the school I provided as much information as possible to enable them to consider whether this was as area of research they wanted to engage in. There was a strong interest in developing the student voice agenda in school and the senior manager I linked with agreed to take the initial information to wider staff along with an invitation to any individual interested to meet with me to explore in more detail what would be involved.

I tried to anticipate the sorts of questions that might be asked, and prepared a short presentation on this basis including, for example the context to the research, who I was, what would be entailed. This served as an initial focus for discussion, and then led into more open discussion about what engagement would entail for anyone interested. At this point the four participants confirmed their interest, and a consent form was signed as part of this process. It was made clear that withdrawal was possible up until the point at which the data was submitted as part of the degree requirements. Participants were asked what sort of feedback they would want from their involvement and this was factored into our final meeting during the summer term 2012.

When conducting the student focus group research element, information was similarly given in advance. This was managed by the Head of Year 9, who then asked students to self-identify. Given the age of the young people involved and the nature of the discussion I felt that they were capable of giving their own informed consent to participate, but did also provide an opportunity for parents to consent or object to their child's involvement.. A letter was provided to the school to send out to parents of interested students, inviting them to get in touch with a nominated member of staff within school if they had any concerns or questions. No formal feedback was offered to professionals beyond the involved staff participants, or to the parents.

The consent form and a draft parent letter are included in Appendix C (p.207).

3.3.2 Confidentiality and Data Management

I discussed the issue of confidentiality with participants, within the context of anonymizing the data collected. Unlike questionnaire and other large scale research methods, case study research seeks to detail and maintain the structure of an individual's account. This makes absolute confidentiality more challenging, as although names can be changed within local contexts it may be possible for informed individuals to work out who has been involved. It was for this reason that

we agreed that although this dissertation would be available through the University, I would not be sending a copy to the school. The end of involvement meetings were set up to allow for individual feedback and the raising of any questions participants had. Any further use of the data in terms of my professional role was similarly agreed within the context of these considerations, and no records containing individual or school names exist within my home, university domains, or workplace. My intention is to maintain a complete data set for 12 months following the completion of my degree, at which time I will dispose of it through my workplace systems for managing confidential information.

Within the context of the focus groups conducted with students, the same types of conversation and steps were taken. The feedback to both the students and the staff of what emerged from these group discussions was carefully produced and communicated to maintain confidentiality. Opportunities were given for the students to comment on the validity of the findings, and how representative the final summary for staff was. In this sense it was an iterative approach to managing the data. The change in focus for the research means this will not be described further.

3.3.3 Risk Analysis

The *Supervision and the University Approval form* were helpful in structuring my consideration of risk to participants. In the initial stages this focused on the more immediate potential of harm that might have come about as a result of the direct activity undertaken. I then broadened consideration of this to include potential harm from indirect involvement, for example pressure on staff as a result of a longer term commitment, or impact on students should actions be taken/fail to be taken following the focus group consultation. I managed this as overtly as possible with both staff and students, and particularly for staff with whom I met regularly I always asked explicitly how they were in regard to coping with the demands placed on them in addition to the research involvement. E-mail and telephone contact details were provided to the participants, with the open invitation to get in touch anytime should there be a need. This in effect allowed for situations to be responded to as

they developed, with particular regard to work demands for those involved. Approximately 25% of planned meetings were rescheduled in response to participants' work demands, again illustrating the pressure on staff day to day.

A further step was taken to maintain my own reflection in regard to the wellbeing of those involved, including myself. I have been fortunate to complete this doctoral research at the same time as several other colleagues from the same Local Authority Service as myself. One of these colleagues has provided regular peer support and supervision in the form of ongoing discussion over the course of time that I was working with staff. This in conjunction with planned University supervision has been instrumental in supporting both my professional learning and also my awareness of issues that I believe has allowed me to conduct a more ethical, safer, and better quality of research than would otherwise have been possible.

3.4 The Research Context

3.4.1 A Profile of the School Context

North College is a mixed gender community school for 11 to 18 year old students. They had a total roll of around 1400 students at the time this research was being carried out. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. More girls than boys attend the school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. An above average proportion of students in the 11 to 16 part of the school have a learning difficulty or disability.

When I first met with senior management in the school they shared with me that they were facing two significant wider challenges. The first related to a falling roll, particularly for the 11 to 16 phase of the school, and the financial pressure that this was creating across the school. The second related to a difficult OFSTED inspection in 2009, and the resultant pressure to raise standards and improve leadership and management. This had resulted in significant restructuring of

responsibility within the school, and the initiation of considerable change in terms of the everyday systems and practices.

My impression of those I met was that there was considerable energy and ambition to improve standards, and that they were genuinely interested in and committed to the idea of students being involved in informing how this was done. There was a history of student voice work within the school and across the age phases, in the form of a school council, use of questionnaires, and some student panel experience. They had considered developing a *students as researchers* approach in a department within the school in the past, although this had not been progressed. Exploration of some of these experiences suggested that the majority of what had been undertaken with students had involved a relatively small number of committed senior staff.

3.4.2 A Brief Profile of the Staff Participants

A more detailed profile of each involved participant will be provided in Chapter 4 (p.70) and this introduction to them is intended to provide a context to that.

Four participants volunteered to be part of this research. Each had an active interest in, and experience of, student voice agendas. All were involved in departments which were undergoing change, and each participant was interested in what developing this agenda might support them to achieve within this context.

Two participants were female, and two were male[8]. All had at least six years teaching experience.

Lynn was the most senior of the involved staff, and had recently taken on considerable additional responsibility for supporting school improvement. Her direct contact with young people had at the same time started to reduce.

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[8] All the participant names have been replaced with synonyms to protect their identities

Julie was responsible for coordinating a major area of the curriculum and a key area of support for sixth form students. Her role was under review as a result of changes to statutory requirements, and restructuring of external services within the Local Authority.

David was the Head of Humanities, and had the most previous experience of student voice and young people participation agendas both in and out of schools. He carried a high teaching load alongside his management role, and worked across all the age phases.

Simon was the most recently appointed member of the group, and was primarily responsible for the delivery of a new course within the sixth form. He had come into teaching from a business background, and was interested in translating this experience into education.

A motivating factor disclosed by all the participants for engaging in this research was an interest in professionally developing themselves further. All four members of staff had started a Master's in Education and hoped that the research opportunity would support them in completing this, alongside the development work taking place within their respective areas of school life.

3.5 Method and Data Analysis

3.5.1 An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach

As stated by Willig (2008), phenomenology is interested in the world as experienced by human beings within particular contexts and at particular times, rather than in general or more generic observations of the nature of the world more broadly. It is concerned with the phenomena that appear in our consciousness as we engage with the world around us. Phenomenology is therefore focused at the idiographic level, which was a term originally developed to distinguish the study of specifics from the study of 'things in general', although it is traditionally associated in psychology with the study of individual persons (Larkin *et al.*, 2006).

Larkin *et al.* note that the analytic processes described by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) are largely unremarkable when compared with other qualitative methods, and that it may be more appropriate to describe IPA as a *stance* or perspective from which to approach the task of analysis. They assert that the IPA researcher must approach their data with two aims in mind. Firstly, to try and understand their participants world and to describe 'what it is like'. This requires a focus on the 'experience' of the participant in regard to the area under investigation, and the production of a coherent, third person, and psychologically informed description. The second aim is to develop a more overtly interpretative analysis, which positions the initial description in relation to a wider social, cultural, and perhaps theoretical context. It is this consideration of existing theoretical constructs, and a more speculative approach that in part distinguishes IPA from grounded theory approaches, which I also considered.

Although phenomenological approaches, as described by Willig (2008), have been established since at least the early twentieth century, the method of IPA is attributed to Smith (1996). IPA shares the aims of other, more descriptive phenomenological approaches to data analysis in that it aims to capture the quality and texture of the individual experience. It recognizes, however, that such experience is never directly accessible to the researcher, and as such accepts that there is a need for interpretation at every stage of the process. IPA aims to produce knowledge of what and how people think about the phenomenon under investigation, and in this sense it can be conceptualized within a *realist* tradition. It recognizes, however, that a researcher's understanding of the participants is necessarily influenced by his or her own way of thinking, assumptions and conceptions. These are not considered biases to be eliminated, but rather a necessary precondition for making sense of another person's experience. An open and reflexive stance is required to enable this to be undertaken in a way that will allow others to make judgments as to the validity and trustworthiness of the accounts that emerge.

Larkin *et al.* (2006) in considering the ontological and epistemological bases for investigating the 'person in context', point out that perhaps the most pressing issue for psychology is the recognition that it is not actually possible to remove ourselves, our thoughts and our meaning systems from the world in order to find out how things 'really are' in some definitive sense. They note psychology's reluctance to accept the idea that 'reality' might be an intellectual construction, and acknowledge concerns within the research community that accepting these propositions could create challenges in terms of distinguishing 'good' claims from 'bad', and 'rampant relativism'. The more considered view, they suggest, is that accepting such ideas does not automatically lead us to a state of disciplinary anarchy. The position of minimal or critical realism means that our success as phenomenologists will depend on our being prepared to do the most sensitive and responsive job we can, given our inherent epistemological and methodological weaknesses.

If the subject/object distinction is accepted as a false one from a researcher perspective, it follows that any reality I might discover is partly dependent on my own process of intellectual construction and my own subjective engagement with the area under investigation. It therefore reveals something of me, something of the participants, and something of the broader reality of the phenomena under investigation. An additional level of complexity is added when studying the accounts of others. The double hermeneutic described by Smith *et al.* (2009) involves me as researcher making sense of the participant who is making sense of the phenomena under investigation. Smith *et al.* emphasize the importance of a positive process of engaging with the participant over the process of bracketing my own biases, the reasoning being that skilful attention to the former inevitably facilitates the latter.

Willig (2008) identifies three key limitations to an IPA approach. Firstly that it assumes that language provides participants with the necessary tools to capture the experience- i.e. it relies on the representational validity of language. This is

problematic as it can be argued that language constructs as well as describes reality. Secondly, it relies on participants' descriptions of their experiences, which raises the difficult question of to what extent their accounts constitute suitable material for phenomenological analysis. Are participants able to capture the subtleties and nuances of their experiences? The third limitation relates to what can be revealed. The focus on participant perceptions and experiences may reveal *what* and *how* they understand, but not *why* such experiences take place, or why there may be differences between individual representations.

3.5.2 The Method

Smith *et al.* (2009), in describing how to do IPA, outline four areas for consideration. The first, which has been covered earlier in this Methodology, regards the planning of the research study, and the development of the questions. The second relates to choosing a suitable method for generating the data. The third area details the process of data analysis. The fourth area concerns itself with the writing up of the research. I will now describe my own research in regard to the second and third areas. The fourth area will be dealt with in Chapter 4.

3.5.2.1 Planning the Interviews

As previously discussed, I wanted to use semi-structured interviews over time in order to explore the research questions. The process of planning the interview guide was an attempt to make sure that the data that did emerge was both boundaried but also flexible enough to allow for participants to share their experiences in whatever way felt natural to them. As noted by Smith *et al.* (2009) qualitative research has a focus on meaning, sense making and communication action. The questions that can be formulated depend on the focus of greatest interest, and in my case this was on the personal meaning and sense making of the participants involved with regard to student voice within their own individual contexts.

The assumption that I made when developing the guide was that if I could identify the right questions then a reasonably rich and reflective level of personal account could be accessed. I hoped that this would tell me something about the key objects of concern in the participant's world, and the experiential claims made by the participant, through which I could develop a phenomenological account.

In order to focus on the experiences and understandings of the participants, I needed to develop semi-structured interview questions that were both open and exploratory. They needed to reflect process rather than outcome, and focus on meaning. The aim in developing this guide was therefore to ask questions about experiences and sense making activities, and to situate these within specific contexts. As I developed these I also needed to ensure that the over-arching research questions could be reflected on through the interpretation of responses based on the questions used within the interviews.

In producing the interview questions I wanted to use a structure I had come across previously. Hayes (2000) describes stages in developing questions that allows for careful reflection from the outset. In particular the importance of being explicit about the aims of the interviews in terms of (i) why I wanted to conduct them, (ii) what type of information I wanted to obtain, and (iii) how I wanted to analyse this, seemed relevant to what I was doing. These in effect provided a touchstone for me when designing the questions I went on to use. As noted by Denscombe (2007), with a semi-structured approach to interviewing there is a clear list of issues or questions to be explored, but this can be done flexibly in terms of the order in which topics are considered. Perhaps most significantly it also allows the participant to develop ideas and speak more widely on issues raised. In that sense the guide, while providing structure and helping to maintain focus and boundaries, was not implemented rigidly, but rather responsively with each participant.

The interview guide that emerged from this process is shown in Table 3.

Table 3- Interview Guide

Research Element	Purpose	Interview Element	Proposed Analysis
<u>Individual meetings with staff involved- first 2-3 meetings</u>	Access insight into experience so far	Semi-structured interview Qs • What has been happening since we last met? • What has struck you about this work so far? • How are you feeling about it? • Are you doing anything different as a result of the work so far?	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
	Access insight into understandings of student voice for participants	Semi-structured interview Qs • What are your thoughts on student voice in general at this stage? • Has that changed?	IPA
	Identify what role I might have in supporting the individual moving forward	"How can I help you?" exploration	
	Agree next contact	Identify a date and a time for next meeting	

Research Element	Purpose	Session Element	Proposed Analysis
Individual meetings with staff involved- subsequent meetings (once well underway)	Review of what individuals have been doing with student voice	• What has been happening since we last caught up?	IPA
	Exploration of planning/doing/reviewing as experiences; and as developing understandings of student voice	Semi-structured interview Qs • What has struck you about this work so far? • How are you feeling about it? • Are you doing anything different as a result of the work so far?	IPA

	Reflection on any observed impact
	   - On individual
	   - On young people
	   - On colleagues
		Semi-structured interview Qs
		 • What are your thoughts on student voice in general at this stage?
		 • How has what you've been doing affected you/ students/ colleagues?
			IPA

	Reflect on how experience and noted impact is influencing concept of student voice	Semi-structured interview Qs • How are you thinking about student voice in context of your experience now? • Has that changed in any way? How?	IPA
	Identify intended next steps	"What next?" exploration	IPA
	Identify what role I might have in supporting the individual moving forward	"How can I help you?" exploration	
	Agree next contact	Identify a date and a time for next meeting	

Smith and Osborn (2003) argue that producing an interview guide in advance forces us to think explicitly about what we think or hope the interview might cover. More importantly it allows us to think of difficulties that might be encountered and how those might be handled. Having thought this through in advance, they suggest, allows the researcher to concentrate more thoroughly and confidently on what the respondent is actually saying.

My approach to the interview itself was to try and encourage the participants to speak about their experiences of student voice with as little prompting as possible. Where I felt I needed to, I used the questions to gently nudge them into providing a little more detail about this; but where I didn't feel I needed to I used simple reflective comments to communicate that I had heard what they were telling me. I attempted to do this in a warm and interested way, but without giving any more impression of my own views than I could help. The order to the questions was also fully flexible, although we always tended to start with a "What's been happening since we last caught up?" type of question.

The aim was to be as open to their experience as possible, and to allow a natural rapport and relationship to develop over time. This was possible because of the multiple interviews aspect to the process, but also created additional considerations when it comes to data analysis which I will explore in the following section.

3.5.2.2 Data Analysis

Smith *et al.* (2009) state that although increasingly well established, the existing literature on analysis in IPA has not prescribed a single 'method' for working with data (op cit., p.79). Indeed they note that what has been published has been characterized by a healthy flexibility. The essence of IPA, they suggest, lies in its analytic focus which directs our analytic attention towards participant attempts to make sense of their experiences. This typically involves iterative and inductive cycles which commit the researcher to exploring, describing, interpreting and

situating the ways in which the participants make sense of their experiences (Larkin *et al.*, 2006)- something that Madill *et al.* (2005) describe as 'contextualism'.

My approach to analysing the data I gathered stayed quite close to the process suggested by Smith *et al.* (2009)which details six steps. These will now be outlined with the adaptations I did make indicated clearly and justified.

Step 1

This step begins a process of entering the participant's world and requires an active engagement with the data. It is described as *Reading and Re-reading* by Smith *et al.*, although they suggest that if working from interviews it is helpful to listen to the audio recording at least once while first reading the transcript. I adapted this step to allow for more flexible use of the audio option, made possible by advances in technology and use of NVIVO[9]which allows audio files to be imported. My hope was that by working more flexibly at this stage I would be able to stay closer to the actual account. The process I followed within this step was:

- Listen and re-listen;
- Create partial[10] transcription using NVIVO focusing on participant contributions, and reducing my contributions to brief summary statements;
- Read and listen to refine partial transcriptions and ensure they reflected what seemed most important in the interview.

My justification for these changes comes from my own experience of how different a transcribed record of an interview can *feel* from the experience of being there, and the inevitable loss of contextual information that results from reducing what happened to text on a page. That is not to say that audio captures the full account either, clearly much of what occurs within any interaction is non-verbal, but I

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[9] NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. It has been designed for qualitative researchers working with rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required.

[10] 'Partial' transcription refers to a full verbatim account of the participant contributions, but a summarised and reduced account of the researcher's contributions- see Appendix D, p. 219 for an example

believe that integrating more fully the audio with the partial transcriptions in the early stages did allow me to stay closer to the interview than working primarily from a full transcript would have done.

Step 2- Initial Noting

This step examines semantic content and language use on an exploratory level. The process outlined in Step 1 allowed for a familiarity with the data that made this next step feel quite natural. The aim was to produce a detailed set of notes and comments, which ultimately becomes the main focus for ongoing data analysis. The focus is on the phenomenological account and the participant's explicit meaning, and I was particularly aware at this point of emerging descriptions of the things that seemed to matter most (key objects of concern) and the experience of this for the participants.

Smith *et al.* (op cit.) identify three types of comments that are commonly used in IPA analysis: *descriptive* comments which describe the content of what has been said; *linguistic* comments which focus on the use of language; and *conceptual* comments which focus on a more interrogative and conceptual level. Again, Smith *et al.* state that these are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but I did find them helpful and used them extensively in the analysis (for examples of partial transcripts and initial noting see Appendix D, p.209). My approach to this, however, was again one of reading and re-reading, cross referencing to the audio records and my research notes, and starting with descriptive comments which seemed most straightforward before moving on to any linguistic or conceptual comments. In this sense it was an iterative and inductive process that allowed me to start to reflect on a much deeper level about what was emerging from the account.

Step 3- Developing Emergent Themes

Smith *et al.(2009)* note that in looking for emergent themes the task is one of simultaneously reducing the volume of detail (the transcript and initial notes) while maintaining the complexity in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between the exploratory notes. This shift from the transcript to the

initial notes was gradual for me, as a way of trying to ensure that the comments were closely enough tied to the original data. As commented by Smith *et al.* this process took me further away from the participant and includes more of me, but 'the me' that was closely involved in the lived experience of the participant. My main task at this stage was to produce a concise statement of what was most important in the various comments. I found this difficult at the outset as I did not want to discard anything, but gradually became more comfortable with the process through using reflective questions such as 'What does that add?' or 'Where does that fit with regard to the research focus?' Where comments did not appear to fit, a further question of 'Is it important in any other respect?' was employed before a final decision was taken. As far as possible wording of the emergent themes reflected the original language of the participant, but also my own interpretation of this.

Step 4

As a result of undertaking multiple interviews with each participant and the substantial amount of data that this produced, a considerable number of emergent themes were identified and the challenge in this step was to try and make sense of these within the broader context of what was emerging. An example of how I approached this through the use of participant summary tables is included in Appendix F.

Very little is written about with regard to method and the use of multiple interviews with the same participants. Flowers (2008) highlights the time-related issues within interview based research. He observes that although usually tacit their effects are far from vestigial, and argues that thinking through the relevance of some of the 'time-oriented' aspects of qualitative research can help maximize our research skills. He notes that one-off interviews are the staple means of data collection within most kinds of qualitative research, and that this often represents an 'opportunistic' approach. An interview, unlike a questionnaire, often does not make clear the recall period in question, but most are retrospective, looking back across time or lived experience.

Flowers suggests that the disadvantages of one-off interviewing can relate to the challenge of establishing rapport very quickly and the cognitive load on the researcher to remember what the participant has said in order to probe for more information. Multiple interviews, by contrast, require decisions to be taken in terms of how then to analyse what emerges, i.e. whether to treat the data as separate interviews or as one 'mega' interview. The latter, Flowers suggest, is simpler in that it keeps the process simpler and makes writing up easier. The disadvantages, however, include the fact that it de-emphasizes the importance of the social context of the interviews themselves and the resulting 'relationship' which builds across interviews. It also risks losing sight of contradictory narratives within each account

I also needed to decide what sort of analysis would take place between interviews. A research diary was kept throughout and an entry made after each interview capturing my initial observations and thoughts. I also listened to the audio of the previous interview prior to each meeting in order to re-attune myself. This also served a very helpful function of keeping my own self-awareness high with respect to my role and influence within the interview. I am conscious that my 'technique' altered and, with respect to good research practice as described more widely in the literature, improved over the course of the research. My own developing style and competence also represent a variable that is difficult to control for in the analysis. One of the more obvious changes to my 'technique' over the course of the interviews relates to the reduction in my talking and the increase, where I do contribute, of the use of reflective comments. This was also partly a consequence of the revised and narrowed focus for the research, away from any more deliberate development or evaluation of practice.

The result of this is that, as pointed out by Flowers, transparently articulating how the different interviews and different analytic stages and influences relate to a single narrative within a final written account is extremely challenging. Making explicit some of the temporal issues that affected me and the research process I

hope will allow the reader to come to their own conclusions about the context to the accounts presented.

In more practical terms then what I did with the emergent themes was to transfer them on to post-it notes. Up until this point they had been chronologically arranged, but at this point they became conceptually arranged. The purpose of this step was to find a way of drawing together the emergent themes and in doing so produce a structure to make visible the important aspects of the participant's account. By repeatedly asking the question 'How do these fit together?' I was able to identify patterns that eventually became the categories or 'pillars' through which I managed the data (see p.70). I did this interview by interview first, and then across interviews. Smith *et al.* (2009) describe a variety of strategies for evolving this process including abstraction, polarization, subsumption, contextual and function. I used all of these flexibly to create the structure for each participant, and then discussed these through supervision to refine them further.

Step 5- Moving to the Next Case

Once I had completed the data analysis for a participant I produced two summary tables, one that allows an 'at a glance' sense of what emerged interview by interview, and then a collated summary organised by category or 'pillar'. My wider professional responsibilities meant that although I worked continuously on the data for each participant, I did then often take a break between analysing the data for each participant. I think in retrospect this was probably helpful as it allowed me to look with a fresher eye at each participant as an individual than I might have been able to if I had moved more quickly from one participant to another.

I am aware however that I will have inevitably been influenced by what I had already 'found out', and in this sense again that there were variables at play that I had limited control over in any traditionally 'objective' sense. In this regard the Steps adopted for each participant were identical in terms of the *processing* of the data, but to a lesser degree the *Processing* of the data. By this I mean that while the 'method' was the same the level of my own awareness and reflection was

changing as I started to construct the superordinate themes that helped me to further organize the data. This was gradually reinforced through the iterative cycles of analysis that took place.

Step 6- Looking for Patterns Across Cases

The final stage in the data analysis involved looking for patterns across the cases. By arranging the various super-ordinate themes within the summary tables next to one another and again going through a process of asking 'How do these fit together?' as well as 'How do these not fit together?' it was possible to evolve some master themes as well as identify some unique aspects to individual accounts (for example see Table 5, p.96). The risk, I felt, at this stage was to drift too far from the individual accounts so again I found myself going back and checking things out within the context of the original data. This level of analysis is well illustrated within Chapter 4, and an example summary table of superordinate themes subsumed into the master themes and related to Research Question One is provided in Appendix G (p.216).

3.5.3 Presenting the Data

As noted the challenge of providing a transparent account that reflects the many different temporal and personal variables that changed over time is very challenging, and I will pick up on this further in the final chapter. My presentation of the findings is structured to first allow me to provide a descriptive account of what emerged across the participant accounts in respect to each research question. Once this has been done I have then engaged in more reflective interpretations of the findings, but still from a relatively grounded perspective, before going on to also relate key theoretical concepts with the wider relevant literature and psychological theory.

Chapter 4- Findings and Discussion

As part of analysing the findings I wanted to ensure I could focus in on accounts that seemed to say something directly about what student voice was, but also provide a context to this in terms of the participant beliefs, experiences and actions that seemed to relate to those ideas. I had about 25 hours of interview to analyse. Once I had familiarized myself with the content of the accounts, developed a set of detailed initial notes, and identified the emergent themes, I needed a way of managing the data to allow me to consider the research questions in more organized detail. To this end I used the following 'pillars' as a way of beginning to organize the accounts shared with me. These emerged naturally through the first three steps of analysis (see p.63), within the context of my reflections on the accounts and the research questions themselves. In effect this represents Stage 4 and 5 in my IPA analysis.

The 'pillars' are not in reality distinct and separate but rather overlapping and complementary within the accounts shared, and I moved flexibly within and between them in considering the research questions. Their job was to help me to manage the data in a way that allowed me to make sense of the findings that emerged, within and across participant accounts. An example of a participant summary table for one of these areas is included in Appendix F. Each will now be defined in Table 4:

Pillar	Working Definition
Characteristics of Student Voice	Ideas and actions that said something directly about what student voice was to the participants, and how it operated in school from their perspectives.
Personal Experiences	Closely related to *Characteristics* but adding a very human and personal dimension to the more theoretical ideas about what student voice was or wasn't.
Practical Challenges .	Ideas and experiences related to the practicalities of student voice, and how it could be helped or hindered.
Professional Conviction	Beliefs communicated as part of the accounts that while not necessarily saying anything directly about what student voice was, did offer a sense of perspective on how as individuals each participant approached working with young people and doing the job they did.
Organizational Context	This element within the accounts set a broader landscape within which student voice then emerged. It related to drivers that were for the most part out of the individual participant's control, and which were dominant factors influencing much of what was possible both for student voice and broader professional life.

Table 4- Working Definitions for the 'Pillars' Used to Manage the Data

4.1 A More Detailed Profile of the Participants

Before any specific consideration can be given to the research questions it is important to develop a more detailed appreciation of the participants in terms of their initial hopes coming into the project; the professional perspectives that each brought to their work and the way this related to how they understood student voice more generally; and what they actually did as part of this project. My background in cognitive behavioural psychology has informed this approach, as I would argue that our everyday actions and experiences are heavily influenced by the beliefs, attitudes and assumptions we carry with us into these encounters. The profiles that follow are an attempt to therefore contextualize the more detailed consideration of

the research questions that follow; and to bring a little of the character of each participant to bear in making sense of this.

Quotes used throughout this and the following chapter will be identified using a code composed of the participant's initial (for example D for David), the interview drawn from (for example 2 would indicate it was the second interview with that participant), and the time section within the interview where the comment was made (for example 5-10 would mean it was part of the discussion that took place during minutes 5 to 10 of the interview). Where it is clear who is speaking the participant initial will be dropped.

4.1.1 Simon

As previously noted, Simon was the most recently appointed member of the group and was primarily responsible for the delivery of a new business course within the sixth form. He had come into teaching from a business background, and was interested in translating this experience into education.

4.1.1.1 Hopes Starting this Project

Simon was very clear from the outset that he wanted to use student voice as a way of creating the most effective department he could:

> *I've got the overall or overriding agenda…of creating an effective department to enable learners to engage and achieve. And then the goal of being the Business Department with practice which is a response to pupil voice.*
>
> 1.0-4

Simon wanted to develop a process that would challenge the students to come up with ways that would improve teaching and learning in his department. He had some doubts, however, about how able the students would be to deliver on this, the following quote giving a sense of this:

… how do they then have the knowledge of what works well? And what do we make in terms of the significance of their voice in relation to say the pedagogy etc.? And that's the bit I'm struggling with… how much do we listen to what they want as opposed to what we know, or we're told?

1.0-4

Simon was also clear from the outset that there would have to be a benefit to the student voice undertaken although he was initially unsure what form this might take:

I look at it from say a business perspective and I'll say, 'Well how are you going to do this? And how are we going to measure the success of that?' And I do think that satisfaction surveys… there is going to have to be some benefits to the department and the school as well.

1.4-9

In the longer term Simon saw the most meaningful measure of success as examination results:

Teachers are under pressure to get results. Hopefully…it will improve results... And if they can enjoy their lessons more, they can engage more, and perhaps they will get better results.

1. 33-36

4.1.1.2 Some Professional Perspective

Simon came into the project with the view that student voice was not always useful. His references to this view were focused on what he described as formal or routine student voice:

I personally believe… that say formalized processes aren't as effective as the informal process of just having a conversation with someone. I think that is much more important… I think that a lot of the time in schools they're all very happy to go, 'Here's a questionnaire, blah blah blah.' And then we write it down, it's data, it goes and gets filed away, and nothing happens with it.

1. 9-15

Simon associated this more formalized approach with management agendas and OFSTED, and considered it detached from what went on in the classroom:

> *And a more formalized approach to student voice is basically paperwork and I don't think it has a great deal of influence within a lesson. I think it is just an exercise.*
>
> <div align="right">4.15-20</div>

> *And I can see where the formal approach comes from, and I can see that people need this paperwork to tick this box. And OFSTED come in and you say, 'Look what we've done.' But I just think that in some respects it doesn't mean a great deal.*
>
> <div align="right">5.15-21</div>

Within Simon's accounts there was also a sense of resentment of this sort of management led approach:

> *I think that if you have the one approach it's always led by say the senior management who want some evidence from this one approach. Then I think it is like saying someone is taking the professional responsibility away from the teachers.*
>
> <div align="right">1.30-34</div>

Simon's view of management was that they needed to trust staff more with things like student voice:

> *Well it would have to come from the top of the school. And then there could be people or students that are interested in following it further within the subject areas… And I think in some ways it would take the whole ownership of their learning, and something I could do with my group.*
>
> <div align="right">5. 35-40</div>

This also appeared to be his instinctive approach to running student voice with the students:

I would hope that it is more in terms of the generation of things from the student perspective, than it is a drive towards change. It could be that we initiate and say, 'This is what we are looking at- have you got any ideas on that?' And I do know that in reality there is going to be some direction, and I could provide that direction by saying, 'How can we improve things?'

5. 26-31

It was suggested that Management should also ensure that there is a basic level of commitment and co-ordination across staff and departments, as without this there was the risk that individual staff would become less motivated over time:

If I am doing something within my subject all well and good. But if no-one else is, or if people are just doing another approach of say ticky boxes, 'This is where we are.. great, happy days, I've done my student voice bit.' Does that then negate some of the benefit of mine? And I think … You need a common approach throughout the school.

5.35-40

When it came to ideas about education, Simon saw learning as a social process:

The feedback within that, and trying to get them to learn from others… So in some ways it's like.. I don't know, proximal development in a way. Where they are all learning from the people around them, and in some ways trying to scaffold their whole answers into that framework.

4.0-6

The role of the teacher within this was very much fitted to the whole school attainment agenda:

And it's just about building their skills, and their exam skills. That's what they are tested on. That's what they need to develop.

3.20-25

This approach was informed by Simon's own school experience:

I think that in some way it is potentially a lot to do with what I believe they should be getting from it… It is what I would have loved to have had when I did my A-levels (laughs).

4.6-11

This idea of needing to guide the students to success is also illustrated by an instinct to come up with solutions and 'strategy':

> *So I wouldn't say it's fully collaborative. There is still me leading it, in say the design of the questionnaires and that.*
>
> 3.9-15

> *No that was mine. I mean their thing was they enjoyed.. they wanted that immediate feedback, and they found it helpful when they were told as opposed to had to read it. So that was when I came up with the strategy that I have started to use.*
>
> 4.11-15

Simon clearly believed that students, and not just teachers, were responsible for success in school.

> *It's not really the way we were trying to change things in the lessons and trying to benefit in terms of teaching and learning style. I just think it's the realization of, 'Wow! This is what I have to do. We have to be responsible for our own learning.'*
>
> 5.15-21

4.1.1.3 What Simon Did

Within the above context Simon was keen to develop a focus with students within his department that would support their learning and achievement as they moved towards their A-levels. He began by adapting an OFSTED questionnaire out of which emerged an issue with written feedback:

> *These are the percentages. 'I always read feedback on my work.'. We're looking at like 8 percent like 'Strongly disagree'. And that is a key thing. 'I always reflect on feedback on my work.' Ahm.. some of them. And that was the thing that interested me. More reflect on it than read it. And then it was like, ' Ah well, we just look at our grade.' And then think, ' Ah, we did well. We didn't do well. We didn't meet our target or we did meet our target.'*
>
> 3.0-5

A focus group was established, and Simon was keen to get a reasonable representation of students involved in this:

No, it's open to anyone who want to come along… So I am quite open to anyone coming in… I mean I don't want all 43 of them (laughs) sitting there, because then it's like.. there's no point. So we've got a full spread from each class.

<div align="right">3.15-20</div>

The findings from the questionnaire survey were then introduced to stimulate discussion within the focus group:

'Here's the feedback from the questionnaire I got everyone to do at the start of term. What are feelings on it? What are you talking about? What do you think we could do? So why aren't you reflecting on feedback? Why do you just like your mark? Why is your mark so important?'

<div align="right">3.0-6</div>

This led to the group deciding to try and develop a better way of providing feedback on written work:

It was basically they came up with the idea. So we've said we'd do something, we'd try and work on something in the next session. So basically the next session is basically they're coming with ideas about their feedback sheet based on what they already have. On ways to improve it and then we can discuss them.

<div align="right">3.0-6</div>

Once a new approach was agreed it was then implemented for the entire cohort of students and Simon made the decision to track their progress over the subsequent two terms as new strategies were implemented. Simon saw this as something that they had evolved together, and that although it was frustrating at times for him personally it did develop in a way he saw as valid.

I mean I think the whole concept of evolution is probably the more important aspect. I'm looking at it.. even if it does frustrate.. I mean obviously the whole concept behind it is that you are constantly having to change. You constantly have to reassess, evaluate what is going on, and change direction in order to take everyone with you. And align them to what you want to achieve.

<div align="right">4.15-20</div>

4.1.2 David

David was Head of Geography when we first met, but took on a Head of Humanities post just as the project was beginning. He had the most previous experience of student voice and young people participation agendas both in and out of school. He carried a high teaching load alongside his management role, and worked across all the age phases.

4.1.2.1 Hopes Starting the Project

David hoped the project would offer an opportunity for him to support the development of his department, and his own development as a teacher. He was also hopeful that involving students in this way would lead to better engagement, and increased motivation and enjoyment for the students. Having insight into what the students wanted was seen as central to this:

> *It would be nice if I could do something on a bigger scale… to help me in the new role that I've got. It would be beneficial for me as a starting point in that role to really get an idea about what the students want.*
>
> 1.1-4

David saw student voice as relating to the raising attainment agenda, but wanted it to be used in a supportive manner while recognizing that it was potentially challenging for staff:

> *My goals were originally to look at the role of student voice in raising attainment. but I think it would be interesting to look at… how much students enjoy their subjects... If the staff in the faculty haven't been used to this sort of approach, then I don't want it to be a tool to beat them round the head with.*
>
> 1.2-4

There was also a degree of worry that whatever was undertaken was manageable while at the same time at a scale where students would genuinely benefit:

I think the other change in focus is that I was looking across the departments, whereas now I would like to focus on Key Stage 5.. cos that's the largest proportion of our students. Those are the people most affected… We'll have to limit it down.

<div align="right">1.6-8</div>

Up until his promotion David had been Head of a Department where SV was very well established. He was less confident that the new departments he was responsible for following promotion had well established practices in this area:

I don't know how well embedded it is across other departments. We have student voice panels as well [within Geography] *to have discussions with the students, which is going to give you the same kind of outcomes.*

<div align="right">1.7-11</div>

David was clear that while the process he hoped to establish should be valuing, it should not be demand led:

We are allowing students to be involved and therefore that's going to have a positive effect in terms of them feeling valued and their views being taken on board. As long as we make sure you know that it is not a demand led process. It's not, 'Well we want this,' so you get that.

<div align="right">1.11-13</div>

4.1.2.2 Some Professional Perspective

David viewed student voice as something that could be done well or not well, and as something that has become associated with OFSTED:

I think sometimes within schools you've got to do it because OFSTED say you've got to do it... And some people have gone down the line of quite mechanically collating student voice without meaningfully doing it. We need to just go back to why we are doing it. There's no point me doing it and collating it if it's just going to be a headache where they're not actually using it.

<div align="right">2.31-42</div>

It was however clearly understood as having an important part to play in raising attainment:

> *But obviously across all of those student voice comes out cos how do you raise attainment? What do students think we need to do more of? … How do students perceive the issues? How do we monitor? How are students involved in that?*

<div align="right">2.17-19</div>

David questioned where the limits of student voice might lie and held a view that students didn't and couldn't always know all the options, and that they often had quite a narrow perspective on an issue:

> *I think it is always quite difficult.. well I think as well when the first Academies came about and they were going to students, ' Right, design the school you want,' and then a lot of them.. well they didn't know, because they didn't know what the options are. I think they* [the students] *are judging you against either other people in the school, which could be positive because if you're getting a good experience comparatively to the other departments then that's good.*

<div align="right">2.14-18</div>

A recurrent theme in my discussions with David related to ideas that students should enjoy the experience of school and learning. David saw enjoyment as essentially being an outcome and a value:

> *So it's a bit like.. enjoyment* [as an outcome]. *Hmmmm.. I know these aren't all directly related but.. I suppose something along the lines of values. It's all a bit blue sky.*

<div align="right">2.15-20</div>

> *It's about the experiences as well, isn't it? Because that's really what education is about, and the government just seems to think it's about what comes out at the end… How fat is the pig? And that's not what I perceive it to be anyway. It's about making some more of their experiences right, and as well as that help them feel supported in the process.*

<div align="right">6.36-41</div>

The idea of enjoyment was understood to relate to the process of engaging students:

> *I always like the analogy of being a bit like a shop. And if the shop existed and didn't draw any customers then it wouldn't be very successful, and as a school or department you're the same. We've got to make sure we're getting it right because otherwise why would they come in?*

<div align="right">2.45-50</div>

This was particularly important within the context of student numbers:

> *… we are faced with increased competition with other providers outside the County.. so we need to make sure that the people that we get on the courses are happy, and that if there are any issues then we need to tackle them immediately. Hopefully that* [Student Voice] *will help us do that.*

<div align="right">4.16-19</div>

Enjoyment was also understood to relate ultimately to attainment, as David believed that better engaged and happier students would achieve more:

> *Because you would probably suspect or assume that people who feel supported, who are happy on the courses, who feel like they're getting looked after, would ultimately lead to* [better attainment].

<div align="right">6.36-41</div>

David's general view on good teaching was that teachers learn from one another, and from listening to students:

> *I want them to deliver good lessons using different resources and strategies, informed by what students tell them… as well as the judgments of their colleagues.*

<div align="right">2.26-30</div>

The notion of working collaboratively and co-operatively was important to David:

*Cos we weren't originally looking at outcomes as much as the process
really, and how collaborative work can help you become a better
practitioner… I've been really lucky I suppose the team that I've got at
the moment.*

3.0-6

Relationships were very important to David, and were understood to often set the
context for what was possible:

*It's about keeping people on board. I think it is interesting within schools
as well, because there is that relationship as well and it is different in
different places. And the more traditional teachers will say, 'Oh, I'm not
comfortable with that.*

6.3-36

David made few references to the role of management in school, but was very
aware of the pressure the school was under to perform and the way in which that
translated into directed practice:

*I think that's probably one of the problems that have arisen, because in
school, you know, it can be quite, 'You are going to do this.. We're going
to monitor this or monitor that.' It's not kind of having conversations
about 'why'. It's just, 'Right, you've got to …'*

2.37-40

He was also torn between a belief that informal direct student voice is the most
useful, while at the same time needing to feel confident as a manager that
professional ambivalence wasn't undermining this:

*And for me it would be much more valuable … but it takes a lot more
monitoring, if you just said, ' I want you to speak to your classes and I
want you to think, what do they think?'… But then you've got the issue
of professional ambivalence, where you think, 'Have they done it?' or
'Are they too unsure and anxious about what they might find out?'*

3.21-26

4.1.2.3 What David Did

David decided that given his new role and need to start working across other departments that he would use the management structures in place to start a process of reflection in which he took more of an intermediary role between the students and the Heads of Departments:

> *Not every member of the team would be involved, because there would be people in the team responsible for certain things … for collating it and then disseminating it so that the teachers took it on board to improve teaching and learning.*

2.6-9

> *So in order for that to happen… it's about collaborating with those people to create the method. I don't know if that is the right word.. to make sure there are practices in place... First of all I'll need to have a rationale and an understanding as to why we are doing this, and then start the kind of.. development.*

2.9-15

David decided to start the process using questionnaire surveys, which he then planned to follow up with more targeted student panels. The questionnaires were based on a generic school version, which had been developed from an OFSTED form.

> *And I think that is why we do both, because then you get the dialogue but you also get the data as well.*

3.5-10

David's intention was to develop things slowly, *'I think I need to walk before I run,'* but with the hope of getting as many staff as possible to 'listen' to the students:

> *Cos I think I am winning in some places if we just start really listening to the students.. if I am honest. So we need to go and take that. I don't want to just go in with student researchers cos we need to take it slowly.*

3.17-19

David took on direct responsibility for collating and analysing the questionnaires, which he then fed back to Heads of Department, who were given responsibility for

discussing findings with their teams. This process caused quite a lot of anxiety for David both in terms of potential staff response to some of the messages, but also the struggle to ensure that the messages fed back were valid:

> *But one of the other things is working with colleagues who I haven't worked with before, and sometimes reactions and defensiveness can come about. Rather than just saying, 'Yeah, they've got a valid point.'*
>
> 5.3-5

Due to the demands of taking on his new role, David's plans to set up student panels for each of the subject areas were still only at a very early stage of development by the time my involvement was ending:

> *The panels.. it's something that we want to take further. It's not something if I am honest that we've done much about. We've got student nominations for each of the subjects. So basically it's a case of trying to organize when and where we meet.*
>
> 5.17-23

4.1.3 Julie

Julie was Head of the Psychology department, and responsible for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) support for sixth form students. Her role was under review as a result of changes to statutory requirements around IAG, and restructuring of external services within the Local Authority.

4.1.3.1 Hopes Starting the Project

Julie had a range of experience in working with student voice, and was keen to build on these. She stated at the outset that she wanted to move beyond student voice that was simple feedback or judgment, to a point where students were able to actively help to both design and evaluate the way IAG was delivered in school.

> *So for example the Investors in Careers I am working towards, in the third stage it talks heavily about evaluation…. And what I really need to be able to judge is whether or not students are making progress.*
>
> 1.0-5

But I think also you could work towards a position where students actually take an active part in planning sessions, because that is ultimately what the quality standards are working towards.

<div align="right">1.10-15</div>

Julie's process for achieving this involved developing a model of good practice that would allow for student voice to be much more routinely gathered and available to inform work within her subject areas:

I've got lots of snapshots, and what I'm trying to do is put together a model of good practice … So I want to be able to say, 'This is the way you run a focus group. You can ask these questions and you can get this information. If you design a questionnaire like this you can get this information.'

<div align="right">1.5-10</div>

The focus was often on meeting external requirements that would then lead to recognition of some sort:

But then the National Framework is very much mentioned there, because at the moment it says you need to get feedback on this or that. So I need to make sure that my feedback meets the criteria for that, even though I know [I've met] *the criteria from having a chat (laughs).*

<div align="right">1.0-15</div>

Something that was particularly important to Julie at the outset was that whatever developed needed to be systematic and sustainable:

And that to me makes a model of good practice student voice… You're actually doing it systematically, and I think that's where the sustainable part comes in, because once it becomes part of your systems then it becomes sustainable.

<div align="right">1.15-20</div>

4.1.3.2 Some Professional Perspective

Julie's reflections on the student voice she had been involved in over her career suggested dissatisfaction with it:

Because I've engaged with student voice for quite a long time but it has never really (laughs) provided me with what I want, if that makes sense.

<div align="right">1.25-31</div>

She was also clear in seeing student voice as one of a number of stakeholder voices within the school context:

It's not just about the students, it is also about the parents and it is about the staff.

<div align="right">1.0-5</div>

And then coupled with that, I said to Jo you know if we're going to have a student entitlement then we need to have a staff entitlement. So we're looking at that as well.

<div align="right">2.20-25</div>

Julie saw student voice as a crucial way of staff and young people being able to learn from one another through developing insight into their experiences:

Because for me it is important to know what's stuck in here (points to head) when you are doing this or that. And then we've got the, 'What do you remember? Why do you remember? And why?' So then we've got some information.

<div align="right">1.25-31</div>

This was stated as a key aspect of the job of being a teacher:

At the end of the day they are the ones that are in your lesson, and you need to ask them what they think.

<div align="right">6.40-46</div>

Getting to know the students and taking an active interest in them was very much a part of this for Julie:

I think it is just in your nature that if you've got.. it's just par for the job, that if you've got kids that are at that age and they're ready to move on it's just part and parcel of what you do.

<div align="right">5.46-53</div>

The idea of being actively invested in knowing the students was also reflected in her view that good teaching in general depended on good relationships, and that often there was pressure to establish these quite quickly:

> *But on the other hand it's about that relationship… there is quite a reciprocal process… You can't take a cohort that you might only teach for nine months and not develop strong relationships straight away.*
>
> 6.35-40

Students also held a responsibility for their own learning, and Julie was clear that she expected them to invest themselves in the process even if that was uncomfortable:

> *I expect them to be to be independent and do quite a lot of work themselves. Ahm.. I don't like passive learning. I like it to be active and kids find that difficult. They would much rather sit there and have all the information, as I would (laughs)!*
>
> 4.21-27

This view hints at a belief that adults know best when it comes to education, and this theme is reflected further in Julie's' views that a young person's capability to participate increased with age:

> *We all felt immediately that there had to be a difference between the pre and post 16 students, even though some of us worked on both sites.*
>
> 1.40-45

> *Because the mentality, I suppose, was for me the older the student the more likely they are to be able to engage.*
>
> 1.49-57

And that there are often limits to what students could reflect on:

> *If that's all you've experienced you don't realize that you are getting so much more.*
>
> 4.21-27

On this basis Julie took responsibility for ensuring that within her department and remit she met the students' needs as best she could, and where possible guided them through in ways that avoided unnecessary risk:

> *And we know we can help them very specifically, and even though we are putting things out there for them they are not taking part.*
>
> 3.40-45

> *We know that as adults. The benefit of starting in Year 12 and having a plan, having a back-up plan, and working towards it.*
>
> 4.11-16

Julie's perspective on the organizational context and external drivers were significant factors in how she chose to develop her ideas around student voice.

> *There is this wider agenda that is going on.. and I don't think you can underestimate the turmoil that we are in (laughs) at the moment…. The kind of instructions are changing on a monthly basis.*
>
> 5.30-35

> *And so you are very much in limbo. You don't know what judgments are going to be made, and certainly that is quite important in terms of OFSTED coming in, and knowing what you are doing.*
>
> 5.30-35

The tension between wanting to do a good job, but having to live with uncertainty as to how this was going to be defined, meant that any action taken on the basis of student voice needed to be very carefully considered in terms of potential impact. This did at times seem to bring into question the purpose of student voice in school, and raised the possible need for this to be resolved by management:

> *We haven't necessarily got completely joined up thinking about what we want student voice to be. And I think maybe when we have all done some more work on it, maybe that will come naturally, but I don't think we are there yet.*
>
> 1.40-45

4.1.3.3 What Julie Did

Julie started with a review of the questionnaires that she had previously used as part of the IAG programme. She was keen to align these with National Standards, and to make this as straight forward as possible:

> *What tends to happen at the moment is that I have student voice in various forms, and each year I tweak it or I change the questions, or I am asking something different, so I can't build any comparisons. And also if I am doing that I can't see any progress.*

<div align="right">1.0-5</div>

She saw the development of questionnaires as something that would sit alongside and complement the use of focus groups that would also allow her to explore student experiences of the IAG programme:

> *So since we last met then, we had Janet who designed the questionnaires in part with me.. ahm.. she came in and ran the focus group with Year 13. Two focus groups, and she also ran the focus group with Year 10, and I think there were some Year 9 students.*

<div align="right">2.0-5</div>

Julie was keen to try and standardize these processes to ensure there was some quality assurance around how student voice was being conducted:

> *Because somebody else might end up having to pick this up, and you need a set of resources that can be delivered to any age group for any activity that is related.*

<div align="right">3.10-15</div>

The findings from these questionnaires and focus groups were then developed into some planning and action:

> *We've never had the feedback before… It came partly through the focus groups, you know when they were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of what had happened. They said that one of the problems is we haven't had anyone sit down with us, necessarily, for an extended period of time.*

<div align="right">3.0-5</div>

So this year we've gone back to having the hour, but both year groups are on a Wednesday afternoon, so it does give the flexibility of changing things slightly if you need to.

4.5-11

A major focus was on a careers event that happened once a year over four or five afternoons, but which took an enormous amount of planning and organization.

What also came out of student voice is that.. say for example you provide something very unique. If there isn't something for them they think that is unjustified. So it doesn't matter how many things you have put on, if there isn't something specific to what they want to do then (laughs) why do they have to participate?

4.5-10

I don't think there will ever be a win-win for everyone, but I do think we need to take on board it needs to be more personalized. It possibly needs to be more small scale than big scale. And I think it is about them having an identified person they can keep going to.

5.6-10

4.1.4 Lynn

Lynn was the most senior of the involved staff, and had recently taken on considerable responsibility for supporting school improvement. Her direct contact with young people had at the same time started to reduce.

4.1.4.1 Hopes Starting the Project

Lynn saw student voice as an opportunity to support professional learning within school, and hoped the project would allow her to begin to explore ways in which this might be achieved:

I do think we are missing a trick in terms of how we use student voice to inform teachers, to then inform their teaching and learning and the way they deliver in the classroom and all the rest of it.

1.0-6

Lynn initially planned to take this forward by developing a *students as researchers* type approach:

> *I would like to set up a group of student researchers. So I envisage getting a cohort of interested people, and doing some kind of training and discussion with them…. And then not getting them to spy on people I don't mean that at all, but just having them go away so that when we have follow-up sessions they can feed back to me specifically what different teaching and learning approaches work for them, and ones that don't.*

<div align="right">1.0-6</div>

The idea was that this would then establish as an embedded cycle of student voice informed professional development:

> *I could then tie the whole thing together. Because I would have different hats on, to use what they said to feed back into professional learning. To feed back into cpd. To feed back to teachers, and then to check it is having some kind of impact in the classroom. A kind of cyclical approach*

<div align="right">1.0-6</div>

The purpose of this was ultimately to improve teaching and learning, and to raise attainment:

> *What is my endpoint? I guess there are two. To improve teaching and learning. To raise attainment. I know that sounds crass, but in this climate that is what schools are tasked with.*

<div align="right">1.6-10</div>

4.1.4.2 Some Professional Perspective

Lynn expressed some frustration at the outset that her experience of student voice often didn't seem to explore the areas that she saw as most significant:

> *So yes, we've got student councils, and yes we've got the subject panels and approaches, but I would like a whole school approach to student voice that doesn't just look at uniforms, the toilets.. you know, the usual kind of things.* [Something] *that tries to drill a little bit deeper.*

<div align="right">1.0-6</div>

Lynn was interested in a model that we had used to stimulate some discussion in an earlier workshop, and had reflected on the current school practice in relation to the ideas held within it:

> *That ladder that you showed us.. is it Sheer or Shier? It talks about from one, I guess it's kind of consulting students, up to number five, which is them having some kind of responsibility or empowerment. Really meaningful. And I think as a school we're probably not getting beyond three. It's really trying to get to that other point in the ladder where it's really kind of meaningful.*
>
> 1.6-10

Lynn was focused from the outset on the agenda of standards, and felt that her predecessor had been slow to adapt to the reality of this within school:

> *Because obviously it wasn't the previous post holders forte. I would certainly describe him more of an old school, pastoral leader. It's all about the students and their issues.. which is fine and everything, but obviously in the current climate you've got to be doing all of that and be doing rigorous detailed analysis.*
>
> 2.3-6

She saw the way into improving standards as starting with detailed analysis of data:

> *So starting with overall trends, and then drilling down into subjects, and then in each subject trying to drill down into subgroups such as boys, girls, free school meals, ethnic minorities.*
>
> 2.3-6

Lynn saw this view as very much a reflection of her new role:

> *I just think the minute you change role you see things from a different perspective…. I've now got this hat on. It's all data driven. Rightly or wrongly , that's the game you've got to play. It's all data driven.*
>
> 2.11-20

Lynn developed the view quite early on in our meetings that 'generic' student voice couldn't support an agenda like this:

> *I just don't think something as generic as that, now I've had my eyes opened. Ahm.. I don't think it would have the impact I want it to have.*
>
> 2.11-20

> *Student voice shouldn't be solely driven by the state of the toilets, or X, Y or Z. It's important but it's superficial, where you should be drilling down into teaching and learning.*
>
> 4.16-21

Lynn also had a clear view that managers needed to lead colleagues within departments:

> *I'd like teaching and learning to be an agendaed item every meeting, which is every three weeks. But sometimes I am going to be saying, 'This is what you are going to be doing. You're going to get the feedback from me and then you're going to go and do something with it.'*
>
> 1.41-46

> *So at that point how it works is that every curriculum leader has a link with the SLT. At that particular point it would be a case of devolving what I had found out to those two people.*
>
> 2.6-11

This view that managers needed to set the focus and standards extended to understandings of student voice in school:

> *And that is something I'll have to consider with other members of SLT… So I think we probably need to have a conversation first regarding what good student voice ought to look like.*
>
> 2.11-20

Lynn also understood her role as one in which she needed to respond to issues:

And I do it quite a lot, because we have a number of students who do come to me and say, 'I am really unhappy about X.' Or at one of the parents' evenings parents and their children will come together, and we do have these discussions.

<div align="right">4.46-51</div>

Lynn had reservations about the degree to which young people were capable of informing some agendas:

I want them to start unpacking what successful teaching and learning is…. But at the same time I think you have to weave in what really good teaching and learning is.

<div align="right">1.36-40</div>

She considered that student experiences might limit their perspectives:

But at the same time is it just what they are used to? Have they come from an environment or school where it is.. you know? And then they come here and they are out of their comfort zones, and don't see it as being…

<div align="right">2.31-37</div>

Lynn was very attuned to the external influence of OFSTED, and the way in which they approach school inspection:

As OFSTED will often say, 'Oh well these great interventions or these great strategies that we've got. And what's the impact of that? And what's the impact of that?'

<div align="right">2.25-31</div>

Activity related to preparing for OFSTED and improving performance was considered the clear priority:

It's just not.. particularly because we are on red alert for OFSTED… And this is seen as a bit of a luxury.

<div align="right">3.16-23</div>

Lynn considered that the OFSTED agenda was putting a lot of pressure on staff, but that this was unavoidable:

I mean we're putting a lot of pressure on people at the moment…. And there has been a lot of change in a lot of areas. It's just unavoidable because we've got to have this sort of thing in place.

<div align="right">2.53-58</div>

4.1.4.3 What Lynn Did

Lynn's change in role, and the shift in priorities that came with this, often led her to express disappointment at what she had been able to do with student voice:

I do feel very guilty that I signed up to this project with all the good intentions, and obviously my promotion has taken it all away from me. Not that I ever wanted it to not be a priority, but there were obviously with my new job other priorities.

<div align="right">3.0-5</div>

This resulted in her making a decision to start delegating more to a colleague, and the first significant step involved setting up a group of students to focus on teaching and learning experiences:

So the one thing we have finally managed to set up is a body, let's say a student council type body, which was the thing I originally wanted to do. To have a body and then to do some discussion about teaching and learning, and have student researchers and have that kind of cyclical approach. But my colleague who is the deputy head of the sixth form is going to be leading on that.

<div align="right">3.0-5</div>

This forum was used to identify and explore a number of issues, leading to changes in the timetable and curriculum where the senior leadership team considered this appropriate:

And so it really was a very useful discussion, and then as an SLT we discussed it further.. because obviously if we thought we'd present the idea as you can or you can't we had to look at the impact of this to the organization.

<div align="right">3.5-11</div>

The foci for the meetings were primarily identified by the senior management, and this was justified in terms of other student voice forums already being established for students to raise their own issues:

> *To be honest that* [agenda] *was driven by us, and again that is probably a difficult thing because I know a lot of the discussions ought to come from the students themselves… But alongside that there is still the normal student voice meetings where we go through the agendas set by them.*
>
> 4.5-11

As Lynn left more of the running of organized student voice to others she began to consider ways in which she was still engaging with student voice in less planned ways, including the following up of complaints:

> *At the moment I am probably more of a mediator, in terms of speaking to the students and relaying the messages back to the department…. And it's trying to unpick the truth and trying to help everybody.*
>
> 4.51-57

The research questions will now be used to structure my presentation of the findings. Each section will begin with a descriptive account of what emerged across the participant accounts in respect to each question. I will then engage in more reflective interpretations of the findings, but still from a relatively grounded perspective, before going on to relate key theoretical concepts with the wider relevant literature and psychological theory.

4.2 Question One: How do teachers understand student voice?

From the outset this was my main research question as considering the others required an understanding of this, and underpinned the overarching consideration of how the actions and experiences of the participants could enrich understandings of student voice as described by the literature. I had read many accounts of what professionals outside of schools thought student voice was, but had found no accounts of how professionals within schools understood this. My own personal experiences of working with schools around this agenda had increased my interest

in this as I had become less confident that the ideas expressed in the literature did in fact fully explain the practices I observed in real school contexts.

A number of master themes emerged from the individual accounts in relation to what student voice was. These are briefly defined in Table 5:

Master Theme	Working Interpretation
Part of something bigger	Comments and ideas relating to observations that student voice occurs within a broader context of voices and agendas.
Need to benefit	The idea that there should be a practical purpose to engaging in student voice, and that the individuals engaging should in some way benefit from this experience
Developing and evolving	Observations of student voice as something that develops and evolves over time in terms of a particular focus, the construction of insights, and the practices relating to the gathering of views and engagement with the students.
Collaboration and compromise	The process of staff coming together with students, and staff with one another, in order to consider and respond to the ideas and experiences shared by the students.
Different types	The various forms that student voice can take; differences relating to ideas about function, formality, the degree to which the agenda is controlled and by whom, and the tools that are employed.

Table 5- The Master Themes Related to the Conceptual Characteristics of Student Voice

4.2.1 Student Voice as Part of Something Bigger

All the participants referred throughout the project to the idea that student voice did not exist in a vacuum, but rather was something that both reflected and influenced within a broader context- see Figure 3 for an overview of this.
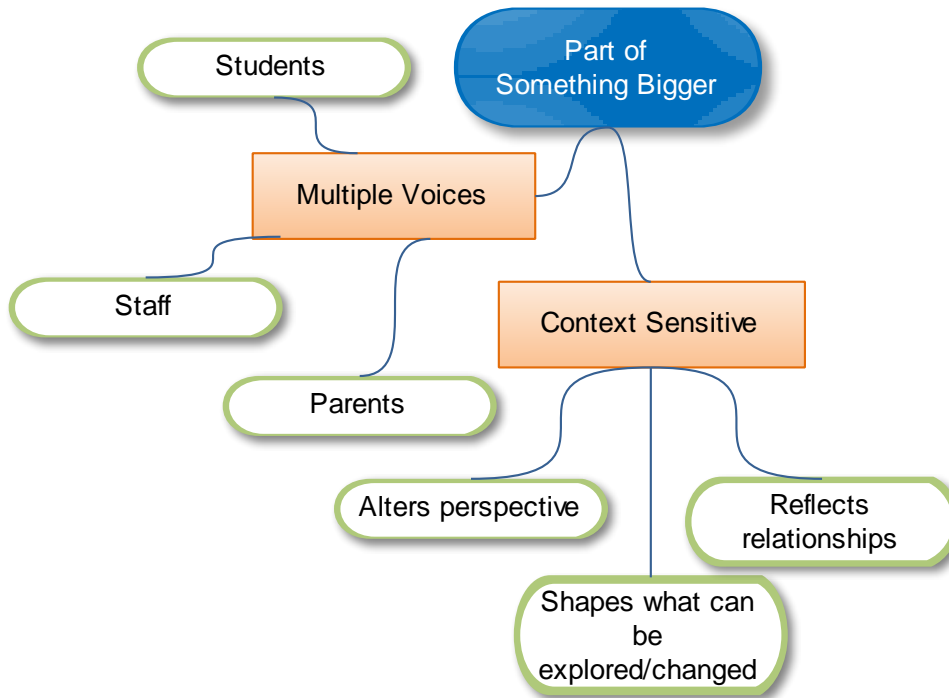
Figure 3- Summary of Sub-themes and elements within 'Part of Something Bigger'

Participants made frequent reference to student voice being one of a number of voices that existed within the school context:

> *A few years ago I had a role of stakeholder voice within the school, which was students, staff and parent voice.*

<div align="right">D.5.23-28</div>

> *It has worked quite well. We've got some good points, and obviously the same with the staff. The ones that we can't snare are the blinking parents!*

<div align="right">L.4.16-21</div>

What was often apparent in the accounts was the idea that any voice that was enabled would reflect the context more broadly:

> *I think things will change then, and how quickly things change depends on everyone involved and what's being requested.*

<div align="right">S.1.35-41</div>

Certainly a programme in 7, 8 and 9, where it could be very much what students wanted to do. So it wouldn't be a problem if they said actually we want to spend more time doing this rather than something else. You know it's not going to make a massive difference. Certainly in Year 11 there are other things that possibly take priority, and in that case maybe they would have less free rein.

<div align="right">J.5.35-40</div>

Student voice was also explicitly referred to by David, Simon and Julie as reflecting the relationships between staff and students:

I suppose it depends on the relationship that you have with students, doesn't it. How comfortable they are. Cos I have a kind of inkling that if I do student voice students will feel quite comfortable with saying, 'Well Sir, dededede..' But sometimes that doesn't always happen.

<div align="right">D.5.30-38</div>

And this then goes back to my whole thing about informal feedback, and my relationship with them [students]. I think it is far more important to understand what's going on than some formalized process… How you establish and build relationships with your class and how they can respond.

<div align="right">S.5.15-21</div>

It's about having the relationships with the kids already there. If I don't teach the kids and go into their tutor groups and go, 'I want this information,' it's just going to be superficial.

<div align="right">J.5.40-48</div>

4.2.2 Student Voice Needs to Benefit

There were ongoing references throughout my discussions with all the participants that there had to be a purpose to doing student voice- see Figure 4 for an overview of this. Most particularly that student voice should lead to change that benefits those involved, students and staff:

We're going to give it a fancy title so they can whack it in their UCAS as well. So it actually enables them to benefit from it, not only in the teaching but in the.. what they can write in their UCAS (laughs).

<div align="right">S.2.0-5</div>

It's about what's in it for the students as well. So I think some of my COPE students, if I said you can get one of your challenges by taking part in this meeting, working with others, coming up with suggestions for the Careers Programme, then they would be quite happy to do it.

<div align="right">J.5.25-30</div>

Well by meaningful I don't mean that we just collect it in, put it in a drawer and leave it. It's about doing something with it…. And the long term goal of change in the classroom.
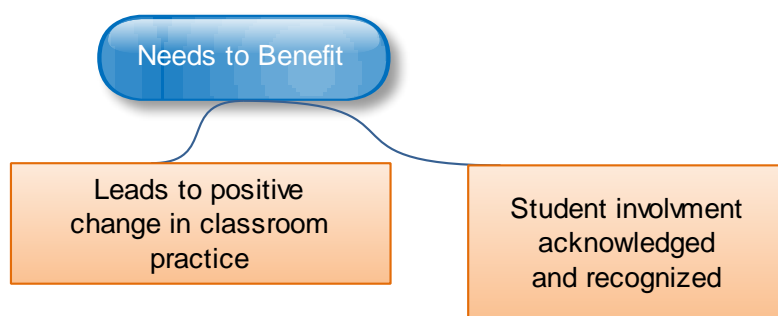
<div align="right">L.1.32-36</div>

Figure 4- Summary of Sub-themes within 'Needs to Benefit'

4.2.3 Student Voice as Something that Develops and Evolves

Also apparent across the discussions were experiences that suggested that student voice was something quite organic. The focus would often evolve out of an initial conversation or survey, and then be developed further through ongoing dialogue and action- see Figure 5. The ways in which student voice was enabled similarly often appeared to evolve within the context.

The Year 11s said something like… well it was following a period of quite a lot of revision, but it was.. a lot of it had been quite didactic, so they said…they would prefer to just get on, and have the opportunity to just work. And this term I've really tried to really sort out the more independent kind of stuff.. them getting on. Cos you just think, 'Well I haven't got the time.' (laughs). So that's really helped me look at it.

<div align="right">D.5.5-8</div>

<div align="center">99</div>

I mean to some extent it depends on what comes out from each and every meeting. In some ways we need to operate on an ad hoc basis.

S.2.5-12

There's different ways of doing it isn't there. I could start generic and see what comes in or I could start being specific. So if they say something about, I don't know.. written feedback then I could say right take them off down a path and say, 'Right, we're going to focus the next session on written feedback.'… So I guess it could be like an ever decreasing circle, where we start generic and at some point latch on to some specifics, and repeat the process.
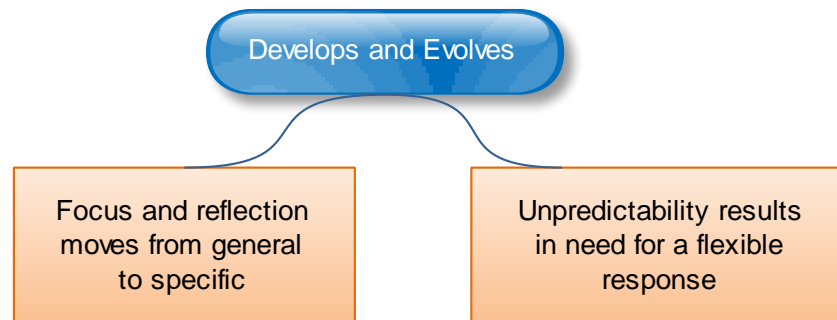
L.1.5-10

Figure 5- Summary of Sub-themes within 'Developing and Evolving'

4.2.4 Student Voice as Collaboration and Compromise

My sense from the experiences and ideas shared with me by the participants was that the process of collaboration and compromise represented the engine room for identifying, agreeing and reviewing change- see Figure 6.
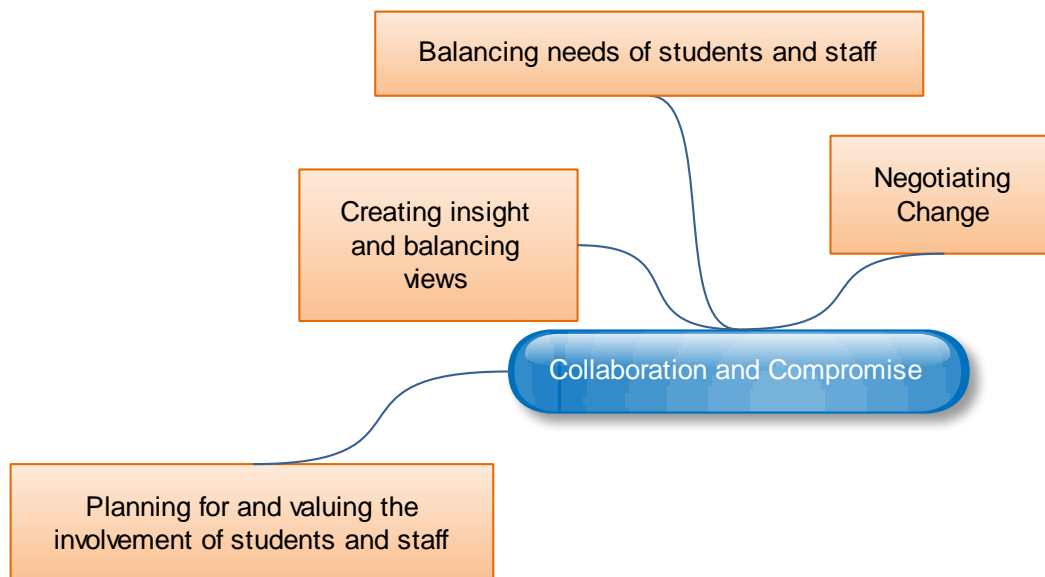
Figure 6- Summary of Sub-themes within 'Collaboration and Compromise'

It began with the coming together and sharing of views with respect to an area of focus. This encompassed both the coming together of staff with students, but also staff with each other in order to reflect on expressed views.

> *By developing the process.. I'm thinking out loud here, we are allowing students to be involved and therefore that's going to have a positive effect in terms of them feeling valued and their views being taken on board.*
>
> D.1.11-14

> *The teachers and everyone have agreed that from September when the intake comes in, we are going to have like a big meeting with the teachers and the [student] volunteers, and we are going to actually plan what we are going to do with them as well.*
>
> S.2.0-5

> *And sometimes I think if you are doing maybe the verbal feedback in the focus group. I think it is about having the opportunity to question. Having that opportunity to ask why they have said something.*
>
> J.1.5-10

Ideas of argument, tension, and compromise were seen as a normal part of the process of student voice, and necessary for evolving insight and agreement about what changes were possible:

> *And I talked to them and said, 'Can we not have the grade on there.. How would you feel about not having your grade on there?' And it got a pretty mixed response… And then one of them said, 'Well why don't we….'*
>
> S.3.0-5

> *So there is that issue about how you use your resources. I think you've got to get good value for money haven't you. And at the end of the day if the kids are not happy with what's being provided.. I don't know. Sometimes you've got to review what you are doing and say, ' No, actually it's time for change.'*
>
> J.5.15-20

> *I think it is always a balance. I think there are always going to be things we want to know, need to know, and we use the students and the staff..ahm. And there will always be things that the students really push for and we go, 'Oh God! Seriously?'*
>
> L.4.6-12

4.2.5 Different Types of Student Voice

Over the course of our discussions it became clear that the participants had a very broad interpretation of activities that constituted a form of student voice. The differences related to ideas of formal versus informal student voice, and various methods employed such as questionnaires, focus groups, or individual discussion with students- see Figure 7.
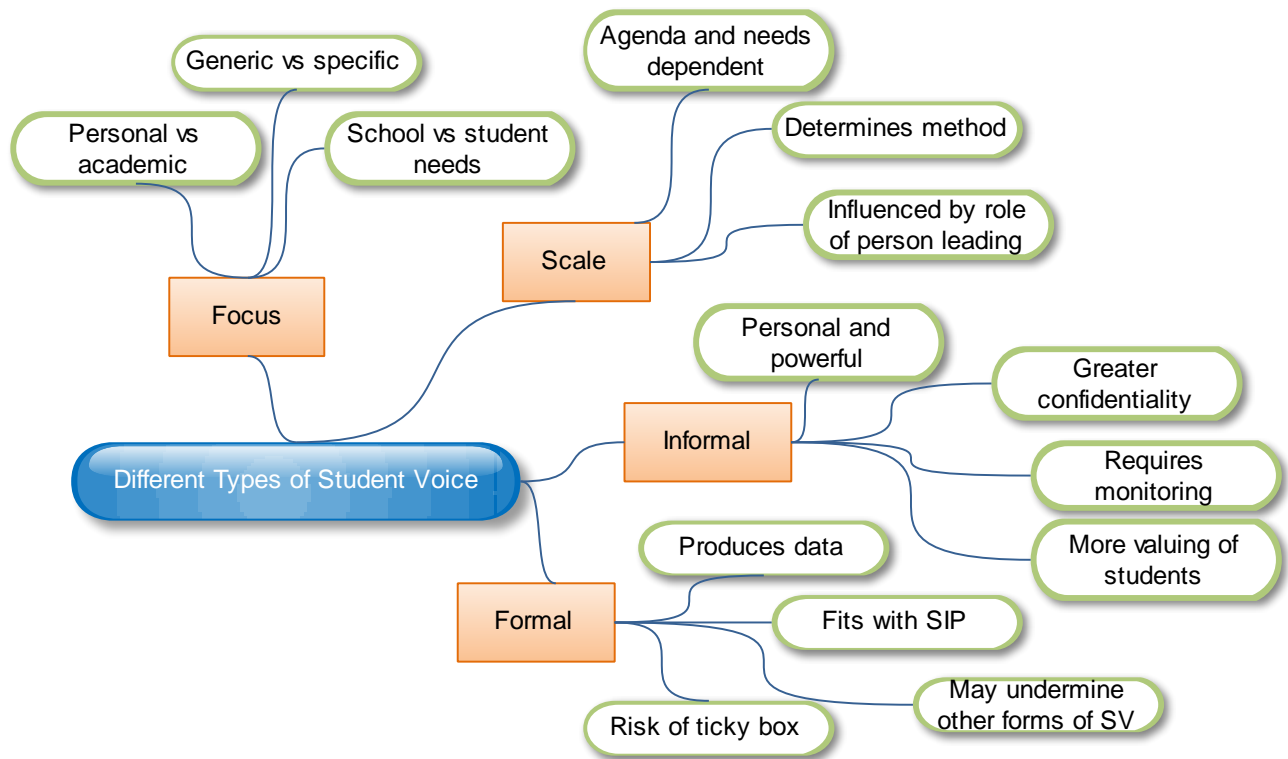
Figure 7- Summary of Sub-themes and Elements within 'Different Types of Student Voice

David saw informal student voice as being a very powerful way of gaining insight and changing teacher perspective. His understanding of 'informal' related to the degree to which findings needed to be recorded or shared within formal school improvement processes.

> *But what we tend to do now is.. well I know what these students think of me, and that they want me to shut up (laughs) and not speak to them all the time… that's really useful for me. Do I need to then collate all of that up and put it in my SEF and use it as a monitoring tool? I mean for me looking through these I'm going to be, 'Yeah.' I'm really going to be conscious when I do that again.*

D.3.21-27

Informal student voice also seemed to allow for a degree of confidentiality that formal would not, although this was conflicted by the idea that less formal approaches would take a lot of monitoring:

And for me it would be much more valuable if I said… but it takes a lot of monitoring, if you just said, 'I want you to speak to your classes and I want you to think about what they think. I don't want to know. I don't want it to be published anywhere. I don't want it to be in a SEF or anywhere. I just want you to use it for professional dialogue.. for professional learning.

D.3.21-27

Formal student voice had a place for David, however, in terms of starting a process of reflection, and he saw the formal and informal approaches as running alongside.

I've organized a meeting with… the historians from Key Stage 5. So as well as the hard crunchy evidence we've got in the data (questionnaire), we're going to have the subjective conversation.

D.4.6-8

The more formal gathering of student voice was understood by David as something that fitted into the subject improvement plan.

It's dependent on the results that come out, but obviously we do look at them and build them into what's called our subject improvement plan… So that goes alongside teaching and learning, monitoring.. so lesson observations etc. We look at work scrutiny and we look at student voice.

D.4.16-19

In contrast Simon saw formal student voice as an activity that achieved relatively little. Simon often referred to this as a form of *generic* student voice, one that was overseen by management and applied to all, usually through a questionnaire or survey approach:

It's not to be this generic thing that can be applied everywhere else… I think it's subject specific… specific to what I teach, or the way the subject is taught.

S.3.15-20

His view towards student voice that was management led tended to be quite critical, and Simon saw this form of more formal student voice as undermining of more informal and direct student voice:

It's, 'What's the evidence behind that? Tick this box. Tell me that. Give me this.'

<div align="right">S.1.30-34</div>

For some reason it is not enough for a professional person to say, 'Look. This is what I have done. Come and talk to me about it.' And I think it is a shame, and it's the whole de-professionalism, or de-professionalization of the profession.

<div align="right">S.5.26-32</div>

There was a sense of conflict around this for Simon as well, as his own role meant he held responsibility for practice within his department:

Can I get people to record it all or will they give me titbits and not everything? And does that limit the value of it as well? I think that's an important consideration as well.

<div align="right">S.2.15-21</div>

As noted in the earlier section on Simon's professional perspective more broadly, he did recognize the organizational pressures to produce data and conform with OFSTED inspection requirements, but saw these as being in tension with the development of better practice in this area. It was the relentless focus on improving standards that Simon saw as particularly problematic in this regard:

And then you've got the pressure of trying to improve the results, and then we've got to focus on students who are not doing as they should do. And then it detracts away from what I really want to do.

<div align="right">S. 15-21</div>

His argument was for more context specific and direct forms of student voice, entailing dialogue and collaboration with students, in ways that value their contribution:

It's more dealing with the student as though they are an important part of the lesson.

<div align="right">S.1.9-15</div>

Julie's interest was primarily on forms of student voice that allowed her to evaluate and plan more confidently.

> *What I need to be able to judge is whether or not the students are making progress.*
>
> J.1.0-5

Julie saw student voice as being on a continuum between gathering information and more actively engaging with students:

> *I think in the first stage I want to be able to regularly obtain student voice. I think you could work towards a position maybe where students actually take an active part in planning sessions.*
>
> J.1.10-15

Julie also felt there were forms of student voice that attended to either the academic or personal experiences and needs of the students:

> *I think that you could really see that there were two student voices. You can have a student voice that is all about the academic and everything, but if someone had a bad experience…*
>
> J.1.49-57

She also recognised that agendas could focus on school or student needs to a greater or lesser extent:

> *They wanted personalised, whereas we went for a big HE learning days.*
>
> J.5.6-10

Julie understood student voice to work on different scales, often depending on the agenda or needs being focused on, and the method used reflected this context. The scale often determined the degree of direct influence that students ended up having:

> *But those kind of smaller scale projects, you know are very much student led.*
>
> J.5.25-30

But there are formalities and certain procedures… and we do that in terms of questionnaires, quantitative data and analysis… And then you've got all of these little active groups where the student voice is completely informal.

<div align="right">J.6.40-46</div>

As noted previously Lynn also described student voice in terms of it being generic or specific. For Lynn generic student voice related to more open and student led agendas, whereas specific student voice was engaged in relation to a pre-set topic or agenda that was usually adult identified. Her views on which of these was more important became more delineated with her promotion, but although she wanted the focus for student voice to be much more on teaching and learning in the classrooms she believed it was important to have forums where students could bring their own agendas:

We're still going to have a student council. So I see part of their role as to be just that kind of .. ahm.. forum.

<div align="right">L.2.11-20</div>

One of the things that has really heartened me from it was we have a whole section about student voice, and the ways we listen to student voice.

<div align="right">L.4.36-41</div>

She saw the focus on teaching and learning as providing an opportunity to gain insight into what was working or not working:

We just want to take a pause moment to reflect on whether we are doing the right things.

<div align="right">L.4.6-11</div>

Lynn saw the focus for the student voice as something that could limit or enable the extent to which students were granted control:

So obviously the ideal would be to let them come up with an agenda and pursue it, but sometimes you do have to rein them back. By the same token we've got things that we do want to know, and so we push on them a little bit.

<div align="right">L.4.11-16</div>

She saw non-curricular agendas offering the greatest degree of freedom and control:

They identify every year two or three charities… That's very much entirely led by the students.

<div align="right">L.4.36-41</div>

The scale of what was undertaken was also something that seemed to reflect Lynn's change in role, and there was a strong sense that a more formalized approach to how this was undertaken was desirable:

But obviously with my new role I was kind of looking for something a little bit more whole school.

<div align="right">L.1.10-16</div>

Towards the end of my involvement with Lynn, and probably in part as a reflection of some of the difficulties she had experienced in setting up the forms of student voice she had hoped to, Lynn started to consider other less planned ways in which student voice can operate:

I want to talk about what they perceive to be good quality teaching and learning…. But I still don't feel we ever really get to that.

<div align="right">L.4.41-46</div>

So I am.. or whether it's really informal and a kid just knocks on my door saying, 'Do you know what, I've got a real problem with X.'

<div align="right">L.4.41-46</div>

Figure 8 (p.109) brings together all of the master themes discussed to this point with respect to the 'Conceptual Characteristics' of student voice:
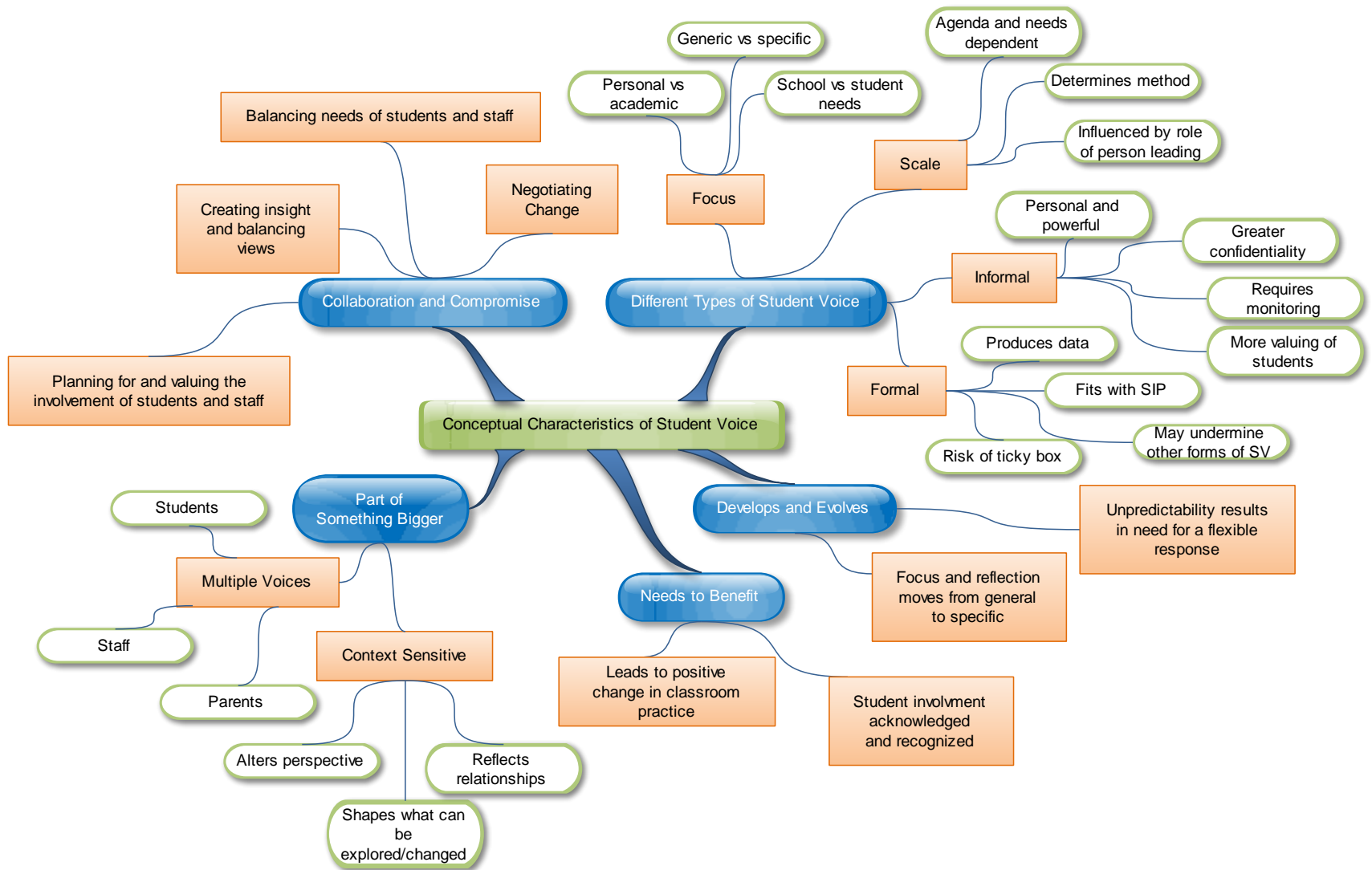
Figure 8- Summary of Master Themes Contained with the 'Conceptual Characteristics' of Student Voice

4.2.6 Thickening the Accounts

Smith *et al.* (2009) talk about the need to layer up the interpretation of accounts to thicken the reading and produce a richer understanding of experiences that have been shared by participants. Up until this point the analysis has been primarily focused on the ideas, beliefs and assumptions that have been shared by the participants, or interpreted from their actions. A missing element within the analysis so far has been a focus on the personal dimensions that were also a key part of the accounts shared, and which add an emotional aspect to what has already been described.

When listening to and reading the accounts I made a decision to focus on this in its own right, rather than try to directly integrate it into the previous section. This was in order to give it an equal emphasis rather than to lose it within the more cognitively conceptual descriptions that the research question might otherwise have been reduced to. Two master themes emerged during the analysis, and the following table provides a brief working description of these.

Master Theme	Working Interpretation
Emotional Impact	The way in which participant experiences and reflections appeared to affect them emotionally
Sense of Threat	The perceptions and experiences that were uncomfortable to the participants, and which appeared to present a risk of some sort

Table 6- Master Themes Related to More Personal Experiences of Student Voice

4.2.6.1 The Emotional Impact of Student Voice

It was clear across all the participant accounts that student voice had a very personal element to it, and that experiences resulted in a range of emotions (see Figure 9, p.114 for an overview of these). Despite the depth of experience that each participant brought to their endeavours, there was often a sense of surprise at the views that students expressed:

A couple of things kinda came out that we were quite surprised at.. and it's obviously the result of the students' perceptions of what they've got but.. At first we were, 'Oh!? Oh!?'

D.4.3-6

They seem to actually… like that… but obviously in terms of can you sit down and give individual feedback… no you can't… I haven't got an answer.

S.4.0-6

Initially I thought their idea of success would be different to mine. Or there is the worry… When actually having looked…their notion of success is exactly what I would want.

L.1.1:14-1:19

Frustration also seemed to be a common experience for the participants, and this seemed to often relate to both the practical and personal processes involved:

But it's about those kind of things where.. and again it's proportionate isn't it, cos that's one person's view…. But you know it's quite hard for me to do, because I was about to say, 'Ah! I don't think you do!' (laughs)

D.4.25-31

I don't know. Head against the wall! Ahm.. to be honest just seeing where it takes us.

S.4.6-11

So these are the two Year 13 groups, and when you look along, you know, there doesn't seem to be much overlap.

J.2.15-20

I want to talk about what they perceive to be good quality teaching and learning… But I still don't feel we ever really get to that.

L.4.41-46

Another common feeling experienced by participants was disappointment. Again this seemed to relate to both the procedural aspects of carrying out student voice, and the actual content of the engagement. It particularly seemed to link with the idea that student voice was often critical, or took the form of critical feedback.

Yeah, so it is sort of like a criticism.. and that's got to be taken into account when we take this across the faculty because some people will just automatically shut down and go, 'That's.. I don't agree with that.'

D.3.14-18

We did loads of different things and loads of different ways of trying to change the learning, which was basically, fundamentally from the focus groups. And it's like.. it still gets back to my other question which is why does it work with the focus group? Why didn't it say work with the other ones as well?

S.5.11-15

If the students are very critical then you are kind of thinking, is it worth it?

J.5.6-10

It's just a bit soul destroying. You're going out of your way to make the lessons engaging and interesting… And then the panel feedback was…

L.2.31-37

Offsetting this were several examples of how positively motivating the experience of student voice could be. This was much less apparent in the accounts however.

So really it's turning into two times every half-term. Just because.. well I think.. really they agree with me we were quite productive in the first sessions, and we thought it was a shame to leave it so long until the next session. So we thought, right we'll do another session.

S.3.9-15

Actually it was one of the most positive things in terms of staff voice that I have ever done. And because of that we replicated it with the students.

L.4.0-6

The awareness that student voice can feel critical and lead to staff feeling disheartened also appeared to result in a lot of worry for the participants as they also had responsibility for getting colleagues on board with the messages that came out from the process.

Yeah, and it's important that is isn't used as a stick.. to beat people with.. you know. It needs to be a dialogue.

D.4.38-43

Simon's worry was more in respect to ensuring that the messages that were communicated more widely were representative of the students and therefore valid:

> *And sometimes it's not representative of all the students involved… if they don't want to feed back or they just want to sit around and have a chat… I can't really square that element of it.*
>
> S.5.15-21

For Julie the need to keep things manageable and get staff on board created a real sense of pressure:

> *It's always on my mind about what we can do year on year..you know and keeping it sustainable.*
>
> J.5.15-20

> *Because that's the other thing that feeds into this, the staff have got to be able to deliver the programme that you put together.*
>
> J.3.15-20

The worry for Lynn related more to her change in role, and the perceptions staff may have for how she wanted to develop student voice:

> *And I know there will be some comment about getting the kids to spy, but it's not like that at all!*
>
> L.1.10-15

> *Then you worry that you just get all the kids who have an axe to grind.*
>
> L.4.41-46

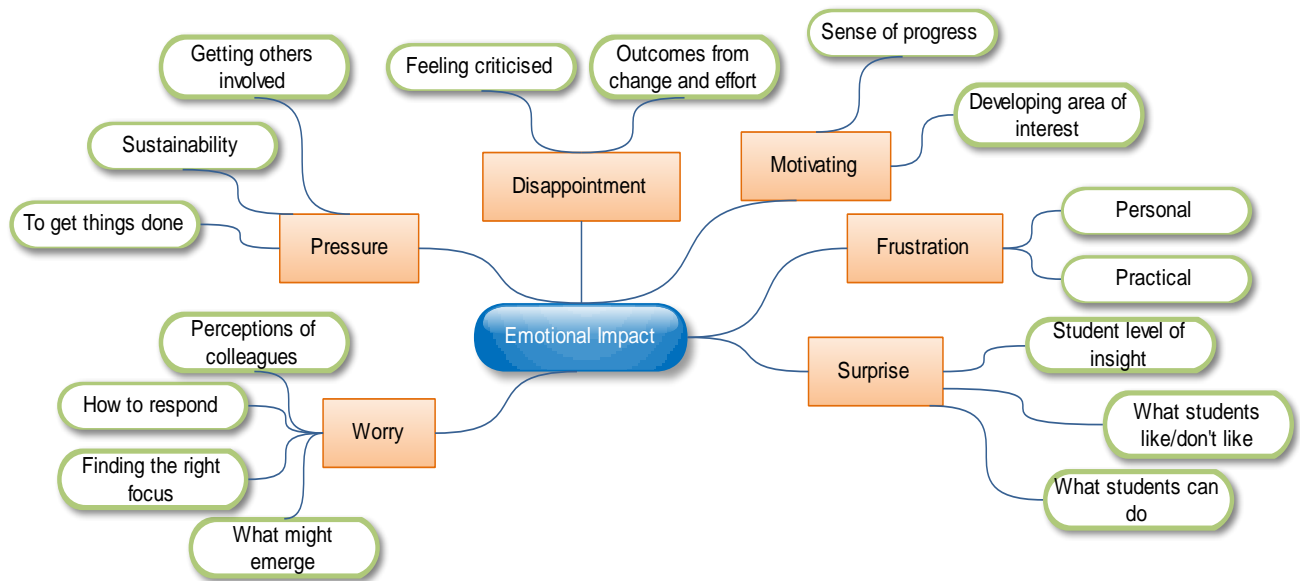The range of common feelings described are now summarised in Figure 9.

Figure 9- Summary of Sub-themes and Elements within 'Emotional Impact'

4.2.6.2 The Threat of Student Voice

One of the things that I was struck by from a very early stage in project was the wariness that the participants had for student voice. There was no doubting their commitment to the ideal of supporting students to be much more involved, but the practice of doing this was often marked by a very cautious and conservative attitude towards what they were doing. As noted in the Profile section (p.70) each participant had described some disappointment in relation to student voice previously engaged with. There were numerous examples of perceived threat within the accounts which often related directly to the emotional experience they reported- see for a summary of these.
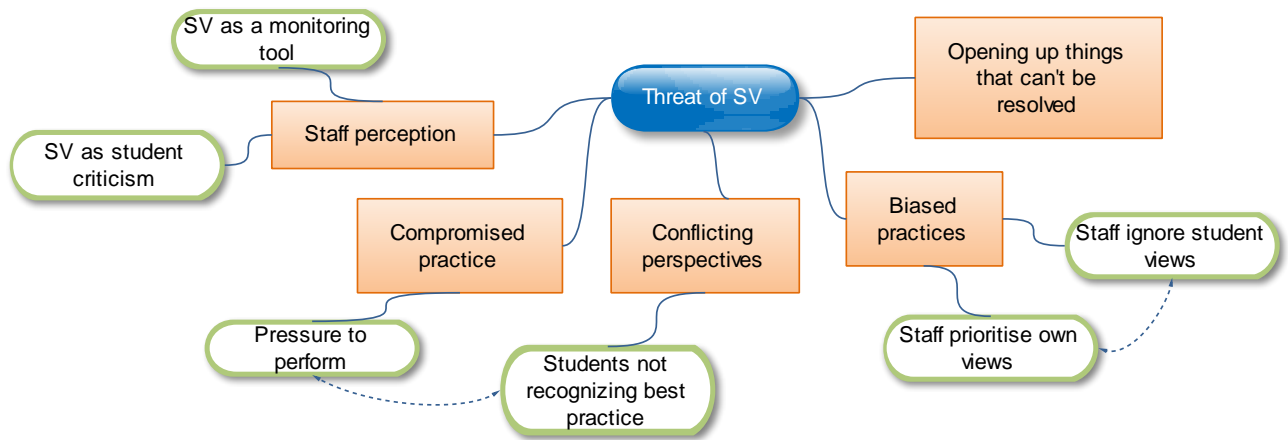
Figure 10- Summary of Sub-themes and Elements within 'Threat of Student Voice'

 The threats themselves however tended to be more individually specific in terms of role and context.One of the common themes to emerge from the data with respect to threat, however, was a sense that student voice runs the risk of opening things up to challenge and may lead to practice being compromised in some way.

But I think it would be interesting to look at … how much students enjoy their subjects. I don't want it to be a tool where it is going to be difficult. Where if staff in the faculty haven't been used to this sort of approach, then I don't want it to be a tool to beat them round the head with.

D.1.3-6

Even if you try and not give them that summative mark.. are you stopping them from understanding what level they are working at and what they actually need to do to improve?

S.4.6-11

And I think there is still an element, obviously because we've seen the students go through two or three times, you do have a sense of what you think they need to do. But the two don't necessarily marry up. What they think they need to do, what we think they need to do. So I am trying to find a happy medium I think.

J.5.6-11

What worries me is if.. what if the kids tell us they like being lectured to? I would cry!

L.1.1:06-1:14

The sense across all these accounts was that students would not necessarily recognise what was in their own best interests, and that consequently staff had to take responsibility for ensuring standards, for which they were responsible, were not compromised. Interestingly another perceived threat was in relation to staff promoting their own views and being dismissive of student views. I will come back to ideas of open mindedness in the final chapter (p.197).

I suppose the criticism would be that it is me that records it.. and I might only record what I hear or what I perceive to be important.

D.5.31-36

And also I think there is a tendency within our natures, we're more likely to take forward things that we agree with.

J.6.24-30

Because both David and I said, 'Ahh, let's just ignore that.' (laughs) And I know that is completely wrong.

L.2.31-37

This then had the potential for confrontation or conflict in terms of how to respond.

This student said, 'Well we always copy off the board,' and I said, 'Really?' And I started to chat, which was good, but then you think well that's bad because I'm going, 'No you don't. What on earth are you on about!'

D.6.5-10

And it's a bit of a dilemma really, because I don't know how we are going to solve it.

J.4.5-11

It's that real temptation of wanting to say, 'You're totally wrong. Wrong!'

L.4.5-11

Underpinning this was often a feeling of vulnerability stemming from ideas that staff were being judged both by students and senior managers who were employing student voice as part of a school improvement agenda

Obviously there would be more challenges... I'm poking me nose (laughs) in places which are previously not mine.. with new colleagues.. and I don't know how they are going to respond to that because they've worked in their own little.. you know.. entities.

<div align="right">D.1.1-4</div>

But one of the other things is working with colleagues who I haven't worked with before, and sometimes reactions and defensiveness can come about. Rather than just saying 'Yeah, they've got a valid point.' And if it is just one or two people that's fair enough.. perhaps they just haven't had as good an experience as everyone else.

<div align="right">D.5 3-6</div>

Concern about how to get colleagues to engage with student voice, perhaps more particularly the findings that emerged from student voice, was a major theme for David. He wanted the process to be supportive and positive for staff as well as students.

I suppose in that example it's about showing that similar pressures exist in other places.. you know, 'I had this feedback and this is what I did.' So that they can appreciate rather than be defensive about it, and I can say 'Well I thought that... and this is what I did' … rather than getting their backs up and them totally disengaging with whole process.

<div align="right">D.6.30-33</div>

For Simon I felt there was a degree of acceptance that some level of criticism from students was to be expected.

It might be that we're all amazing and they don't want to challenge anything.. but what do I know! ... It's easy for kids to blame teachers.

<div align="right">S.1.35-41</div>

The issue of being judged critically by senior colleagues in relation to imposed agendas was less easily accepted.

Absolutely, and they give people say responsibilities to manage things and then they try and manage it from the top, and does it work effectively or does it create say a certain amount of resentment. Or a 'Here's another agenda, this one's going to last for 2 years and then we're going to replace that with the new agenda.' … And in some ways it creates that negative and that resentment within an organization. I think that is an issue.

<div align="right">S.1.30-34</div>

The pressure that extended from these agendas was also observed to undermine Simon's ability to develop student voice within his department.

I mean that's not been going .. we've had so much pressure with everything else. And in terms of meetings, I haven't even had my own subject meetings. We've had all this faculty stuff, and senior management are putting loads of pressure on, so it's really hard to actually do it.

<div align="right">S.3.15-20</div>

The idea of being judged perhaps came through less directly in what Julie said, and was more obvious in terms of how she chose to develop student voice. From a very early stage in the process she referred to a belief that it was important for someone other than the teacher implicated in student voice discussions to be involved in the process of engaging with the students. This was justified in two ways. That in her experience it was very difficult to listen openly to what the students had to say if you didn't agree with their views. Secondly that it was difficult for the students to speak openly about staff if they were directly involved in the process.

Because obviously in careers there could an opportunity to follow-up.. but .. if you make a child put their name on it will they give you an honest response?

<div align="right">J.1.25-31</div>

And I am very minded not to do the focus groups myself, so ahm I have an assistant who works with me who is a non-teacher. So I think it is probably her or someone else who would do the focus groups, cos I think otherwise I would be tempted to say 'But...!' (laughs).

<div align="right">J.1.31-35</div>

That's the whole reason I leave the room... Students aren't going to speak freely about you if you are there.

<div align="right">J.6.30-35</div>

Julie was also quite sensitive to how strongly staff could respond to what they perceived to be critical student voice and the need as she saw it to manage this through less direct involvement.

I've seen some appalling responses to Student Voice. There have been some really dire incidents (laughs)… You learn how to manage that in the way you feed it back to staff, and what you do with it.

<div align="right">J.6.40-46</div>

As previously observed, Lynn saw student voice as a natural way to encourage staff to reflect on their practice, but also as a tool to monitor the quality of the teaching and learning that took place in classrooms. The threat of unhelpful or unfounded judgements being made by staff or students was only occasionally evident within this context.

Well we just assume that it is laziness, cos they're just basically saying, 'Well if you tell us the answers and we just make notes and learn it…' And I was wondering, is it laziness?

<div align="right">L.2.31-37</div>

So in that way we follow-up, but by the same token we never take a student's word and then start tackling a member of staff.

<div align="right">L.4.46-51</div>

And I know there will be some comment about getting the kids to spy, so it's not like that at all. I wouldn't want the kids to name names, or even name the subjects. I just want them to talk about what kind of strategies, what methodologies support their learning.

<div align="right">L.1.10-15</div>

Figure 11 on the following page provides a full summary overview of the master themes contained with the 'Personal Characteristics' of student voice, encompassing the emotional impact and threat of SV master themes discussed to this point.
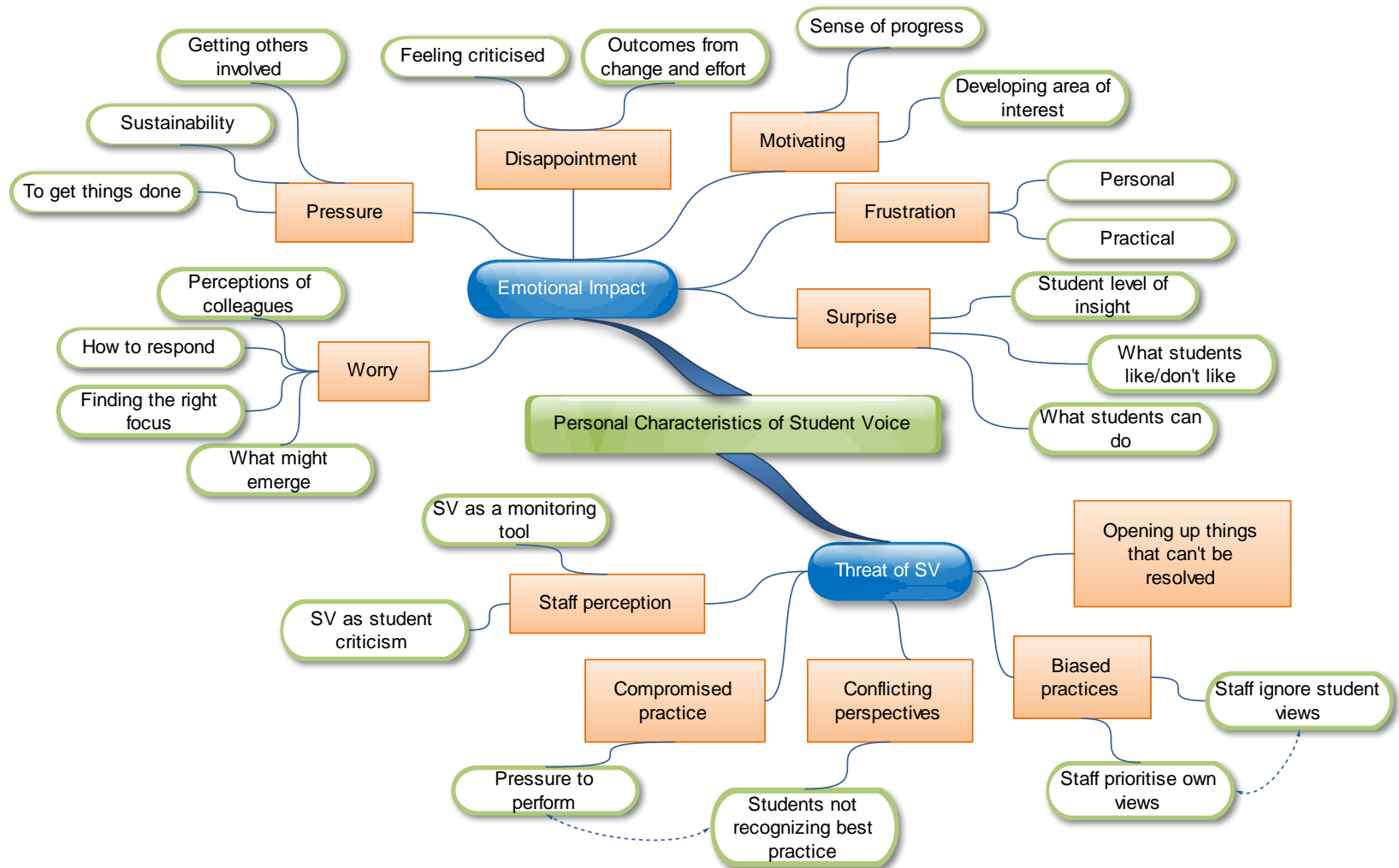
Figure 11- Summary of Master Themes Contained within the 'Personal Characteristics' of Student Voice

4.2.7 Some Interpretative Reflections

In further attempting to understand how the participants understood student voice a number of key ideas have emerged from the data. I would suggest these can be represented as part of a broader contextual view as follows in Figure 12:
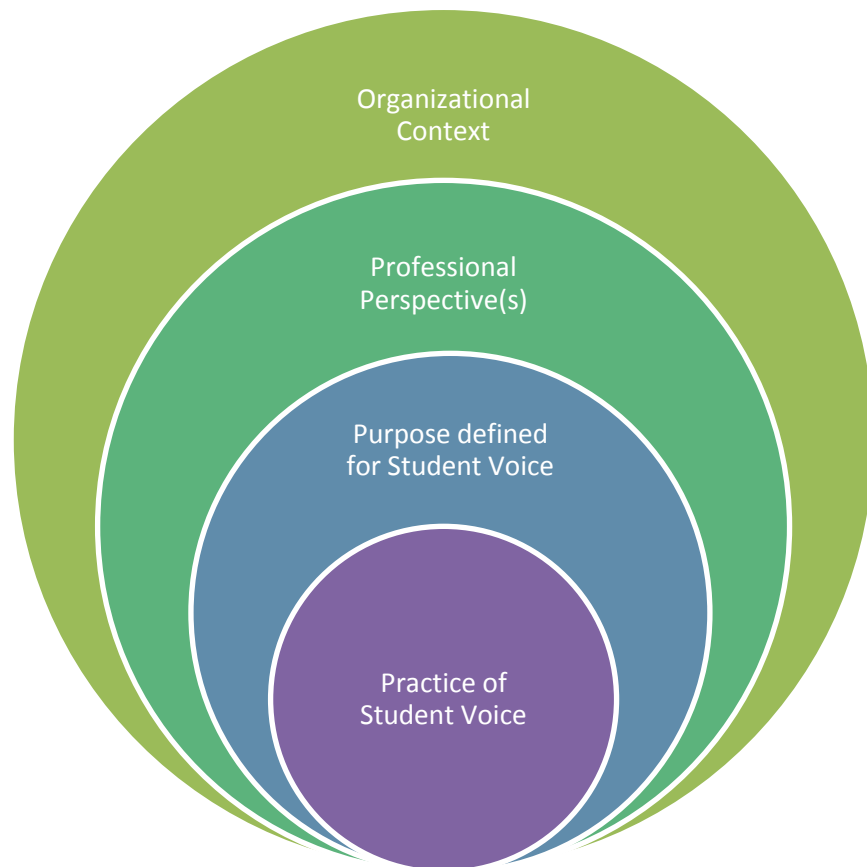
Figure 12- A Contextual View of Student Voice

The organizational context references within the accounts appears to have been the dominant influence in the sense that it set the broader agenda within which all school based activity took place, and for which each member of staff was held to account. The national drivers with regard to what it is statutory for schools to deliver; and the inspection framework with regard to the measures and process they employ, set the priorities and therefore perceptions of what was possible. This is in keeping with Noyes (2005) observation that:

Teachers also have expert knowledge but there is a potential contradiction if they are to listen to, and act upon, pupil voices whilst their own voices remain unheard. At a time when school curricula are closely prescribed and teachers' resistance has been broken there is a lamentable lack of critical approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in the UK.

(Op cit., p.534)

My interpretation was that professional perspective was exercised within this organizational context, and the participant accounts would suggest that there are tensions between the professional perspectives of subgroups within school- particularly those with leadership roles, and individual staff who are often the focus for much of the student voice work undertaken. The way in which this is resolved then appears to define the idea of purpose, or the rationale for student voice. Within this were contained strong beliefs in relation to generic versus specific, and formal or informal approaches to student voice. These in turn seemed to strongly reflect the roles and responsibilities of those involved, which as illustrated can cause internal conflict for individuals.

Whitty and Wisby (2007) report on a research project commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills. They were asked to provide advice on the role that student voice, and in particular school councils, could play in involving students in decision making and school improvement. Whitty and Wisby in examining the practices of 15 case study schools, data drawn from the 2006 national MORI Teacher omnibus survey, and the wider literature on student voice, identified four main drivers for student voice:

- Children's rights;
- Active citizenship;
- School Improvement;
- Personalization.

A number of interesting findings emerged. Firstly that although the literature makes much of the Children's Rights agenda, only two of the 15 study schools, and only 2% of the teacher data surveyed cited this as one of their school's motivations for

student voice. More commonly cited was the use of student voice mechanisms like school councils to enhance citizenship and develop students' understandings of democratic principles and processes, and to develop transferable life skills. 38% of maintained sector teacher respondents and 70% of independent school teacher respondents reflected this purpose. In contrast, and despite the main attraction for policy makers seeming to relate to school improvement, only 11% of teacher respondents from the maintained sector saw this as the main reason for student voice in their school. This rose to 35% for independent Head Teacher respondents. The personalization agenda in which there is an emphasis on the engagement of consumers in choice with a view to improve quality was also one which was only cited by 10% of teachers as a central purpose for student voice. In addition to this only one of the 15 case study schools made a direct connection between these agendas.

Considering these drivers within the context of my own research I am struck again at how difficult it is to make generalizations of this sort, and the degree to which it comes down to the individual level, or the level of subgroups with a clear role and identity within a school. While only David referred to the notion of children's rights, all participants referred in various ways to the development of transferrable life skills, and the idea of providing a more personalized experience within school. Lynn and David who had the most responsibility for standards were clearly driven by a school improvement philosophy, with a focus on developing teacher knowledge and skills by drawing on student perceptions of what worked in other areas.

The influence of role within school appears marked with respect to how the organizational context translates into the professional perspectives communicated through individual accounts. Differences in opinion with regard to purpose were a major theme across all the accounts and at times led to tension at the individual and group level within school. Whitty and Wisby argue that teachers need to take the initiative and play their part in helping student voice to develop in the context of

collaborative rather than managerialist cultures. Though a laudable idea, the freedom and space for teachers to accomplish this given organizational context pressures is in my experience limited.

Out of the organizational context, professional perspective, and purpose setting for student voice emerges the actual practice of student voice. The degree of familiarity with particular approaches often seemed to set limitations with regard to how students were engaged. Ideas about efficiency and time often associated with chosen approaches, but as important were open acknowledgements with regard to not always knowing what good practice can look like. I was particularly aware that having modelled the use of focus groups, the participants seemed to consider this type of approach with renewed interest. Opportunities to access training were considered important in supporting involved staff to enable students to engage openly in the process of student voice. It was also considered key to ensuring what emerged from this process was valid, and safe to act on. Whitty and Wisby also recognize this need, and assert that schools do require more support and guidance in order to facilitate effective student voice. The arguments run a risk of becoming circular at this point, however, as it is stands to reason that the potential conflict in relation to context, perspective and purpose need to be resolved before the 'mechanics' of good practice can be explored in a more thoughtful and conceptually aligned manner.

The dominant influence at a practice level was clearly understood by participants to come from senior managers. Even where individual participants were developing student voice in a more autonomous and context specific manner, there was concern that this was aligned where possible with whole school agendas and priorities as identified by management. As will be suggested in the next section, a balanced approach that responds to the needs of all involved is perhaps where the most constructive student voice can take place.

4.2.7.1 Threat-Response and the Engagement of Staff with Student Voice

As discussed through the findings, adding to the more detached cognitive conceptualization of student voice was the personal experience which added a dimension that might provide some insight into why staff respond differently to different forms of student voice. The perceptions of risk and formality seemed key in understanding the emotional impact and level of positive engagement various forms of student voice seemed to lead to. This was not a straightforward association however, and a moderate degree of formality and threat seemed often to result in more active interaction with the students and a sense of satisfaction with higher levels of personal engagement. The practices that appeared to fit with this description were those in which the participants retained a degree of autonomy and personal control, in relation to agendas that were considered specific and relevant to their practices. A simple model to represent this is offered in Figure 13 as follows:
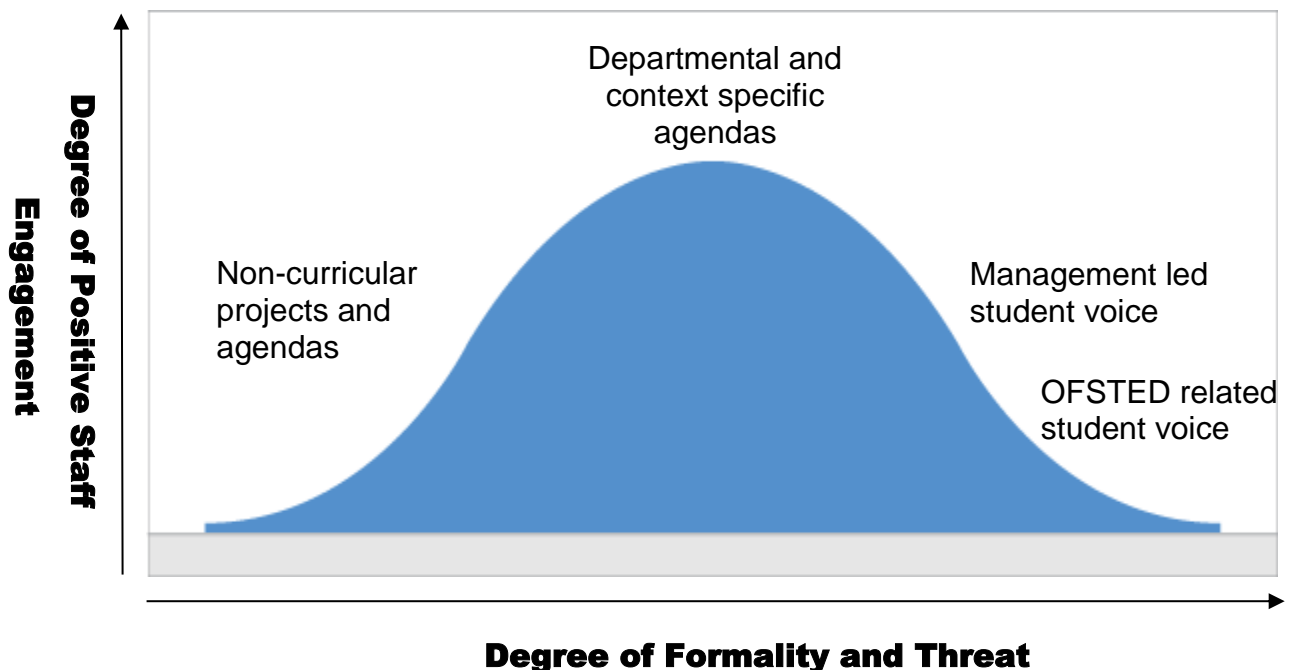

Figure 13- Formality, Threat and Positive Staff Engagement

There is little written about teacher engagement with student voice and the influence of perceived threat. McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck (2005) characterize teacher responses to student voice in their study ranging from 'enthusiastic, impressed and welcoming' to 'defensive, unimpressed and suspicious.' Clear in the conceptualization of this was the idea that teachers applied criteria for judging student contributions. These included:

- The degree to which accounts were considered by teachers to be a valid reflection of classroom life;
- The degree to which suggestions were practical;
- Whether ideas were likely to be attractive to most or all members of the class;
- Whether they were likely to lead to enhanced learning experiences;
- The broader educational desirability of the suggestions.

Student suggestions were more acceptable if they asked for more of what teachers already did, or had done previously. All of this suggests that there was an active processing of information and ideas within the context. The responses teachers had to suggestions were categorized in the following ways:

1. Spectacular short term responsiveness;
2. Growing confidence in the use of pupil consultation;
3. Problems with pupil consultation.

There were two types of problem identified with the last response style, which related to either expecting too much from pupils or not valuing the pupil perspective. The need for teachers to believe that student's perspectives are important was seen as key. The point that effective education has also always depended primarily on how well teachers and pupils have worked together within relationships that reflect trust and mutual respect is also stated.

The accounts in McIntyre *et al.* (2005) also seem to me to reflect the adoption of strategies by teachers within individual contexts to ensure that their own primary needs and those of their students, as understood by the teachers, were met. Another way of interpreting this is that they organized their behaviour in relation to perceived threat. Crittenden (2002) argues that humans have an innate propensity to organize self-protectively. We act on our own understandings of what is dangerous and what is safe, and the strategies used will reflect the experience of the individual.

[11] Crittenden (2013) in outlining a developmental model of attachment and relationships between children and adults, referred to patterns of relationships, information processing and self-protective strategy development. Different strategies are adopted depending on both cognitive and affective processes, the most flexible and adaptive styles being most available to individuals who are able to integrate these processes. Primarily cognitive or affective styles often result in a more limited use of strategies when it comes to dealing with threat and relating to others, and run the risk of being maladaptive within the specific context in which they are then applied. Becoming aware of the way in which we relate to others, making sense of experiences and others behaviour, and understanding and dealing with threat is key to supporting better integration and adaptive change. The greater the sense of threat the more difficult it is to reflect on this.

Understanding teacher engagement in student voice as reflective of relationships, information processing, and self-protective strategy deployment would I suggest go a long way towards making sense of the model represented by Figure 13 (p.129), developed out of my own research. It can provide a framework for reflecting on the needs of the individual in context, with respect to student voice engagement, and in regard to relationships, role and responsibility. Where agendas shifted to the point where they were relevant to the students but beyond the active concerns or priorities of the participants, for example school toilets or charity fund raising, there

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[11] Outlined at a training conference at the Tavistock, 22nd-24th November 2013

was support but also a degree of ambivalence towards the student voice process, and the level and type of engagement reflected this. This may relate to the reduced opportunity for staff to benefit to the same extent on these agendas. Equally once the agenda shifted towards the more formal management and external accountability end of the continuum there was a notable increase in negative comment and affect in evidence. Participants understood the importance of these forms of student voice within the current OFSTED framework, but were clearly threatened by them and did not see them as easily compatible with the less formal but at an individual level more directly relevant forms of student voice. In several instances this led to participants wanting to call what they were doing something other than student voice, in order to not associate with the more formal approaches being used in school.

These findings also fit well with those of Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) who talk about three main areas of teacher reservation, anxiety or constraint (p.156). These relate to:

- Constraints coming from the system or the school:
  - Pressures of time and curriculum coverage;
  - Lack of institutional support;
- Reservations reflecting personal doubts and concerns:
  - Teachers' feelings abouit the pupils they teach;
  - Concerns about possible criticism;
- Anxieties rooted in the procedures:
  - Balancing the individual and the group persepective.

Developing better conceptualizations of teacher and student interactions within student voice processes, with a focus on the ways in which understandings are developed and employed, and a better profiling of the various strategies that might get deployed in threat situations, may represent the most constructive way of bridging the gap between the dominant ideologies and the apparently divergent practices associated with student voice.

4.2.8 Summary

A number of points have emerged from the analysis so far that are relevant with regard to the wider literature. The first is that the participants clearly did not think about student voice in an isolated way, or simply as something you do, but rather understood it as something that develops dynamically within the broader school context, and in relation to other 'voices'. There was a clear sense that to justify the time and effort it takes there needs to be a benefit to all involved.

The second key point is that the process of engaging with student voice was most often experienced as uncomfortable and there was frequently a sense of threat associated with it. This often related to a perceived need to maintain standards, stay on top of other priorities, and manage risk. The influence of management, and the instinctive response of staff to self-protect from threat, appears to offer additional insight into why the participants experienced and responded to student voice in the way that they did. It is not a linear correlation however, and as noted personal relevance was important in securing positive engagement. The combination of lessening personal relevance and increasing formality and threat, illustrated by approaches which were primarily management or OFSTED led, appears to be considered least desirable and most uncomfortable within the accounts.

4.3 Question Two: What is the potential for student voice?

This section will begin with an overview of the different forms of student voice undertaken and referred to by the participants; and then go on to consider any references to observed impact in relation to this.

4.3.1 How Was Student Voice Developed by the Participants?

As already noted each participant developed student voice in ways reflecting their context, role, professional beliefs and awareness of student voice processes and methods. I would argue that the activity undertaken was then a natural extension of this, and in this sense this section can only be understood within the context of the findings from research question one. An overview of the student voice activity undertaken, but also forms of student voice that participants referred to in their accounts, is provided in Table 7 along with the focus or intention expressed with regard to these activities.

Participant	Overview of Student Voice Undertaken and Referred to	Focus or Intention
David	- Questionnaires - Student Panels - Focus groups - School Council - Community Youth Council	- Increasing student satisfaction - Improving teaching and learning - Raising standards - Giving students a say on the experience they have in school - Citizenship and development of democratic skills
Simon	- Questionnaires - Focus group - Working group - Student Panels - School Council	- Improving student engagement with feedback on assignments - Encouraging student acceptance of responsibility in learning process - Raising standards - Giving students a say on the experience they have in school
Julie	- Questionnaires - Whole class consultation - Student panels - School Council - Student led project work - Student led charity fund raising	- Programme evaluation - Programme design - Accreditation - Increasing student satisfaction - Giving students a say on the experience they have in school
Lynn	- Questionnaires - Student panel - Student complaint processes - Enabling student ideas - School council	- Professional learning and CPD - Performance management - Raising standards - Encouraging student initiative - Giving students a say on the experience they have in school

Table 7- Overview of Student Voice Undertaken and Referred to by Participants

Whitty and Wisby (2007), as previously noted, refer to four main drivers for student voice:

- Children's rights;
- Active citizenship;
- School Improvement;
- Personalization.

Also as noted previously (p.127), it is very difficult to reduce down why a school might engage in student voice to just one of these drivers, as motivations at an individual level reflect not just organizational contexts but also professional convictions, roles and responsibilities. The purpose or intention communicated as part of the accounts also differed according to the form of student voice being referred to. For example, and common across all the accounts, the participants talked about the role of the school council in school as one of providing a forum for students to raise issues about their experience, and through which they could exercise an influence. What is interesting to note is that this was often seen as the students' forum, and many of the agendas which emerged through this process were regarded as frustrating to the staff, for example school toilets, or the opportunity to smoke on school premises. There was, therefore, limited immediate potential benefit for staff. Student voice in the form of questionnaires, subject panels or focus groups, by comparison, were described more as forums or processes for staff to engage with students on agendas that they had set. In this sense they felt much more instrumentalist, and often were quite explicitly a means to an end, for example produce data for OFSTED, evaluate a program, or develop a feedback process that students would engage more fully with.

What is clear from the activity outlined is that a great deal of what was undertaken or emphasized was associated with raising standards, and therefore fits best within the school improvement category, and relates to the 'Organizational Context' discussed as part of Question 1.

4.3.2 Impacts and Outcomes from Student Voice

Although there have been attempts to illustrate the impact student voice can have in education, see Rudduck and Flutter (2004) and Halsey *et al.* (2006), what there is tends to be anecdotal and in the form of general claims. When I began this project I hoped to be able to look at this more carefully but dropped the emphasis on this early on as I realized it was likely to conflict with the ability of the participants to develop their practices naturally and without pressure from me. Throughout my meetings with participants, however, I did listen out for examples of impact or outcomes. These are summarised in Figure 14:
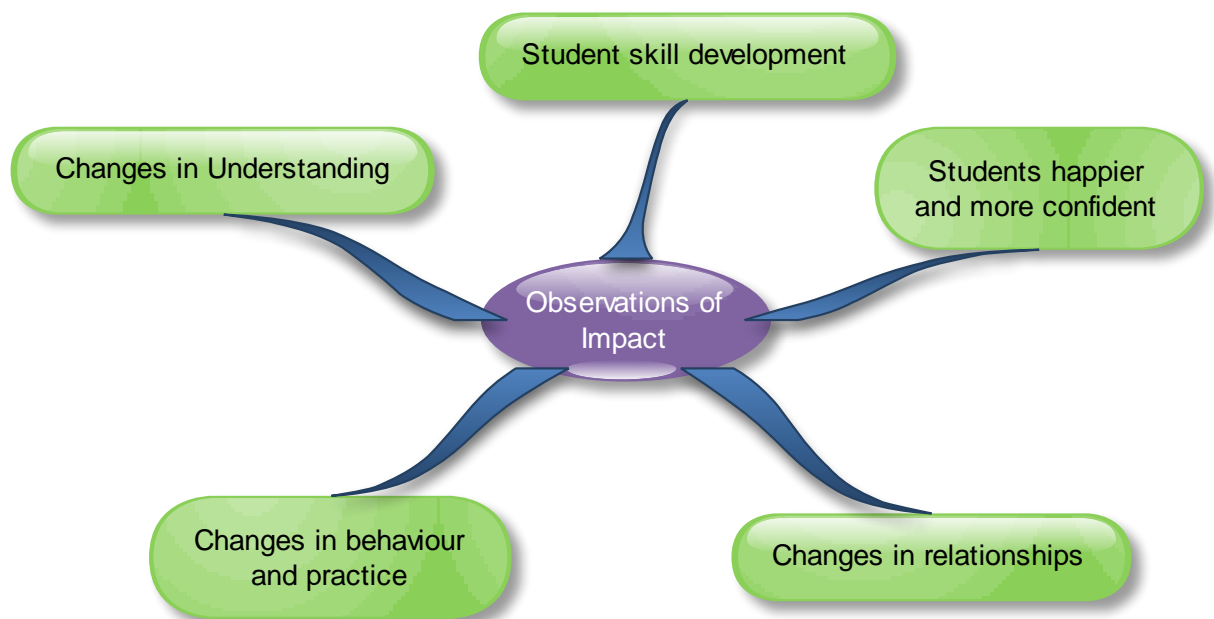

Figure 14- Summary of themes related to 'Observations of Impact'

One of the areas where there were quite consistent observations of impact was with respect to the idea that student voice can create insight and better understandings for staff, and perhaps involved students, in regard to a particular topic or agenda. This often then linked to changes in behaviour and practice:

A couple of things kinda came out that we were quite surprised at.. and it's obviously a result of the students' perceptions of what they've got but… At first we were, 'Oh!? Oh!?' You know, what's happening there? But actually that is really valuable because instead of just going, 'Yes. Yes, Yes,' they've said some things that are worthwhile looking at and pulling out.

<div align="right">D.2.2-6</div>

I'm thinking differently. I'm thinking in terms of how when I hand them back it will work, and even though we're not doing it now I'm already thinking through. And so I'm going round more and saying, 'Do you understand where you went wrong?'

<div align="right">S.3.20-25</div>

There have been internal factors as well, but I think student voice was one of the things that made me want to change it more than anything else.

<div align="right">J.6.16-24</div>

That really helped the teacher and I have a much more informed discussion.

<div align="right">L.1.50-56</div>

Another area where there were consistent observations of impact was in regard to relationships between staff and students, and the ways in which the students engaged:

And I said, 'Ah, it's just for me.' And she said, ' Ah right, cos I wrote lots of nice things in there because I thought it was going to someone higher up.' (Laughs) And I thought, well that's quite nice, at the same time it.. but it was more about what was real. And she said no it was honest, but at the same time it was positive.

<div align="right">D.5.7-14</div>

Some of them with being in that [the focus group]will be a lot more aware of say what teachers do as well, and what we try and help them to achieve… Some of them have actually come and sought help outside [of lessons], and amazingly some of them are even seeking help before they have to submit their work.

<div align="right">S.3.20-25</div>

It's the reaction and what you do with it. So if you want to.. I suppose in some respects I have with the focus groups.. involved them in the process and helped them, and they've helped me implement changes…whereas if you don't actually.. if you just involved them and then say do it my way anyway, then I can see why there would be some disaffection.

S.5.21-26

You do take an interest, and you do ask, and they will come to you for support if they need to.

J.5.6-53

And you're going to get much more positive relationships even if it isn't as constructive as they believe it is.

J.6.35-40

And like you've said, they're motivated. They're committed to it. They want to achieve as opposed just like in the past.

L.3.5-11

Julie also described students seeming happier about things when actively able to participate around issues:

And I think that is going to be much more successful. The students certainly feel a lot happier about it. That their views are being listened to, because really generally it has been something that the students have really hated doing.

L.3.0-5

Julie felt that the process of involving students more meaningfully also led to them developing skills that could be applied in a range of situations:

Like with my COPE students when they go off.. but it tends to be at the end of maybe three or four months when they start saying, 'Well we could do this,' or, 'We could do that.'… It's not necessarily something they could do at the start.

J.6.5-10

I think that the lessons that were learnt by that cohort of students, I think they still exist in some of the stuff that David does with the council.

J.6.24-30

On the one hand if you have got these empowered, engaged young people all with aspiration, and they become more confident, they bring that back into the classroom with them. I think that's one thing, so it's a whole set of behavioural skills that you can develop. But on the other hand it's about that relationship, and one of the things that we do have across the school.. observers always say we have very, very strong relationships with our young people. You know there is quite a reciprocal process.

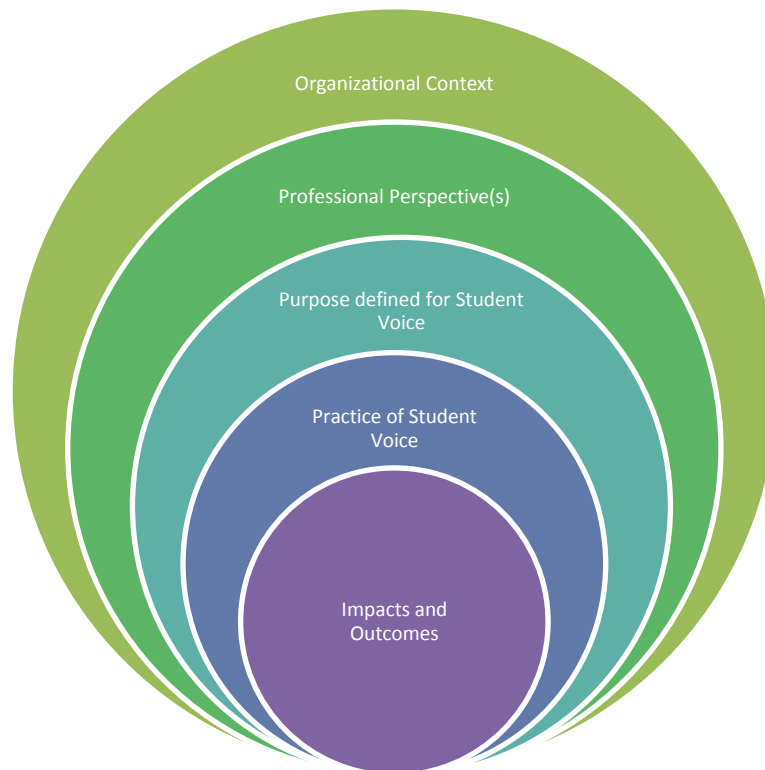J.6.35-40

4.3.3 Some Interpretative Reflections

Figure 15-The Emergence of Outcomes

The findings suggest that the potential impacts and outcomes of student voice are a reflection of the broader spheres of influence surrounding them (Figure 15). This is simplistic in the sense that the experience of staff in engaging with student voice and their observations of impact often then reinforced or challenged professional perspectives, and led to changes in the practice of student voice. The model is therefore intended to provide a framework for considering what key influences were interacting in creating an understanding of student voice. The anecdotal references of the participants to impact therefore reveal something about what perhaps was held to be of value, and are suggestive while not providing 'evidence' in any definitive sense of what student voice is capable of achieving.

Whitty and Wisby (2007) also note that in spite of many references throughout the literature that student voice can lead to school improvement outcomes, there

remains a need for *'Carefully designed experimental and/or longitudinal studies… if causation is to be more firmly established,'* (op cit., p.310).

4.3.3.1 The Influence of Management and Leadership Style on Potential

The question therefore of what the potential of student voice might be within this school context, as revealed by these four members of staff, can only tentatively be responded to. The emphasis on school improvement agendas, and the national context that this is a reflection of, suggests that this is likely to continue to be the focus for much of the student voice work moving forward. The role of management within the school in regard to this agenda would suggest to me that this to a large extent will be led from the top. The establishment of student voice as one of the three elements within the school improvement process (alongside observation and work scrutiny), suggests this process will continue to be refined, particularly with regard to a management identified focus for any related activity.

Two limiting factors are apparent here. The first is the ambivalence of staff with regard to management led student voice, and the sense of threat that increases as the formality and focus on classroom practice intensifies (see p.129). The second factor relates to student ambivalence as illustrated by the difficulty experienced in engaging students in these sorts of discussions, and often the lack of immediate or obvious benefit to students inherent in these adult determined agendas. The anxiety of several participants in having to engage colleagues in relation to student voice that had been carried out by them suggests that translating what emerges from student voice into positive change may not be straightforward. The commonly adopted methodology of senior staff acting as intermediaries seems to me to have the potential of amplifying these difficulties. Simon's observation that he did not want to refer to the student voice work as student voice work is particularly suggestive in this regard.

Mitra, Serriere and Stoicovy (2012) explore how leadership can help to enable student voice to occur in schools. They note that when developing student voice initiatives, one of the greatest struggles is in determining the role of the adult in

these initiatives. They suggest that adults often either perpetuate hierarchical relationships or assume the other extreme and 'get out of the way.' This can be observed within my research accounts with regard to the approach adopted depending on whether the focus was on teaching and learning, or on non-curricular opportunities or issues. This article, and the research it reflects, is notable for the fact that the third author, Stoicovy, was also the Head Teacher of the research school. This has the potential benefit of allowing for interpretation to remain more grounded in the research context, but also runs a risk that compromise was made in terms of maintaining an appropriate level of criticality of the practices observed.

Mitra *et al.* (2012) make a number of claims with regard to what is assumed to be good practice:

- The importance of having a school vision of student voice as 'the way we do things here.' This entailed encouraging all staff to 'buy-in' while at the same time having non-negotiable components that ensure all staff are involved in the process.
- Allowing opt-in strategies for teachers when possible was a second theme identified. The examples shared in the paper were often also characterised by clear benefits or incentives to encourage opt-in.
- Accepting that implementation will vary across contexts. The example student voice initiative was described as 'a platform for people to become active in the school.' Across contexts teachers exhibited different personal goals for their groups, with over half focused primarily on 'building community between the students.' It was within the analysis of this theme that there was also acknowledgement of the fact that there was a critical and vocal minority of staff with regard to initiatives.

In discussing the findings they assert that leadership with a clear vision must balance teacher voice/buy-in with maintaining the integrity of the vision of the school. In particular they state that '*Despite the need to keep the vision of the school clear, how decisions occur matters- often even more so than what occur,*' (op cit., p.109). This need, they suggest, fits well with a distributed leadership

approach. The consequences of not having staff on board were observed in regard to the manner in which they then engaged with the students:

"In our observations, the teachers most resentful about the decision are leading the SSGs [small-school gathering] in the most traditional format; rather than encouraging student collaboration and voice into their work. Thus teacher resentment can lead into classroom practice in the worst of situations."

<div align="right">(Op cit., p. 109)</div>

These observations coupled with the experiences shared in my own research accounts so far suggest again that the potential of student voice is likely to be severely limited, and possibly destructive, should practices alienate or threaten staff. It also seems unlikely to me that the positive outcomes observed by my participants can be consistently or substantially achieved within this sort of scenario.

Morgan (2011) also refers to the role of management in enabling or restricting student voice in an English secondary school. She notes that the main findings of her study included that student consultation was marginal and low priority for three out of the four teachers who had participated; and that the commitment to student consultation at a whole-school level did not necessarily translate into teachers' classroom practices. In common with my research she noted that teachers found it difficult to prioritize student voice to put it on a par with their many other important and demanding responsibilities, notably curriculum delivery and external examinations. She also observes that teachers did not seem to view what was happening at a whole-school level as providing a model for classroom practice in any way, something commented on in one way or another by all my participants.

In making sense of the findings Morgan explores 'the dominant role played by the SMT.'-

"The image of an SMT that listens to pupils came across strongly suggesting a cycle of consultation involving pupils (for example via department reviews, pupil panels, questionnaires on whole-school issues) and the SMT, taking account of those views and feeding them back to teachers via staff workshops, department review feedback and so on."

(Op cit., p.14)

4.3.3.2 Opening Up Potential

The parallels with my research are obvious, David, Julie and Lynn adopting this type of intermediary role, and Morgan goes on to suggest that perhaps an SMT led and owned approach resulted in teachers not seeing the need for student voice in their classrooms. Classroom teachers in this model are the receivers of information gathered by senior colleagues, and there are reduced opportunities for direct interaction between teachers and students. Where my findings appear to differ is with regard to the conclusion that teachers perhaps do not 'see the need' for direct student voice in the classroom, all the participants clearly wanting this to occur but without perhaps the capacity or explicit practical support to do so. Morgan draws together a number of implications for school management concerning:

- The meanings and purposes of student voice with direct reference to the need to consider how SMT consultation can fit alongside other forms of teacher consultation- assuming they are compatible.
- Support for teacher-student consultation at the classroom level. This needs to include consideration of:
    - o Training opportunities and practical and administrative support;
    - o Creating time in the curriculum;
    - o Use of wider staff in enabling richer feedback than is normally available through questionnaires.
- The role of departments in supporting individual teachers to consult students. Although tentative in her assertions in this regard, Morgan does suggest that perhaps departments in secondary education are the natural

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point of reference for most staff, and that they also form the natural bridge therefore between SMT and the classroom teacher.

These suggestions fit well with my findings, and perhaps start to bring a more hopeful projection in terms of the potential of student voice at North College. Over the course of my involvement all participants naturally reflected on their practices, and many of Morgan's suggestions naturally emerged in the course of our discussions. Lynn, who was the most senior manager involved, moved over the course of the project from wanting to be at the centre of student voice activity, essentially coordinating, collating and disseminating findings to staff, to a position of engaging with departments through the 'Leaders in Learning' structure within school. While this still meant that much of the focus for this form of student voice would be identified for staff and students, it was suggested that how this translated into departmental contexts and was followed through, for example using focus groups, would be left up to staff at that level to decide. David, who also had significant management responsibility for his Faculty, was more instinctively motivated from the outset to try and develop a collaborative approach with colleagues. His hopes were that initial findings from generic questionnaires would start to act as a stimulus for departments to engage with students around areas of concern or interest.

Although not explicitly addressing the issue of how various forms of student voice might fit together, I would suggest that collaborating and constructing practices together is more likely to work than a top down consideration of this issue. It will also naturally resolve the concern of how colleagues support one another within departmental contexts.

Again, however, a number of limiting factors can be identified in regard to this 'potential'. Firstly that there is no real opportunity for students to set the agenda, other than indirectly through their responses to an OFSTED informed generic questionnaire; or through their progress or perceived lack of it within subject areas as identified through data analysis. Lynn, Julie and David recognized this fact and responded to it by arguing that:

a. There are times when teachers need to set the agenda;

b. There are well established forums through which students can bring other concerns.

This in my view again illustrates very well the tension that exists between externally defined ideologies of student voice, and practice based realities. Fielding (2004b) while maintaining an ideological stance acknowledges the difficulties and limitations of real world practice, particularly with regard to *performativity and surveillance* and the fact that most student-teacher *dialogue* takes place in *spaces* that perpetuate significant power imbalances. Morgan's (2011) observation that there is not nearly enough research into how teachers understand and engage in student voice, and that this has led to inadequate theoretical frameworks for taking this forward, continues to hold true in my view. In the absence of this there is a danger of increasing divergence between academic writing on this subject and real world practice. Without a common language it is difficult to see how practice in schools can be well supported by this literature base, leaving open the possibility of more simplistic and instrumentalist interpretations and practices being adopted or imposed.

A number of key factors therefore appear to constrain the potential of student voice. These include:

- The vision of student voice and how it is constructed within the school;
- The degree of freedom staff have to develop student voice practice;
- The support available to do this;
- The extent to which the SMT and teacher led forms of student voice are compatible and threat managed.

The 'type' of potential would depend on the focus for the student voice undertaken.

Perhaps a single principle can be identified that would enhance the opportunity for the potential to be realized, and that is the need for collaboration and dialogue at a conceptual and practical level between management, class teachers and young

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people. As Morgan suggests this might most usefully be done at a departmental level, within the real world context in which it will operate.

4.3.3.3 Power and Potential

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) reflect on the tensions between the ideal of student voice and the everyday practice that actually occurs. Taylor and Robinson (2009) argue that it is this tension that provides the impetus and theoretical space for a consideration of how power operates to constrain and limit the practice of student voice. Bringing together theory and practice, they argue, will help to create more thoughtful and effective practice, the theory acting as a 'thinking tool'. It is also considered likely to raise uncomfortable issues. Theory like practice, they argue, is enmeshed in beliefs, values and commitments, the dominant understandings in the literature being located within a democratic and participatory framework. As noted however, these do not necessarily or even substantially reflect the understandings of staff in schools who are engaging in this endeavour.

This may suggest why the "recalcitrant reality" often falls short of the theory (Fielding, 2004b). The possibility exists that there is disparity between the ideological conceptualization and real world conceptualizations which are at best only vaguely articulated. Better understanding at this level may produce insights that help move this debate forward. A metaphor to explore this further might be the challenge of building a new town. A great deal of intellectual endeavour could go into designing the ideal town. It might be informed by all sorts of views including the need to be environmentally friendly and to provided social housing. Architects and planners could design buildings and homes seen as fit for the 21st century, and on paper this would appear a very attractive place to live and work. Without knowledge of the local demographic and the actual geography, however, and the impact of and on other nearby communities, there is no way of knowing how functional and successful this will turn out to be in the longer term. The point here is that at some point the ideology has to harmonise with the reality of the context within which it is being translated if it is to continue to influence and thrive.

Feminist critiques of student voice further question the concept of empowerment on the basis that student voice makes claims to be able to represent a category or subgroup of society by reducing down to some general key ideas or principles. Taylor and Robinson (2009) point out that a notion of power as something possessed by some and not by others, and as open to transfer and reversal can lead to practices that produce surface compliance but which fail to disrupt operations at a deeper level. They note that these ideas do not acknowledge the local and contextual nature of the power relations they seek to replace; nor do they acknowledge that teachers may not be free to redistribute power within the school context.

The unintended outcome from this as recognized by an increasing number of researchers, for example Bragg (2007b), is that practice may then simply promote, maintain or reproduce institutional and social inequities. The temptation to maintain or at least only conditionally allow change to occur was very evident within my own research. The issue to me, however, is not that staff were somehow guilty of wrongdoing or a lack of commitment, but rather that their practices reflected the real world environment within which they engaged with young people. Any consideration of potential therefore needs to be theoretically framed within this real world context.

Arnot and Reay (2007) assert that the analysis of voice has developed considerably over the last 20 years, and that most contemporary voice research recognizes that there is not one authentic voice of a single social category. This is visible and explicitly referenced in all my participant accounts. A way of conceptualizing this, Arnot and Reay argue, is through the adoption of Bernstein's concept of pedagogic voice in which the diversity and context specificity of voices can be acknowledged. This would in their view allow for different voices to be elicited for different purposes; would prevent assumptions about pedagogic voice and social identity; recognizes that interactional practices shape messages and

can change voice and ultimately challenge power relations; and allows for possibilities for working with the 'yet to be voiced' which may shift the relations of control. Importantly this form of conceptualization allows for reflection on the inner structure that produces voice and communicates the messages to be heard.

Although these ideas allow for forms of reflection that can encourage a more mindful approach to student voice, the fact remains that they are articulated in a language that is unfamiliar to most school based practitioners, and they do not easily suggest methods that allow for the development of student voice that would avoid the pitfalls outlined by these theories. The idea of critical dialogue as described by Freire (1993) as a process that can liberate and empower is commonly proposed and criticized within the literature. My experience suggests that whatever philosophical debates are to be had around this idea, in practice terms it was dialogue with individual students, groups of students, and myself that seemed to open up awareness of some of these issues for participants, and which led to the possibility of changed relations and practices.

Fielding (2004b) argues for a "dialogic" model of student voice, and that the "transformative potential" is more likely to reside in arrangements that require the active engagement of students and teachers working in partnership rather than in those that either exclude teachers or treat student voice as an instrument of teacher or state purposes. He warns that initiatives that only seek student opinion, for example via questionnaire or focus group, on matters that have been identified, framed or articulated by teachers, are unlikely to get much beyond some initial enthusiasm. This is because of the danger that students will grow ambivalent towards invitations to express views on matters they do not think are important; that are framed in language they find restrictive, alienating or patronizing; and which seldom result in actions or dialogue that affect the quality of their lives. All participants commented on the difficulty of engaging a wider range of students in student voice, and Fielding argues that in his experience the practices that hold out a greater prospect of transformation are those that are dialogic(in his example

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those based on a student as researcher/co-researcher model). It is notable that the participant who engaged the most obviously dialogic approach, Simon, was more successful in both engaging students and in effecting direct change on the basis of student views.

Todd (2012) notes that busy professionals in stretched services will often look for practical guidance rather than consider more critically or think more conceptually about what they are doing with student voice. Although this reference was in regard to educational psychologists, it clearly could also be applied to the pressured world of school professionals. She argues the importance of getting critical about professional practice on the grounds that there is dissonance between the discourse of practice and the notion of children as active and competent witnesses in their own lives. The need for critical reflection on this area needs to be seen as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event, resulting in professional cultures that enable participation, if young people are to be successfully involved in decision making.

The process of moving researchers and practitioners towards practices that enable greater participation, Todd suggests, needs to critically consider activity in relation to purpose, consent, method, and interpretation. Failure to do this risks further disempowerment of young people. A participatory design approach is proposed as a way of avoiding this. While on one level this is similar to Fielding's assertion, it brings into the equation more explicitly the question of how we support professionals to develop better awareness of the contextual issues in working with young people, in order to avoid any unintentional disempowerment. The lack of internal support within my research school in relation to this need was striking, with undoubtedly the focus being predominantly on method and 'getting things done.' The influence I had on participants (see p.187), however, appeared one of awareness raising and reflective learning. This was not my intent but perhaps is best understood as a by-product of exploring their experiences with them, and the

natural blurring of research, practice and professional learning that takes place through this process (Hedges, 2010).

The benefit of dialogic and participatory design approaches can also be seen in participant accounts at a teacher-student process level. In fact what is striking within all the accounts, and my own direct experience of working with students, is that well managed student voice provides natural opportunities for critical reflection and the opening up of more context specific possibilities. These are often also characterized by participants as having greater shared validity. It is at this point that the idea of students as researchers starts to feel quite limited, and I have been unable to resolve the following two issues in relation to this sort of approach:

- How many students can realistically be involved in this sort of approach directly, and can this really constitute good practice or rather just a component of good practice?
- How many staff can realistically be involved in this sort of approach directly, and can this really embed in real world school contexts as anything other than an occasional occurrence?

4.3.3.4 A Note of Caution with Regard to Potential

It seems to me that to truly achieve anything like the potential that it may have, student voice as an activity and philosophy needs to be open to as many staff and students as possible. How differently open or responsive teachers are to the ideas put forward by students is described by McIntyre *et al.* (2005) as fitting one of three profile types:

1. Spectacular short-term responsiveness- no real long-term impact;
2. Growing confidence in the use of pupil consultation- leading to developing change over time;
3. Problems with using pupil consultation- including teacher responses based on unrealistic expectations, and not valuing pupil perspective.

Morgan (2007) described three levels of teacher response characterized by increasing degrees of teacher engagement with pupil consultation data:

- Level 1- response remains at the level of teacher thinking, and is not translated into action;
- Level 2- response includes thinking, reflection and limited impact on practice;
- Level 3- response includes thinking, reflection and extended impact on practice.

Although within the literature there is implicitly an assumption that greater openness and responsiveness is better, and that this links directly to ideas of potential, I am less confident of this for the following reasons. Firstly in developing the potential of student voice we tend to assume that any change will be a good thing. This could be in regard to two different considerations however:

- The practice of student voice and the influence of students;
- The outcomes from student voice.

If our agenda is to simply increase the practice of student voice then this assumption probably holds true. If in addition to developing the practice of student voice and the influence of students we are also concerned with ensuring there is a positive impact of some sort, then this assumption becomes dysfunctional as teachers will need to take responsibility for both protecting good practice as it currently exists, alongside responding positively to suggestions that can strengthen existing practices. In this context it is reasonable to argue that both McIntyre *et al.* and Morgan's response profiles in fact reflect a range of often hidden considerations and influences. It is only by exploring these on a case by case basis that any consideration can be given to whether the response is appropriate or not. I believe this is particularly important as it allows for the sort of critical reflection advocated by Fielding and Todd, but avoids idealistic notions that risk critical assumptions of teachers themselves in regard to their interactions with young people.

4.3.4 Summary

Findings support general claims in the literature that student voice activity can lead to new insights, changes in behaviour, better relationships, and happier students. It can also result in skill development and in that sense be seen as supportive of a citizenship agenda. The potential impact or benefit, however, is argued as a reflection of the context and the dominant professional perspectives at play, which define the purpose and practice of student voice. Observations that management style and approach are particularly influential in terms of the professional perspectives are once again highlighted. A question as to how compatible management led and classroom focused student voice activity are needs to be carefully considered.

The view that dialogic approaches to student voice are more likely to open up the potential within any given context is supported, but assumptions that the power and influence of teachers is corruptive or undesirable is challenged on the basis that some moderation and protection of good practice may at times be required in a system that holds only teachers responsible for good academic outcomes. How this is achieved in transparent and justified ways requires further consideration. This is discussed further in the final chapter.

4.4 Question Three: What are the challenges in developing the potential of student voice?

The third research question will explore the sorts of challenges encountered when it came to developing student voice, as they emerged from the participant accounts. The previous question has already identified contextual and relational challenges in considering the potential of student voice in terms of:

- The way organizational context and school improvement agendas constrain space for students to construct the focus;
- The impact of management lead approaches on student voice practice in terms of how staff then come to understand it, and how they subsequently engage with it.

It has also supported the view that more collaborative and delegated forms of student voice may in fact be the only way of meaningfully delivering on the potential of this agenda in schools.

This research question focuses more on the practical challenges of developing student voice. Three master themes emerged from the individual accounts in relation to the challenges encountered. A working definition for each is outlined in Table 8:

Master Theme	Working Interpretation
Enabling engagement	The influences and approaches that supported or hindered the engagement of students and staff with one another
Something bespoke	The considerations and actions undertaken in trying to adapt student voice to the working context
Making sense	The challenges that emerged as part of the process of staff considering the diversity of student views expressed

Table 8- Master Themes with Regard to the Practical Challenges Encountered

4.4.1 Enabling Engagement

Across all the accounts were experiences relating to the process of engaging with students- see Figure 16 for a summary overview:
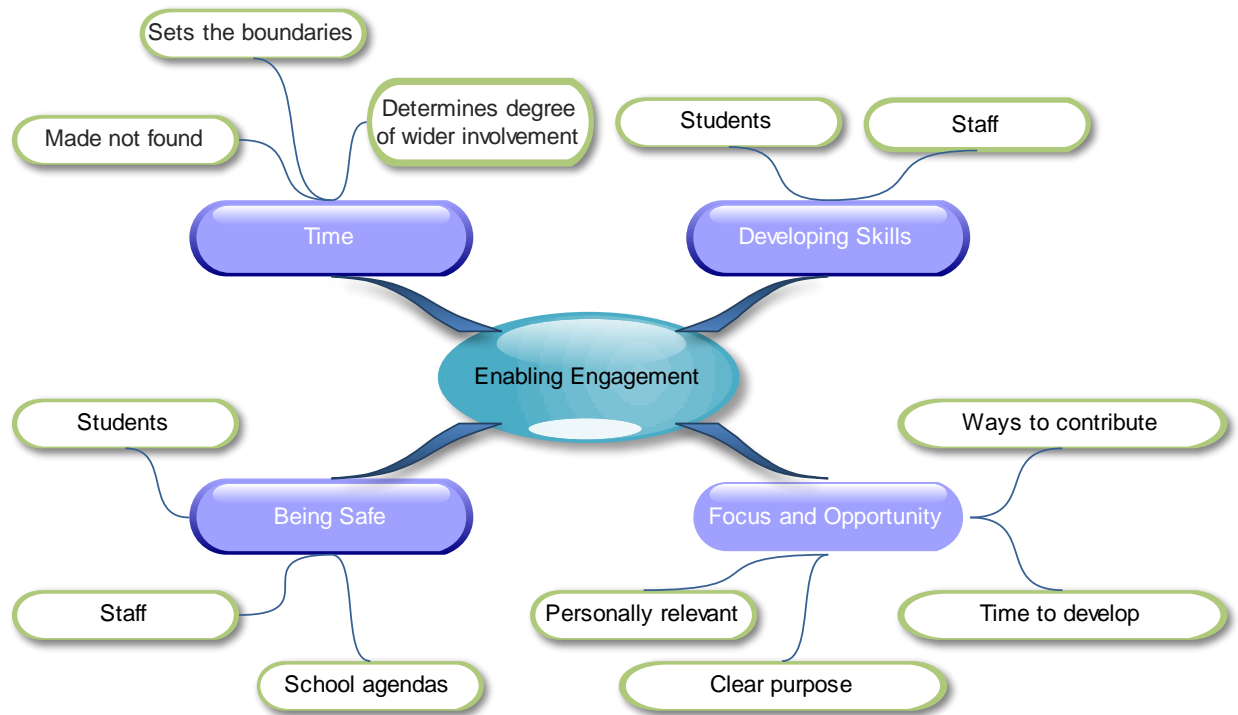


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Sets the boundaries

Made not found        Determines degree       Students              Staff
                      of wider involvement

              Time                              Developing Skills

                        Enabling Engagement

Students                                                            Ways to contribute

              Being Safe                        Focus and Opportunity

Staff                                  Personally relevant                    Time to develop

            School agendas                      Clear purpose
```

Figure 16- Summary of Sub-themes and Elements for 'Enabling Engagement'

4.4.1.1 Being Safe

The idea of being 'safe' to contribute was common to many of the accounts, in particular the need for managed discussion with reasonable anonymity where sensitive issues were being explored:

We wanted to set up some rules about how everyone has an opinion, and how everyone's opinion should be valued…we can talk about them but you're not going to shoot them down.

S.3.15-20

If you make a child put their name on it will they give you an honest response?

J.1.25-31

First of all that couldn't be done by the subject teacher, because there are going to be things that they want to say that he will not want to hear… I just think it would be virtually impossible for a young person to say, 'I don't think your lessons are very good.'

<div align="right">L.4.31-36</div>

This extended often to the safe engagement by participants with their colleagues, and this was most marked for David and Lynn who carried more management responsibility. David saw staff feeling safe as key to them being able to engage with the messages within student voice, and also recognized that the working contexts could often leave colleagues open to more critical demand.

Yeah, and it's important that it isn't used as a stick to beat people with, you know? It needs to be a dialogue.

<div align="right">D.3.38-43</div>

Cos sometimes when you're embroiled in the daily life of what you do and you don't often have that chance .. you just kind a go 'Whey.. te te .. ah shit.' And it's almost brow beating if you just give raw results and go, 'Right this is what the students say and we are going to have to do something about it.'

<div align="right">D.4.27-30</div>

The results suggested that there was an issue with a particular member of staff, shall we say. … it's been quite difficult writing it up to try and make it positive, because … if you just present it a) I think that person will be totally switched off by the notion of student voice, she'll just go 'Well, what do they know.' … Then b) I can't ignore it.

<div align="right">D.5.0-5</div>

Lynn's approach was more challenging. She was keen for staff to be supported to engage with what emerged from student voice, but saw this as something that needed to be dealt with more directly once a focus was determined by management to be appropriate. Safety in this regard appeared to relate as much to the topic for focus being valid and checked out, as it was to avoiding staff being put under unreasonable pressure. It also reflected a desire to avoid creating a negative focus.

<div align="center">153</div>

So in that way we follow up, but by the same token we never take a student's word and then start tackling a member of staff. It would never work like that.

<div align="right">L.4.46-51</div>

Yeah, I wouldn't want them to say , 'Oh Mrs L's lessons are boring!' And then that's a tool for me to go and get a big stick and beat that person with.

<div align="right">L.1.6-10</div>

But the tack that we've never really taken is really speaking to the students, because sometimes you worry that by doing that will you incite some kind of ahm.. complaint. Will you work them up into some kind of complaint? Or make it seem like some sort of bigger deal than it could have been?

<div align="right">L.4.31-36</div>

Yeah. First of all that couldn't be done by the subject teacher, because there are going to be things that they want to say that he will not want to hear... And I haven't let the line manager do it, because she is very close with the teacher in question. So I thought it would be better if I stepped in and did it.

<div align="right">L.4.31-36</div>

4.4.1.2 Focus and Opportunity

The idea of 'focus and opportunity' influencing engagement through the

development of interest and clarity was also apparent across accounts.

Basically a learning process for us and for them as well. And to identify anything we can improve.. and basically we wanted their support. I mean that was how it was sort of marketed to them, and they were all quite keen actually.. and they all sat down and some of them started suggesting, 'Well you could do this.. more trips!'

<div align="right">S.2.0-5</div>

Well I wanted to get the ball rolling, because it is hard to get started, but now I've got half the cohort on board.

<div align="right">S.2.21-26</div>

And that was quite interesting, ahm.. and then I got some kind of quantitative evidence, so I gave them a survey to complete as well. So that if their views hadn't come across in the paired discussions that they'd had then they had another opportunity to do that.

<div align="right">D.6.0-6</div>

I mean obviously in that kind of situation when people feel they are going to be given a voice, we had a huge number of staff turn up, because they feel they are invested in

<div align="right">L.4.0-6</div>

But this was completely voluntary and so we weren't expecting a hugely great turn out, because people had done their one and all the rest of it, but obviously when we put the agenda out people said, 'Well I want to be at that meeting, come hell or high water.' It was definitely the agenda that pulled them in.

<div align="right">L.4.16-24</div>

4.4.1.3 Time

A third sub-theme with regard to *Enabling Engagement* was 'time'. Initially I was unsure where to place the issue of time, as to some extent it can be understood as a challenge in its own right; a challenge that runs through and sets the boundaries for all the themes in respect to practical considerations; or an element that fits better within one of the main themes. I have in the end chosen to position it as an element within the theme of *Enabling Engagement* on the basis that time only matters in so much as it allows us to do or not do certain things, and analysis of the accounts suggest that for the most part time was described as a practical issue related to the ability to engage with students in the process of student voice.

In general terms time was understood to set the boundaries for what was possible:

Well we've had a bit of staff absence and we've had other kinds of things that have pushed the agenda… to one side. Ahm.. because of other demands and having to get teaching sorted and stuff like that.. ahm. But we went down the electronic route which was much better in terms of time, efficiency etc.

<div align="right">D.5.7-14</div>

Every bit of spare time we've been trying to catch up with ourselves. And even before that I was really busy with the build-up to the exams, and I haven't done anything really solid or concrete. I mean I've done another questionnaire ... Other than that there's been nothing. I have been aware of wanting to do things but just that time element.

S.5.0-6

You can have the questionnaire and your focus group and all the rest of it, but if you're not actually doing anything with it (laughs), then you are just ticking a box. Which is the issue isn't it, because when you are really busy well then the data just sits there doesn't it (laughs).

J.3.50-56

I just think that with everything in teaching… it's often finding the time to really follow something through to the depths that you would like to, but you're just getting pulled in a thousand different directions.

L.2.37-42

In particular time influenced how readily staff and students could be engaged in planning for, engaging with, or reflecting on student voice:

And as a Faculty it's often that I want everyone together... but there's not really the chance to go and speak to different departments to talk about things that are pertinent to them.

D.5.23-28

I mean the time is a barrier to it. And like I said, one of them can find the time and want to do it, but it is the others with their conflicting roles and responsibilities… if they can actually find the time to do it.

S.2.15-21

But the focus groups were 20 minutes to half an hour, and they weren't long enough. So that's the bit that I've got to look at because that was the bit that was missed. Because she then went straight on and did the next bit.

J.2.5-10

This sense of there not being time to do student voice led to participants trying to creatively make time in order to allow it to take place:

But because this [SV] would be an issue for a subject, there is limited opportunity for me to engage in it. Unless I say, right we're not having a meeting and we're just going to meet with the history people.. ahm.. which I can probably easily do.. so perhaps that's the way I go about doing that.

<div align="right">D.6.10-15</div>

In some ways the best time to do it is in June, because it's when we are most free… more time to actually sit down and discuss it in more detail… and we can actually pull kids out of lessons and ask them.

<div align="right">S.1.20-26</div>

We are trying to do this through registration time.. because in terms of being sustainable which is really important to me, I can't see me being able to take people out of lessons.

<div align="right">J.2.10-15</div>

We could tie into some whole school. So for example we have ten hours of disaggregated cpd…we've got Faculty meetings... There are a host of ways of doing it as opposed to forcing people or encouraging people to volunteer.

<div align="right">L.1.30-36</div>

So we are in the process of me handing over a little bit more to him, because he does have far more capacity to do it. To give it the justice and the time it requires.

<div align="right">L.4.0-6</div>

4.4.1.4 Developing Skills

The final sub-theme identified in terms of *Enabling Engagement* focused around the issue of those involved in student voice 'developing skills' to enable the process. David's experience of being involved in a community youth council provided an additional perspective on the value of supporting young people to develop the skills to participate.

We spend a lot of time and energy investing in training them [young people] and having conversations with them… whereas if you just pick Harry off the street and ask them then... I mean I've got quite a big background in youth participation… And that [training young people] takes a lot of time and effort, and then they go and work with the Chief of the Council or the Service Managers. They don't just go, 'Boop' (laughs). I don't know if I like the idea of just pulling Jimmy out of a geography lesson to sit in a meeting…

D.5.17-23

Julie also noted how previous experience and the skills developed through this could support good student voice in the longer term.

And those students are now coming through into the sixth form, and I think the lessons that were learnt by that cohort of students, I think they do still exist in some of the stuff that David does with the council.

J.6.24-30

This led to her wanting to have a group of students established that she could work with over longer timescales. Related to the idea of developing skills were attempts to develop materials and resources that would allow for less experienced or less involved staff to engage in planned student voice.

So what I am thinking to maybe go alongside this is a PowerPoint for the person who is taking the focus group. To actually go through a series of questions. So that you do get that objectivity and then you also get the same questions being asked.

J.2.5-10

Lynn was particularly aware of the potential benefits of students being skilled in engaging with student voice in more active ways; and also of the risk of staff not necessarily having well developed understandings and skills to support the process:

And then they [the students] tallied whether it was an open or closed question. Again with that they needed training. So we did a few different types of tally, and that really helped the teacher and I have a much more informed discussion.

L.1.50-56

I think we have some people who are far advanced, and some people who aren't. And that is something I'll have to consider with other members of SLT in terms of how do we ensure that what is going on in each of our subject areas is appropriate and valid. So I do think we probably need to have a conversation first regarding what good student voice ought to look like.

L.2.11-20

Lynn was aware of the fact that senior managers were not necessarily the most experienced in developing student voice, and that she herself did not necessarily have all the answers. Finding a way to develop practice through collaborating and reflecting back was suggested as a possible way of supporting better practice.

In terms of, 'Okay we've identified a group for each of your departments. How are we going to really work and develop student voice to find out the things that need to improve for those students?' The problem is I'm not sure I know the answers myself. But I guess it's not about me training them, it's more of a discussion and us sharing good practice.

L.2.20-26

4.4.2 Something Bespoke

The second master theme, referred to as *Something Bespoke*, relates to previously described ideas of student voice needing to benefit those involved, and the fit with the professional and social reality of the context. Figure 17 provides an overview of the sub-themes and elements contained within this:
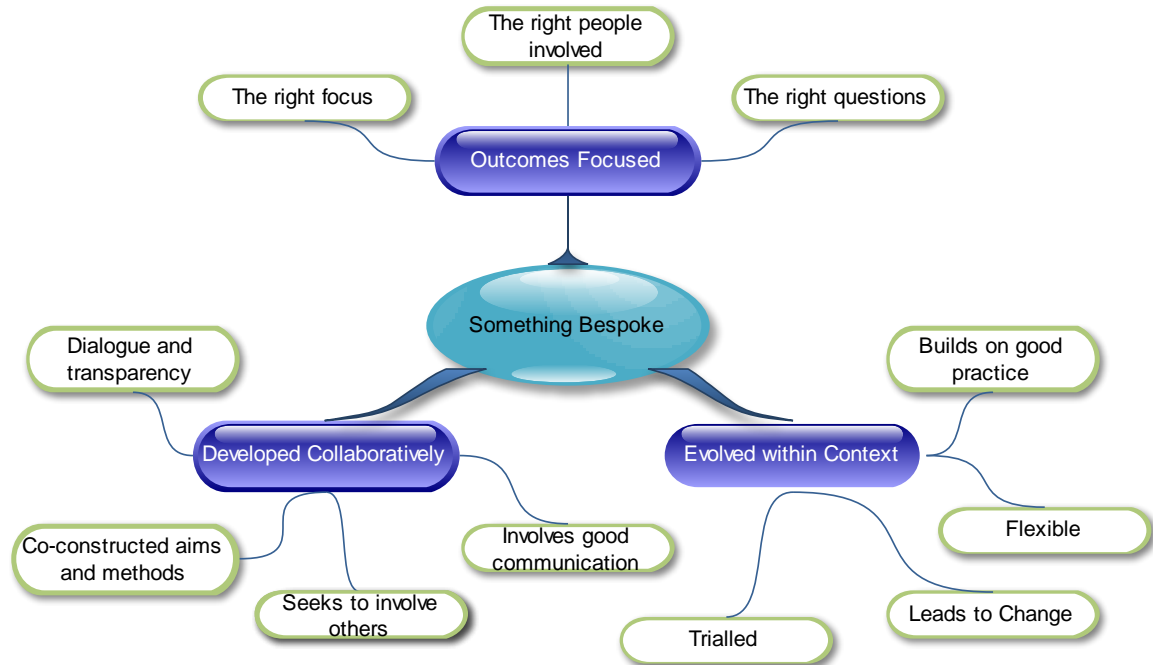

Figure 17- Summary of Sub-themes and Elements for 'Something Bespoke'

4.4.2.1 Developed Collaboratively

A shared sub-theme across all accounts related to both difficulties in engaging students in student voice, and responses that were attempts to differentiate to the students and their contexts. Personalizing the focus and process were commonly referred to as important in reducing the impact of any initial ambivalence by students, as was trying to create a climate of collaboration:

They got a chance to talk to each other, and that was quite useful because…they could say, 'I do that. I like it when...' …so it wasn't like, 'I demand this or I demand that.' … And obviously they can say, 'Well I want more of this,' but I can come back to them and say it's a budgetary issue or if it's about trips, 'Yeah but as a centre we have to keep the number of term time out of lessons to a minimum..' Blah blah blah. That sort of thing.

<div align="right">D.6.0-5</div>

I might speak to him about using that board a little more wisely… because you know sometimes if you run a tutor group and someone reads out lists, 'Ah, switch off.'

<div align="right">L.4.25-31</div>

I could give them a hand-out of the findings.. but again would they read it? Would it be a waste of paper? How would I know they had read it?

<div align="right">S.4.20-26</div>

So we can take something forward in September, to say, 'What do you need next? We've done this with you, what do you think you will need in September? This is what we would normally do, is this going to be the right pitch?'

<div align="right">J.6.0-6</div>

The idea that the agenda and process might need to compromise according to the needs and interests of those engaging has already been emphasized in exploring the characteristics of student voice (Question 1). For David, there was often a tension around balancing what he felt needed to happen with a belief that the process should be constructed out of the experiences the students shared:

I think I will need to tailor them to my needs, and look at what I can get out of them… We've talked about development…like a suggestions box but not really like that. Cos obviously we seek student views when we want them and when we organise a meeting for our survey when we try and make that dialogue a little more transparent and so that students can bring issues to our attention.

<div align="right">D.1.7-11</div>

As noted, the school improvement context was a significant factor for all the participants. Tailoring student voice work within this agenda was a collaborative

process for David:

> *It's about collaborating with those people [senior managers] to create the method. I don't know if that's the right word.. to make sure there are practices in place. To get those people together to co-construct.*
>
> *First…I'll need to have a rationale and an understanding as to why we are doing this, and then start the...development. We need to share our ideas about how that might happen. First why, then how.*
>
> <div align="right">D.2.8-15</div>

4.4.2.2 Evolved within Context

There was an acceptance across the accounts that the process needed to 'evolve within context':

> *We've had a few trials of various things, in terms of looking at student voice and looking at how we are going to use electronic systems to trying that out.*
>
> <div align="right">D.4.0-3</div>

Simon's sense of tailoring to context was more about matching the method or 'tool' to the task in mind, but also incorporated ideas of process and practice evolving over time.

> *I mean one of the things or one of the tools I would want to use is say there'd be short term ones and long term ones, and say medium term ones. So say a medium term one would be end of unit, like reflections of the student, breaking it down into the different component parts. So, how effective was this tool? How effectively did they learn from it? Would there be any changes they'd make, just in terms of the classes? So there'd be immediate feedback. And then that could be reviewed, and like work could be changed effectively to meet those needs... so I'd say that is like more medium term. Whereas your longer term ones you're looking more at say getting focus groups involved, and constantly challenging them to come up with ways that they would improve.*
>
> <div align="right">S.1.0-4</div>

Simon also saw the potential for change as context specific, and the need for students' participation to be flexible:

I think more things will change once I … get the students involved and I start on whatever we decide upon. I think things will change then… How quickly things change depends on everyone involved and what's being requested.

<div align="right">S.1.35-38</div>

It is very organic in what it's done.. it is more led by the, they are more involved … Like I said we've got ten of them. And it's not like you've got to come to every session, we say look if you can make it we'll be really happy, if you can't then fair enough we'll still have a number of people who can contribute. It's not like we're saying it's student A,B,C,D,E,F,G. It's voluntary and I think it works better that way.

<div align="right">S.3.9-15</div>

4.4.2.3 Outcomes Focused

Another sub-theme running across the accounts related to the idea of being 'outcomes focused'. For Julie there was often an emphasis on ensuring the right questions were identified in order to progress what was essentially an adult set agenda, associated with clearly stated desirable outcomes. As previously explored this frequently related for Julie to broader agendas, such as accreditation.

Because I can't see any difference between a Year 9 student and a Year 11 because I haven't framed my questions in a way that builds on what they should be able to do in terms of the outcomes.

<div align="right">J.1.0-5</div>

The agenda also set the parameters for who might be involved, and how many students needed to participate in which ways.

I don't need that many, so four tutor groups will probably be sufficient.

<div align="right">J.1.5-10</div>

Because all of the Year 9s have taken part in the questionnaires, but not necessarily all of the students in Year 9 took part in the focus groups.

<div align="right">J.2.26-32</div>

I think the idea of having questionnaires is to have a kind of quantifiable response from all the students, at least a significant percentage.

<div align="right">J.4.31-40</div>

Within this context there was still the idea of evolving process and practice, in that:

…maybe it would be one person delivering to 7, 8, and 9. So…the same person…would have free reign over the three year groups, … really committed to involving the students in lots of different things.

<div align="right">J.5.35-40</div>

Lynn's approach was also more tightly governed by an agenda of school improvement, but again the way in which this developed changed over time as a result of her own personal experience. The idea of colleagues learning from each other also featured as part of trying to evolve approaches that worked better.

I know I said we had this one vision, well I did. Ahm, and then I kind of jumped to something else, and jumped to something else. And I think the problem is I am trying to do it myself, which I think in my position is now not possible. So in the past couple of months I've been trying to work with other people, more strategically to try and get what I want to do off the ground, without me having to be at the heart of it.

<div align="right">L.3.0-5</div>

But it's just having the time to pull it in, and pull those people who are running the student panel together to do some of those things I've talked about in the past, like, 'How are you doing it? And what's working well? What's not?' And sharing some experiences rather than just let everyone just kind of forge on in their own way.

To be honest I know there are lots of pockets of really good practice, so it would be nice at some point to just pull it back and get those people together, and explore with those people what we're doing next.

<div align="right">L.3.33-38</div>

It probably does, it probably does. That is probably the area where it ought to sit [within department], and then maybe it is getting that to work better and more consistently, as opposed to trying to create something new or different.

<div align="right">L.4.46-51</div>

4.4.2.4 Further Reflection

Placing the Research Question 3 findings so far within the context of what participants understood SV to be, I would suggest that:

- It was at the junction between being 'outcomes focused' from an organizational perspective, and providing a 'focus and opportunity' that *enables engagement,* that much of the previously related tension emerged.
- It is the process of *collaboration and compromise* that diffuses at least some of this and allows for outcomes that are to the *benefit* of all.

The final master theme, however, reflects the difficulty often encountered by participants in making sense of what emerged through the student voice process.

4.4.3 Making Sense

Figure 18 below provides a summary overview of the final master theme, *Making Sense*, with respect to the challenges of developing the potential of student voice:

Figure 18- Summary of Sub-themes and Elements for 'Making Sense'

This theme was much more apparent in the accounts shared by David and Julie. Having reflected on the reasons for this, I think the fact that they were in effect taking on the role of intermediary between the students and their own colleagues created pressure in terms of needing to distil what emerged from the student voice process into key points that could then be acted on with confidence. The reality of there not being one voice but in fact many, some with overlapping messages and others with conflicting messages, made this task a very difficult one.

David identified how the different approaches used to evaluate teaching and learning, including student voice, could lead to contradictory conclusions.

… because looking at attainment in Year 13 and looking at some of the comments, you think well if those experiences had been different could that have impacted on attainment? But then if you bring lesson observations which we do by both myself, members of the SLT, and we had two inspections last year.. a geography specific inspection and a Local Authority inspection school wide inspection.. those came back quite positively.. ahm in terms of teaching and learning.

D.4.16-19

Julie saw student voice as being a crucial element in understanding what was going on within the teaching and learning process, and as being a more reliable indicator than observation by a colleague.

I've mentored PGCE students and…when they've got feedback from me I always say, 'What do you think they'd say?' And… they have engaged with questionnaires and talking to students and stuff like that… You'll probably get a much more honest opinion if you ask them.

J.6.40-46

Attempting to make sense of student voice brought a more critical focus to bear on the various methods employed, and questionnaires were regularly commented on as resulting in ambiguity and confusion.

The kind of feedback we have had back are things like, 'What is the distinction between some and not much.' (laughs) So.. ahm yeah (laughs).

J.1.25-31

Furthermore, when feedback was discussed with student representatives there was a sense that views were often quite group specific:

… what we realized a couple of years ago was that it is all kind of whatever the cohort likes.

J.4.16-21

For David questionnaires seemed often to polarise views:

It's…like when you go to customer service or whatever, and reviews. People either put, 'I've had a fantastic time,' or, 'I've had a really bad time.' And one in six have had a really bad time.

D.5.3-8

In addition to this David felt there was a risk that those who had an experience that wasn't extreme would be less motivated to respond:

… you go on these sort of Trip Advisors things.. and when you go on any of those things it's either because you've got an axe to grind, or you are really, really happy.. you don't go on if...

D.6.5-10

Related was the notion of needing some sort of representative spread of views, and enabling reasonable numbers of students to participate.

Yeah.. the geographers were kind of coerced into it.. 'Do it!' (laughs). And what I did was I kind of sent them out at points in the lesson.. the start or the end of the lesson.. we've got some computers outside, 'It'll only take a minute'. Whereas the history students… they were kind of left more to it.

D.6.5-10

I've gone away from the idea of asking more students to fill out questionnaires, and I've gone for student groups. So depending on what activities they're taking part in, I've asked different tutor groups on different weeks, so three tutor groups filling in the questionnaire and then on the following week a different three. So we're not working with 500 forms.

J.3.26-31

Familiarity with particular cohorts of students led Julie to note that:

…there is always a recurrent theme in student voice, depending on which year group it is. And one of the issues with Year 13 is we stopped giving out text books a couple of years ago because they weren't lasting, they were just falling to pieces it was too expensive. So we give out these photocopied packs…

<div align="right">J.4.21-27</div>

The individuality of this often led to frustration for Julie, as she found that students reported:

… 'Well I learn best like this.' So we change everything and next year we have, 'Well I learn best like this.' And we change it all back again. I just think you go round in circles sometimes.

<div align="right">J.4.21-27</div>

David also reflected regularly on how difficult it was to get it right for everyone involved.

… my Year 12s because I did something similar with them.. uhm they started talking to me about field trips and it's one of the questions … And I was saying, 'But you've got to remember that we've given you this opportunity but you've decided not to choose it'.. and they're saying 'Calm down Sir, you're getting a bit defensive!' (laughs). And I'm like 'Yes, you're right actually.' But you know the kids have had three opportunities for field trips and they haven't signed up to them, so arghhhhh!

<div align="right">D.3.10-15</div>

Figure 19 on the following page provides a full summary overview of the master

themes contained with regard to the challenges of developing student voice:
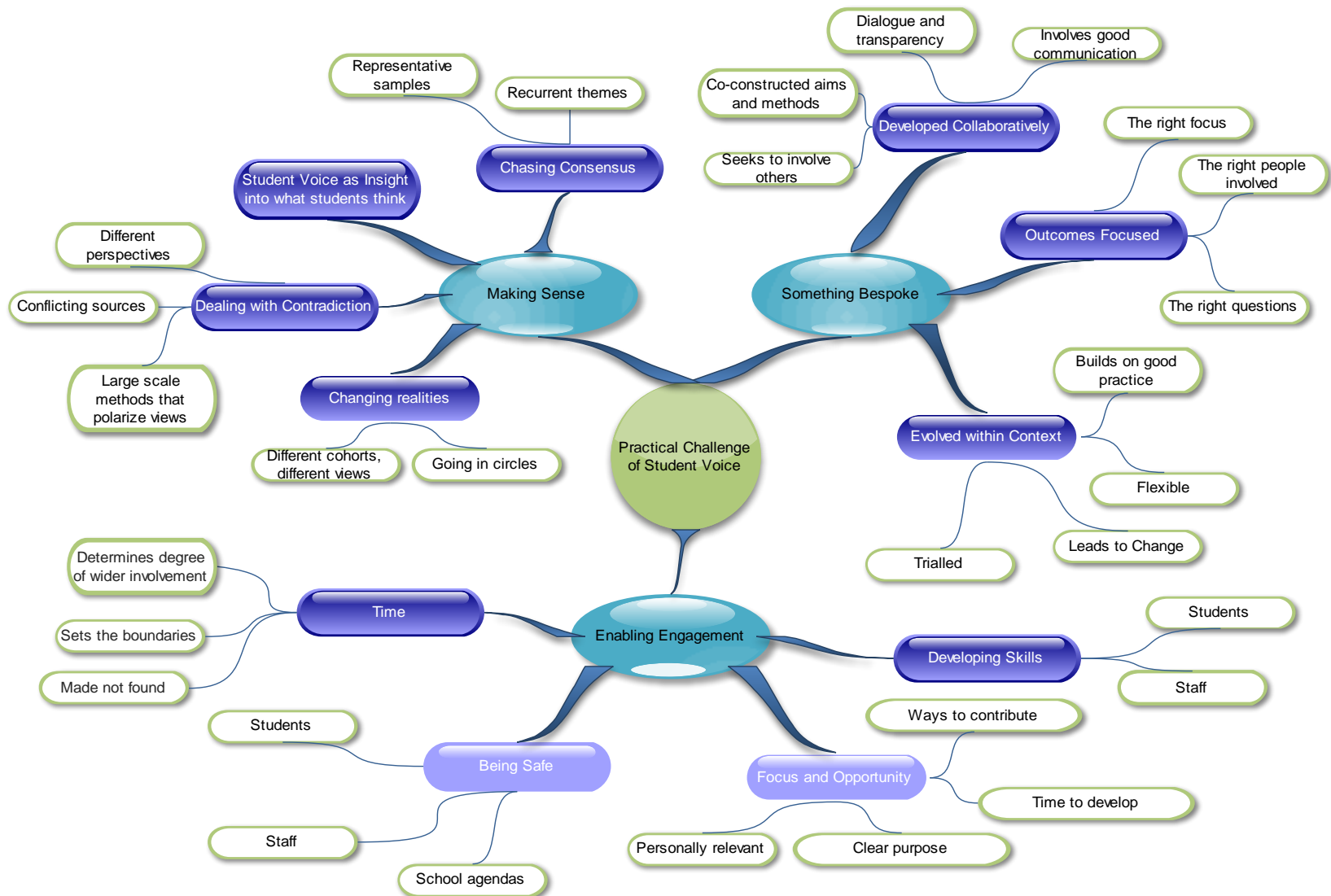
Figure 19- Summary of Master Themes and Sub-themes with Regard to the Practical Challenges of Developing Effective Student Voice

4.4.4 Some Interpretative Reflections

Emerging from my analysis of the accounts with respect to the practical challenges encountered in developing student voice, are three master themes:

- Enabling engagement- creating safe spaces and the opportunity for stakeholders to come together around relevant agendas; developing the skills to support this form of engagement; and making sufficient time available to allow it to happen
- Something bespoke- which involves refining the focus and process, evolved in the school context collaboratively with a broad range of directly involved stakeholders- students and staff
- Making sense- coping with multiple and often conflicting perspectives, and evolving out of these understandings that support change

Although disaggregated for the purposes of analysis these areas of challenge all interconnect and, depending on how they are resolved, appear to determine a great deal about the practice of student voice within any given context. Figure 20 below, in this sense, perhaps conceptually represents these challenges better than the previous more descriptive models.
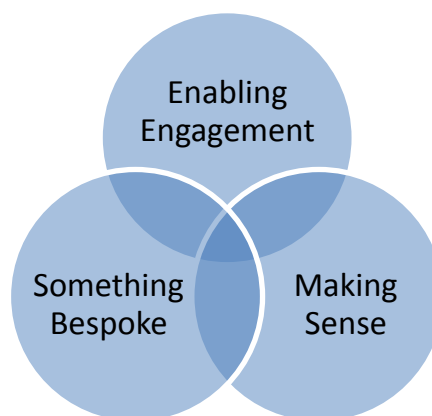

Figure 20- The interconnected nature of the identified practical challenges

In the last 5 years an increasing amount has been written about student voice from a postmodern perspective, and the influence of power within the process. One way of conceptualizing this would be to borrow from Noyes (2005) who observes that

'Power relates here not only to what is spoken, but who gets to say it and how it is 'said' (which includes action),' (op cit., p.537). I will come back to the issue of power in the final chapter, but given the practical focus adopted for this research question I want to maintain this stance now, looking instead at the idea of 'conditions' in which student voice is more likely to develop effectively.

Although many authors generally reference the conditions that help or hinder the development of student voice, few have provided an empirically based theorization of these. The idea of practical conditions was a key theoretical focus for Morgan (2007) who recognized this as a gap within the literature. In common with my own research context, Morgan worked with four teachers in a secondary school as they developed student voice practice, out of which emerged a conceptualization regarding the conditions that seemed most supportive of effective student voice practice. Mirroring my findings, Morgan's participants showed diversity in the specific purposes chosen for their consultations, ranging from gaining student perspectives on specific lesson activities through to the general aim of informing school policy. There was also a common theme regarding the consensus view that the process should not be demand led and needed to take into account teacher agendas.

By analysing the different purposes, activities undertaken and responses to student voice, Morgan suggested three ideas that appeared central to making sense of her findings. The least developed of these was the idea of relative costs and benefits for each of the participants, which resonates within my own accounts in terms of the well-articulated views that student voice must benefit those involved if it is to have any chance of embedding in practice. It appears to me to be key in enabling engagement and ensuring that developing practice is bespoke and therefore relevant to context. The idea of management influence has already been dealt with in the context of my own Question 2, and while my findings support Morgan's claims that management led approaches can lower the prioritization and investment by teachers, they also extend this by highlighting the potentially

conflicting agendas at play within school systems, and the level of teacher perceived threat as more formal and standardized approaches are adopted.

The third idea related to *conditions* that support classroom consultation. Morgan's conceptualization of these is shown in Figure 21:
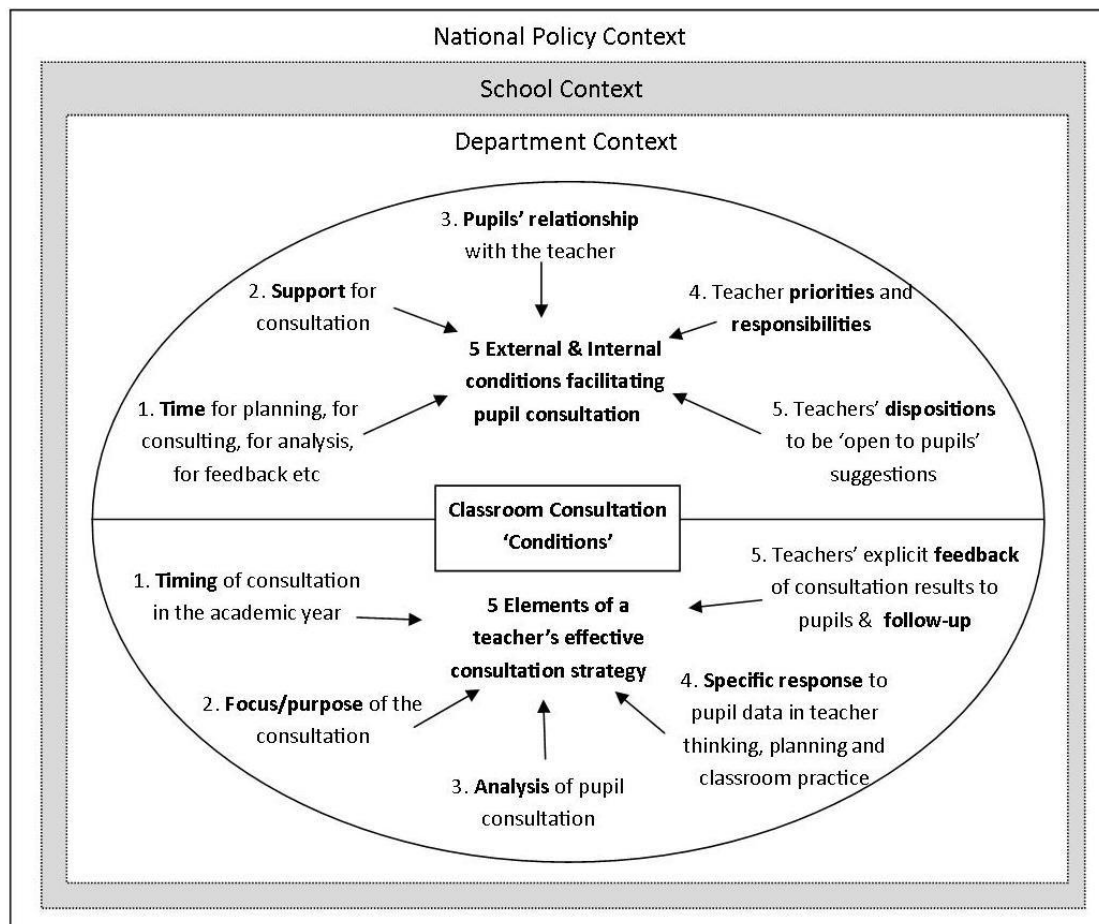

Figure 21- Morgan's Classroom Consultation Conditions (2007)

Ten key factors were identified that Morgan claimed could explain why consultation was more successful for one of her participants than for the other three. These were presented further as (i) five external and internal conditions that facilitated the active pursuit of student consultation; and (ii) five elements that characterized an effective consultation strategy. It was asserted that a combination of many of these, if not all of them, was necessary for classroom consultation to be effectively

undertaken. The wider contexts of school and national policies were also acknowledged as important in the provision of support for these conditions, as it has been in my conceptualization of accounts for Questions 1 and 2.

I was initially struck by how different the model I ended up with was to Morgan's. On reflecting on this I believe it is in part due to differences in methodology, my own approach perhaps more immersed in the personal experiences and less focused on the systems and resources that facilitate effective practice. While Morgan's presentation of the findings appear slightly removed from her participants' lived experience of student voice which perhaps allows the model to be applied more practically to the agenda of SV and school improvement, my own remains more grounded in the immediacy of what student voice was from the perspectives of the participants and may need further translation as a result. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses, with the potential to complement and extend understandings. The limitations of my own research will be reflected on in the final chapter (see p.186).

On further examination of the models, however, I realized that in terms of the factors described there was far more similarity than difference. Table 9 is an attempt to relate Morgan's conditions to my own themes and sub-themes with regard to the practical challenges discussed.

My Conceptualization re Practical Challenges	Morgan's Related Conditions re Effective Practice	
Enabling Engagement	*External and Internal Conditions*	*Elements of an Effective Consultation Strategy*
Being Safe • Students • Staff • School agenda	• Teacher-pupil relationship selection o Willing and able vs challenging • Teachers' disposition to be 'open' to pupils' suggestions	

Focus and Opportunity
• Personally relevant
• Clear agenda
• Time to develop
• Ways to contribute
	• Support for consultation
	   o Procedures and processes
	   o Advice
	   o Clear vision
	• Teachers' disposition to be 'open' to pupils' suggestions	

Developing Skills • Students • Staff	*Dealt with elsewhere in Morgan's research findings*	
Time • Made not found • Sets boundaries • Determines degree of wider involvement	• Time for planning, consultation, analysis, feedback.	• Timing of consultation in the academic year
Something Bespoke	*External and Internal Conditions*	*Elements of an Effective Consultation Strategy*

Developed collaboratively
• Dialogue and transparency
• Co-constructed aims and methods
• Seeks to involve others
• Involves good communication
	• Support for consultation
	   o Procedures and processes
	   o Advice
	   o Clear vision
		• Teachers' explicit feedback and follow-up

Evolved within context
• Trialled
• Leads to change
	• Support for consultation
	   o Procedures and processes
	   o Advice
		• Timing of consultation in the academic year
		   o Making time within context of other

Making Sense	External and Internal Conditions	Elements of an Effective Consultation Strategy

• Flexible
• Builds on good practice
	o Clear vision
	• Teacher priorities and responsibilities
	  o Competing demands, and needs related to performativity
		demands
		• Analysis of pupil consultation data
		  o Leading to insight and change
		• Specific response to pupil data
		  o Integrated into thinking, planning and practice

Outcomes focused
• The right focus
• The right people involved
• The right questions
	• Support for consultation
	  o Procedures and processes
	  o Advice
	  o Clear vision
		• Focus/purpose of the consultation
		  o Balancing pressure re performativity with opportunity to do something meaningful

Making Sense	*External and Internal Conditions*	*Elements of an Effective Consultation Strategy*
Dealing with contradiction • Different perspectives • Conflicting sources • Large scale methods that polarize views		• Analysis of pupil consultation data o Leading to insight and change
Changing realities • Different cohorts, different views • Going in circles	• Teachers' disposition to be 'open' to pupils' suggestions	
Chasing consensus • Representative samples • Recurrent themes		• Teachers' explicit feedback and follow-up
Student voice as insight • What students' think		• Analysis of pupil consultation data o Leading to insight and change

Table 9- Considering Morgan's (2007) Conditions in Relation to My Own Findings re Practical Challenges

It is difficult to confidently interpret another researcher's findings with any degree of specificity. For this reason I used the description shared in Morgan's original dissertation rather than just what was reported in her later 2009 paper on the subject, recognizing that even so only limited information was available without seeing more of the raw data. What appears to be highlighted by the comparison, however, is that there is significant support across the two projects.

My theme of *Enabling Engagement* is reflected in Morgan's' External and Internal Conditions. In relation to the sub-theme of *Being Safe*, Morgan too found the influences of time and relationship to be significant. The sub-theme of *focus and opportunity* perhaps extends Morgan's in the sense that it brings in more explicitly ideas of personal relevance and benefit- a topic that as mentioned she deals with separately. The 'Developing Skills' sub-theme in my data does not obviously have a corresponding part within Morgan's model, but does appear when she draws together her implications for school management (see p.145).

With regard to the *Something Bespoke* theme, Morgan's elements of support, feedback and follow-up, timing, analysis and response, all fit comfortably with my sub-themes of developing collaboratively, evolving within context, and being outcomes focused. Morgan's element of 'Support for Consultation' is extended within my theme through its emphasis on the construction and evolutions of focus and process.

More specificity emerges from my theme of *Making Sense,* and adds to what Morgan's model refers to as 'Analysis of Data'. Both models remain relatively underdeveloped in terms of suggesting how this can be undertaken, with my own extending the general principle of collaborative dialogue and a more constructionist approach.

I think it is noteworthy that so little is written about the process of making sense of student voice activity. When listening to the participants I was often struck by how difficult it was for them to come to a position given the contrasting and at times conflicting views they were encountering. Ingram (2013) explores how complex this can be even at the level of working with an individual student. She

approaches this from the perspective of an educational psychologist working with a young person within the school system where there are concerns. Ingram notes how a child's views may be interpreted in different ways and given different weight in the formulation of the difficulties. She notes that the different psychological theories that are employed make different assumptions about how to analyse the views. These variations are characterized as relating to:

- The degree of match or mismatch between the views of the child and an assumed objective truth about the real world;
- The correspondence between the child's expressed views and their 'real' views .

Ingram notes that any analysis could be experienced as disempowering if the view expressed is not taken at face value, but goes on to argue that an interpretation of the views need not be disempowering if it enables the young person in some respect and allows for them to challenge the conclusions drawn. The importance of being able to justify any interpretation and the need to be transparent and accountable with regard to the practice of gathering and analysing the views is stressed. An overarching critical realism framework is proposed as most appropriate for considering the views expressed as it allows for the possibility of a more objective reality, but acknowledges that this is socially constructed and will always be subject to error. This encourages the development of a broader knowledge base that can be used to consider the views expressed within a context, while also ensuring that there is an integral participatory process for young people. In other words it attempts to address the conflict between the roles of supporting participation and the analysis of the views.

A number of issues remain apparent, however, not leastly how we might ensure that there is always a transparent and robust rationale to support any analysis or recommendation. Ingram notes the principles outlined by Pawson and Tilley (1997) for 'participants'. These are that:

- Young people are invited to contribute views (theories) about what works well for them, and these theories are considered at face value as possible ideas for future intervention or change;

- Young people are invited to comment on the theories of the other participants (for example teachers or other students) as part of the overall process;

- Teachers in the context of this research would bring expertise based on the best available research which enable them to make interpretations beyond the scope of the experience of the young people. This might lead to changes that are different from those envisaged by the young people, but will be transparently justifiable and framed as testable theory;

- Theories of 'what works for whom in what circumstances' are refined through cycles of intervention.

Clearly much depends on a credible and theoretically coherent knowledge base being available to draw on, but also as importantly opportunities for the more dialogic approaches argued for in the literature. This brings into question the validity of larger scale student voice work as anything other than an initial sampling of views, at least in terms of it representing part of a collaborative and evolving process that allows for meaningful participation.

The core values Robinson and Taylor (2007) argue should be at the heart of student voice practice also fit well with the emergent findings. They include:

1. The requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity
2. A conception of communication as dialogue
3. The recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic
4. And the possibility for change and transformation

There are obvious parallels with my themes, the additional element being the recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic which I will deal with in the final chapter (p.197). These values, fitted with the Morgan's and my own model, perhaps offer an alternative framework for developing student voice process and practice, based on teacher perspectives and experiences rather than those of external professionals.

4.4.5 Summary

The characteristics of *Collaboration and Compromise*, *Developing and Evolving*, and employing *Different Types of student voice*, discussed as part of question one (see p.98) can be understood to set the context for the more practical considerations and challenges encountered.

Strongly apparent within the accounts was the challenge of engaging students on agendas that are meaningful to all involved (related to the SV characteristic of *Needs to Benefit)*. The accounts suggest that this requires personal involvement and collaboration over time with respect to a given area of focus. This in turn associates with my themes of 'Enabling Engagement' and 'Something Bespoke'. Furthermore there is the critical issue of how to translate what emerges into meaningful activity and change. This is particularly problematic where less dialogic approaches such as questionnaires are employed, which cast students as information providers rather than full participants in the process.

The challenge of 'Making Sense' is one that receives little attention in the literature, but potentially opens up ways of considering how to balance the views that inevitably emerge within the *Part of Something Bigger* characteristic described in question one. The idea of 'conditions' that support effective student voice appears a practically useful one, and future work would need to consider this operationally within the context of a fuller theoretical construction of what it is.

Chapter 5- Final Reflections

This chapter has three key aims:

- To reflect on the limitations and strengths inherent in the methodology and the way these impact on the findings;
- To discuss the major implications of the findings with respect to psychological theory and practice;
- To identify future directions for research in this area.

5.1 Study Limitations

This was an interpretative study by a relatively inexperienced practitioner researcher exploring an area that is loosely structured and poorly understood from an experiential perspective. The process of analysis has allowed me to feel confident in the validity of the findings presented (see p.190), but they are limited potentially by the context and my own skills and experience. The method design adopted is recognised as bringing further limitations in terms of:

- The case study approach- with its inherent weaknesses with regard to generalizability; focus on soft data; lack of clear boundaries; and researcher influence;
- Semi-structured interviewing- which makes cross case analysis and judging the reliability of the findings more challenging.

I have attempted to provide information throughout with regard to my own perspectives, how I managed the research process, and with respect to the hermeneutic cycle which allowed for iterative and increasingly interpretative reflection in regard to each research question. As noted by Larkin *et al.* (2006), the job we have as researchers is to do the most sensitive and responsive job we can, given our inherent epistemological and methodological weaknesses.

A number of factors were also identified in Chapter 3 with regard to the potential effects of carrying out interviews over time (p.67). It is clear to me that in addition to my own developing understandings with regard to the methodology and research focus, there were changes in terms of the relationship I had with each of the participants, and what they shared with me over time. Although I

tracked how ideas emerged across interviews it is not in my view possible to distinguish between what was down to developing or changing perspectives and what was down to the participants feeling more comfortable and able to communicate openly with me. I do feel, however, that the process of meeting over time led to increasing levels of reflection for both the participants and me, and that this was supportive of the research in general.

I also need to acknowledge that the initial mixed models approach, whereby I had hoped to have both an illuminative and an evaluative element to the research design, was flawed. I am uncertain as to the full impact of this as it was resolved early in the process of meeting with the participants. This may have resulted in some mixed messages at the outset, however, with regard to my research hopes which in turn may have influenced how each participant approached the project.

It is clear to me that as a participant within the research design I also influenced what emerged in a variety of other ways, and this was illustrated at intervals through the comments of all the participants. Take for example Julie's comment that the planning process I introduced had benefited her in developing ideas:

> *When we did the Leadership Pathways course we looked at different strategies for planning, and this* [Theory of Change] *actually does work. Very well, and I think if we took it to a group.. that you could see how it could be used.*
>
> <div align="right">J.1.45-50</div>

Lynn also made explicit references to things I had done as part of setting up the research, the following example relating to my use of focus groups:

> *So I envisage getting a cohort of interested people, and doing some kind of training and discussion with them. A bit like what you did with Year 9.*
>
> <div align="right">L.1.0-</div>

I was aware that my presence was creating pressure for Lynn to get things done, and that she in a sense felt the need to deliver:

It's just hard, because … I'm a bit of a perfectionist, and when I feel I haven't done something properly I find it difficult. …I had all these big ideas and good intentions. And then life just kind of took over, and you do worry and think, 'Oh God. Peter's coming in. I've not done this great thing that I've always wanted to do.'

L.3.46-53

I had the impression that Simon was the most independently minded in this respect, although he too showed a degree of wariness at times:

Yeah, I'm going to put it into a plan.. It's just I didn't want to do it and then for you to come in and go 'Nah, nah...', so yeah I'm going to do it as a step by step plan.

S.1.20-2

David appeared to see me as bringing an additional perspective to bear, and saw this as helpful to his own thinking:

… you get to actually think and consider the impact, and working alongside somebody else, because when you're sat and you're having a conversation with yourself in your head you don't always think of the things that other people can bring to the conversation and help you with. …you can run your ideas past people. But it's also quite useful have someone who's not involved in the day to day to give you a kind of perspective, a totally different perspective with a different outlook.

D.2.40-46

I found this quite surprising at times, and it was often comments like the following one that supported me to remain mindful of my own influence within the process:

That stuff that we did last time about a working definition was really helpful for me to get it ingrained in my head so that I can sit with confidence with other people and say this is what we're going to do…

D.3.0-6

I believe that these sorts of illustrations prevent me from being able to make absolute statements about the developments that took place being entirely led by the participants and therefore naturally occurring, as it is clear that I was having an influence despite trying to remain as neutral as possible within the process. I do, however, believe that the focus that developed for each participant was as far as possible free from my own preconceived ideas of effective practice and that the way in which this progressed, while influenced by me, was more substantially informed by the participants' own beliefs, interests and contexts of which I was a relatively small part.

5.2 Research Strengths

Some of the aforementioned weaknesses and limitations also represent strengths in the research design. In particular:

- The case study and semi-structured interview approach allowing for good flexibility of focus, a responsive attitude from me in terms of what emerged, and an in-depth exploration of the participant experiences;

- The timescale allowed for the development of more trusting and open relationships through which ideas and experiences could be shared, and resulted in me having greater confidence in terms of my interpretation of what was emerging;

- The focus on the participant perspectives and experiences, which is central to psychological study; and the process of interpretative analysis offered by IPA which helps to make explicit the key elements of those experiences.

As noted by Morgan (2011) there are limited accounts within the literature of student voice developments that are not more actively led and supported by external professionals, and this study makes that sort of contribution. Also as noted by Morgan (2007), there are very few studies that focus on developing a theoretical account of student voice from the perspective of teachers, and this I believe is the major contribution of my study.

Yardley (2000) considers the question of what criteria are appropriate for assessing the validity of qualitative research. She suggests four open-ended and flexible principles as a guide for doing this. It was my intention that the process and method described in Chapters 3 and 4 adhered to these principles as closely as possible, and that findings were therefore seen as trustworthy. A brief summary of points to illustrate this is offered against Yardley's criteria in Table 10:

Criteria	Things I Did to Try and to Ensure the Validity of the Findings
Sensitivity to context	- Process for engaging participants (Chapter 3) - Participant profiles (p.72) and outline of school context - Initial note taking (Appendix D) - Literature review in terms of reference to key sources, ideas, issues and debates (Chapter 2) - Reflections on Researcher-Participant relationships (p.187)
Commitment and rigour	- Engagement over time (18 months from start to finish) - Immersion in data as illustrated in Appendices D-G - Ability of participants to supply information in respect to research questions (Chapter 4) - Reflexivity re researcher skill development and evolving focus over time
Transparency and coherence	- Sharing of researcher professional perspective and experience (Chapter 1), and reflexivity throughout - Detailed description of research method in terms of espoused theory and actual practice (Chapters 3 & 4) - Illustrative description linking findings to interpretative claims (Chapters 4 & 5) - Arguments supporting claims with respect to research questions (Chapters 4 & 5)
Impact and importance	- Additions to existent literature and practice in terms of: - Models of student voice based on teacher perspectives (Chapter 4) - Links to theory that offers insight into the experience of developing student voice, and an alternative perspective on power within this process (Chapters 4 & 5) - Identification of areas where further research would be helpful (Chapters 4 & 5)

Table 10- Overview of evidence to support the claim that findings are valid using Yardley's (2000) principles

5.3 Research Implications and Theoretical Perspective

Integrating the findings that emerged with the research questions, I have outlined in Chapter 4 some models that allow me to reflect on how the actions and experiences of the involved teachers engaging in student voice can enrich our thinking about what it is and the factors that influence it. This was the overarching purpose of the research.

With respect to Question 1 which asked 'How do teachers understand Student Voice?' five main themes emerged from the participant accounts. These were:

- Part of something bigger- which highlighted that student voice was one of a number of voices, and that it was reflective of the context out of which it emerged;
- Need to benefit- which related to ideas that the participation of those involved should be acknowledged and recognized, and that it was important that this participation led to positive change;
- Developing and evolving- which drew attention to the unpredictable nature of SV and the need to be responsive to whatever emerges, while also highlighting the way in which it often becomes more focused and specific over the course of an engagement;
- Collaboration and compromise- which I understand as the engine room of the process as it related to the actual engagement and interaction between the staff and the students. Out of this develops insight and the planning of change, and through this the potential to negotiate and meet the needs of both staff and students in balance with one another;
- Different types- which acknowledges the diverse forms that student voice can take in terms of focus, scale and degree of formality.

It was clear across all the participant accounts that student voice had a very personal element to it, and that experiences resulted in a range of emotions covering surprise, worry, excitement, frustration and disappointment. What was notable was the skewing of emotion towards the less comfortable; and associated with this the strong sense of threat that seemed to characterize student voice for the participants. Threat related to perceptions of being judged by colleagues and students; the possibility of compromised practices being imposed; the challenge of dealing with conflicting views; the risk of opening up

issues that have no easy solution; and in response to these threats the possibility of unethical teacher responses.

Also apparent throughout accounts were the impact of the organizational context and the style of leadership in terms of the degree of autonomy it afforded individual staff. This in effect constrained the ability of teachers to make decisions based on their own values and belief systems, and the purpose for student voice emerged from this context. The actual practice of student voice then sat comfortably or uncomfortably with this.

Question 2 asked 'What is the potential for student voice?' As already acknowledged, this was a primary area of interest at the outset but it quickly became clear that a more evaluative focus would require me to compromise the illuminative dimension of the research. I therefore made the decision to concentrate on the illuminative aspects of the research, limiting the ways in which I could explore this question. I did maintain an interest throughout the process in terms of how participants developed student voice, and what anecdotal evidence of impact emerged through the accounts. This was used as a framework for reflecting on the question of *potential*. I noted that there were a number of drivers that informed student voice development that reflected organizational context, and the role and professional beliefs of the member of staff, but that the *Standards Agenda* was a hugely dominating influence in terms of what activity was valued and prioritized.

Although nothing conclusive can be claimed in terms of the impact student voice activity had, a number of areas emerged anecdotally through accounts suggesting that it can lead to:
- Changes in understanding- students and staff;
- Changes in behaviour and practice- students and staff;
- Changes in relationship;
- Development of student skills;
- Students feeling happier and more confident.

I observed that a number of key factors appeared to constrain the potential of student voice. These included:

a) The vision for student voice and how it is constructed within the school;

b) The degree of freedom staff have to develop student voice practice;

c) The support available to do this;

d) The extent to which the SMT and teacher led forms of student voice are compatible, and threat managed.

I noted that the type of potential that any given example of student voice might have would also depend on the focus for the student voice undertaken. The need for collaboration and dialogue at a conceptual and practical level was argued for. This was linked to the more critical and dialogic process approaches advocated by researchers such as Fielding (2004b) and Todd (2012), although I remain critical of these approaches in the absence of adequately conceptualized models of what student voice is and the factors that influence it, as in my experience it too often results in an overly critical view of teachers, or at least the activity that they undertake.

Question 3 asked 'What are the challenges in developing the potential of student voice?' Within the context of what emerged through Questions 1 and 2, three main practical challenge themes were identified:

• Enabling engagement- which emphasised the need to ensure staff and students felt safe; that there was a clear and personally relevant focus, and the opportunity to contribute; that support was available for staff and students to develop the skills required to participate; and that this was underpinned by adequate time being made available to participate in student voice activity;

• Something bespoke- which described the need to develop student voice collaboratively and transparently, through dialogue; that it should build on success, adapt flexibly within context, and result in change; and that it should be underpinned by an outcomes focus that allowed for the construction of a shared agenda, the involvement of the right participants, and the structure of the most suitable questions to guide discussion;

- Making sense- which requires those participating to deal with diverse and sometimes conflicting views; to respond to inconsistency and changing views over time; to appreciate that views represent an insight into experiences; and to work towards positions that can be supported by those participating, and in doing so lay the foundations for positive change.

These findings led me to reflect on the *conditions* that support effective student voice in schools, and I concluded that my own findings although expressed differently, support and add to the theorization of Morgan (2007).

The core values Robinson and Taylor (2007) assert should be at the heart of student voice practice also fitted well with the emergent findings. They consist of:

1. The requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity;
2. A conception of communication as dialogue;
3. The recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic;
4. And the possibility for change and transformation.

I argued that these values fitted with Morgan's and my own model perhaps offer an alternative framework for developing student voice process and practice, based on teacher perspectives rather than those of external professionals.

5.4 Further Interpretative Reflection

Larkin *et al.* (2006) offer three prompts for IPA developments, based on their understanding of the core concepts underpinning it. These are:

1. That IPA's phenomenological component should map out the participants' concerns and cares in the form of the experiences they claim for themselves;
2. That IPA's interpretative component contextualizes these claims within their cultural and physical environments, and then attempts to make sense of the mutually constitutive relationship between 'person' and 'world' from within a psychological framework;

3. That the overall outcome for the researcher should be renewed insight into the 'phenomenon at hand'- informed by the participant's own relatedness to, and engagement with, the phenomenon.

They argue that the relationship between the phenomenological and interpretative aspects of IPA are underdeveloped in the published research literature, and through the above prompts seek to encourage researchers to do justice to both components. I have attempted to do this to this point, and will now add to the discussion my views on how findings may be considered not only with psychological frameworks at the level of the participants, but also psychological theory more generally.

5.4.1 Threat-Defence, Power and the Organization of Behaviour

Several options occurred to me in reflecting on the findings that have emerged to this point. At a general level, and in regard to the characterization of what student voice is, it would be possible to explore the emergent findings within activity theory as described by Engeström (1999). I feel, however, that to do so would abstract me too far from the phenomenological accounts shared and would not do justice to the voices of the participants. As described, I have been struck by the emotional impact and perceptions of threat captured within participant accounts and how little is written about this in the literature. I considered looking very specifically at the literature on anxiety and stress, but again felt that there was a danger in this of reducing the psychological accounts down to something that, although potentially interesting, no longer reflected enough of the accounts. The emotional components, from my perspective, were not related to problematic or dysfunctional responses, but rather seemed to me a natural adaptation by the individual within context.

I refer in Chapter 4 (p.125) to the idea of threat response, for example Crittenden (2008). Crittenden contends that much of human behaviour can be understood as a response to threat, and that we all develop strategies that we will employ when under pressure. Whether or not these strategies are functional will depend on the context, and within her work on attachment and parent-child relations she asserts that the goal where there is dysfunction should be towards

extending the range of strategies available to the individual rather than just challenging the unhelpful behaviour. Again depending on the strategy this might involve recognizing both the cognitive and emotional components at play within the situation.

An area of the literature that I became interested in over the course of the research relates to power, and the way in which this influences what it is possible to achieve through student voice. Noyes (2005) notes that there is a very real danger that uncritical adoption of student voice approaches might reinforce existing hierarchies and undermine the potential of voice work. This issue of power disrupting the transformative potential of voice is often referenced back to Fielding (2004b), and Cook-Sather (2007) argues that:

> *"Because the challenges of liberatory voice work consist in large part to the ever-shifting, contextual and relational, and language- and cultural-based natures of identities and voices as they are constructed and played out within various webs of power and practice, we need conceptual frameworks within which to analyse the impositional potential of student voice work that foreground those same qualities."*

(Op cit., p.396)

The idea of the adults involved translating themselves and the messages emerging into these ever-shifting context variables, and striving to work with rather than focus on the students engaging with them in the process, is argued for. This would reduce rather than remove the risk of imposition, as there remains the danger of the adults transforming student responses into analytic themes and drawing conclusions that are framed by their ongoing assumptions and biases. How it becomes possible to draw any conclusions without employing or being influenced by underlying beliefs and assumptions is not explored and seems detached as an approach. An additional discomfort for me in this conceptualization is the casting of the adult as a contaminating influence or problem, and it seems to me that this is an overly reductionist assumption that ignores what many of the same authors assert, namely that student voice exists as one of part of a broader pedagogic voice and needs to be understood within this context.

Robinson and Taylor's most recent collaboration with respect to student voice and power (Robinson and Taylor, 2012) is an empirical research account that explores how student voice work is conditioned by dominant school agendas. The positioning of students in relation to the school culture opens up more grounded conceptualizations of the way in which the ideologies and values of key stakeholders come to dominate or at least constrain what is possible.

Through the analysis of findings from two student voice projects, Robinson and Taylor (2012) provide insight into how the voices of students can be co-opted. They considered power in the context of the complex interactions between institutional structures and teacher-student relations, and identified how aspects of overt and hidden domination can curtail the actions and voices of some individuals- particularly those outside of the mainstream culture. Their conclusion is that there was little evidence of student voice shifting unequal power relations within the schools, but that small, positive changes did take place, such as teachers placing greater value on listening to students. They suggest that perhaps it is possible for small scale and local shifts like these to transform cultural contexts, as the unsettling of power relations at a micro level transforms relationships over time.

The combination of these ideas of threat-defence and power led me to the work of Sherman and Cohen (2006), who review the literature supporting theory on the psychology of self-defence and self-affirmation. Based on theory exploring the psychology of self-defence (Steele, 1988) they note that people in contemporary society face innumerable failures and self-threats. In the case of the participants in this research I would suggest these included job performance and the standards agenda, critical feedback and management pressure, workload, and student behaviour. The assertion within this context is that a major undertaking for most people is to sustain self-integrity when faced with these threats and set-backs. This idea, referred to as ego-defensiveness, is noted by Sherman and Cohen to resonate both with psychological research and lay wisdom. They argue that an important question then concerns under which circumstances people are less ego-defensive and more open-minded. I would argue that it may be through this process of enabling open-mindedness that we might allow for a redistribution of power within context.

As noted, Steele (1988) first proposed the theory of self-affirmation, which Sherman and Cohen review and update the evidence for in their 2006 paper. There are four basic tenets of self-affirmation theory:

1. People are motivated to protect the perceived integrity and worth of the self;
2. Motivations to protect self-integrity can result in defensive responses- these may seem rational and defensible, but are more 'rationalizing' than 'rational';
3. The system is flexible- we can compensate for failures in one aspect of our lives by emphasizing successes in other domains;
4. People can be affirmed by engaging in activities that remind them of 'Who they are,' and doing so reduces the implications for self-integrity and allows for more open consideration of and engagement within threatening situations.

Sherman and Cohen suggest that self-affirmations lift people's self-evaluative concerns in the situation at hand and allow other motivations, such as the desire to empower young people and act on their concerns, to predominate. They note that there are likely to be a number of affective, cognitive and motivational processes acting in concert to produce self-affirmation effects, much of which can lie below the level of conscious awareness. I believe this is potentially why processes like solution focused working (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995), which seek to recognize examples of what is working and acknowledges and builds on strengths, work so well. Although I am less familiar with the operational specifics of the dialogic approaches referred to by Fielding (2004b), or the critical dialogue approach argued for by Todd (2012), my interpretation again is one of a respectful, appreciative, and collaborative approach that would allow for the process of self-affirmation, and therefore the reduction of risk and the opening of perspective and possibility.

By adding into the existing ideological literature better theoretical conceptualization of what student voice is and the conditions that enable it, and adequate contextual frameworks that include psychological theory in relation to

threat defence and self-affirmation, we have the opportunity to understand power and potential in more concrete and context sensitive ways. It allows for a more compassionate and balanced view of the teacher within student voice work, and in conjunction with reflective frameworks such as those argued for by Fielding and Todd, may support better student voice process in schools.

5.5 Future Directions

If the findings and arguments put forward are accepted as plausible, then opportunities now exist to further empower and inform the development of student voice in schools. In essence this would involve supporting the development of more *mindful* student voice that incorporates a process of supported reflection within a context sensitive framework. There is a danger at this point of compounding the issue raised by Morgan (2011), namely that the majority of student voice seems to be conducted or led by professionals external to the school setting, by suggesting that external professionals with both the theoretical knowledge and process skills argued for should take a lead in enabling this.

I believe that there are school support professionals, including Educational Psychologists, who could work in partnership with schools to this end. The reality however is that there is less and less capacity in the system for doing this in addition to the core statutory work commissioned by Local Authorities. The option will always be there to embed it within the everyday work that we do at an assessment, consultation and intervention level, and I hope to explore this further through my own role within the Local Authority I work for. A further option exists however in terms of providing training to school based partners who have an interest in this area. Very little of this kind of training is available in my experience, and professional development that provides the theoretical understandings, alongside the process skills and resources that can enable better practice, would potentially build more effective capacity over time. Training also provides potential income that would allow it to establish sustainably within support services that chose to develop it.

If student voice is to thrive over the coming decades, particularly in the current political climate, I believe that we need more coherent models that enable us to

talk more easily about its value and importance, as well as its potential contribution with regard to school improvement agendas. The argument to embed the idea of children participating more actively and give them opportunity to voice their views has been won in law (see Bragg (2007a) for a detailed overview of this), and this is reflected in current policy but only in a very limited way current practice. In line with the views of the participants in this research I would argue that we now need to recognize it as an interconnected *part of something bigger*, it *needs to benefit* those involved, it involves *collaboration and compromise*, it will *develop and evolve* organically, and it can take many *different forms*. Research that moves beyond seeing student voice as a methodological tool, a means to an end, or an ideological agenda, and which re-grounds student voice in everyday working school contexts as understood by those participating in those contexts stands the best chance, in my view, of moving things forward.

Although I have not commented to any real extent on the language associated with it, I do question the limiting potential of phrases such as *student* or *pupil voice* or *student* or *pupil consultation*. From a psychological perspective it is worth noting the advice offered by Cullen (2013) to aspiring psychologists in a recent edition of The Psychologist. He references a warning by R.S. Woodworth as long ago as 1921 with respect to 'menacing psychological nouns.' This is where we transform verbs such as remembering into 'memory', or thinking into 'thought'. Having done this we then search for the things we have just invented, instead of studying the 'activity' denoted by the verbs we started with. A return to basics may be of benefit to all, not least the young people at the heart of this concern.

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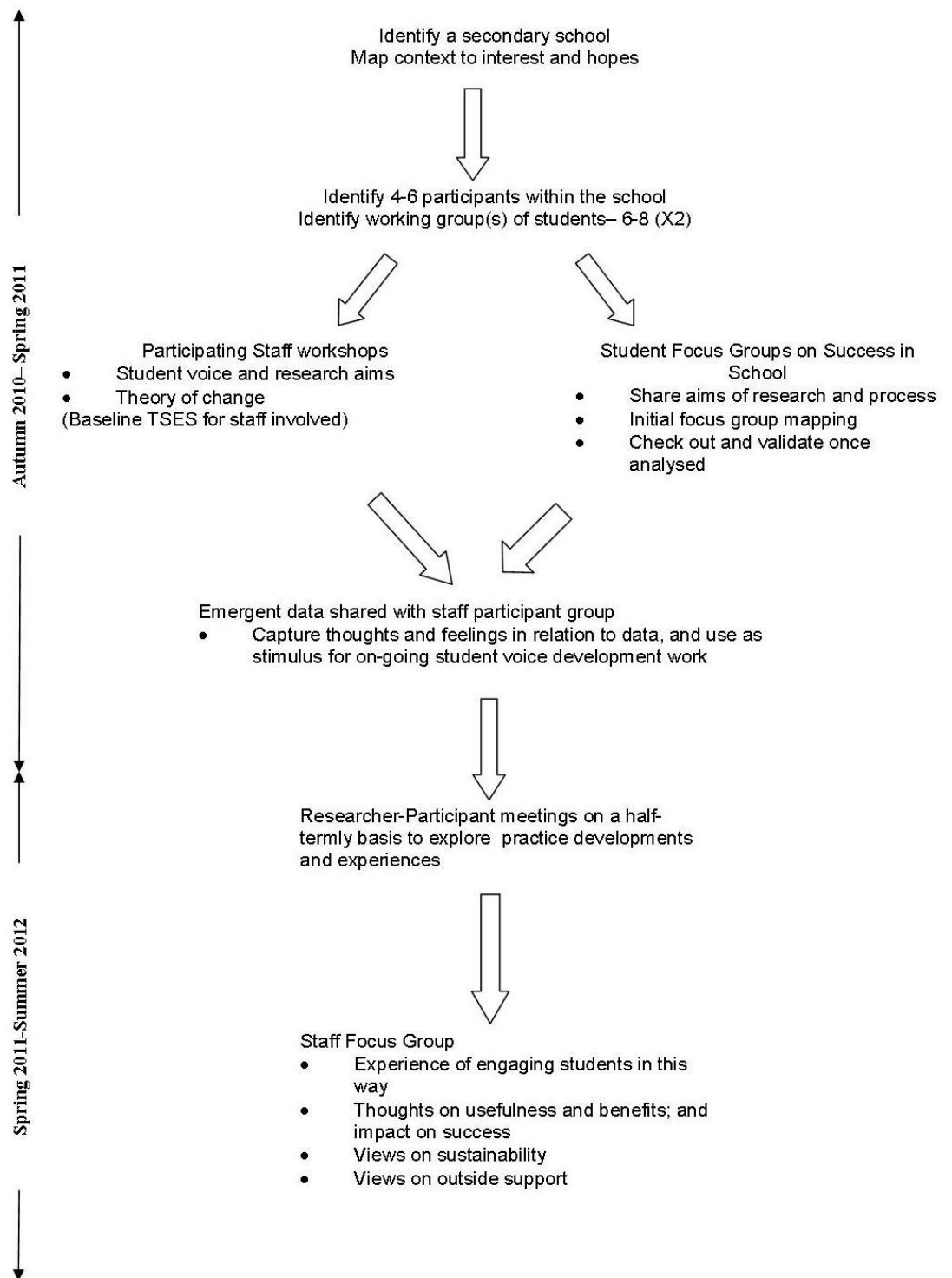
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Appendices

Appendix A- Table Summarizing Revisions to Research Questions

Original Research Questions	Revised Questions- July 2011
How do Year 9 students conceptualise success in school, and the factors influencing it? 1. Yes, although it is clearly limited to a relatively small number of Year 9 students 2. Yes, within a critical realist framework and the above context	This question was removed as an integral part of this study, and has been dealt with elsewhere as an area of interest in its own right.
How do staff understand and respond to pupil understandings of success? 1. Partially. Again limited to the involved staff, but unclear what they understand it in relation to- for example SV, student understandings of 'success', their own classroom practice. 2. In only a very limited way, given lack of clarity around the question and the detached way in which the process enabled engagement	I felt that a change of question was unlikely to help much at this stage and an alternative question instead had emerged and was agreed: **What do the actions and experiences of the involved staff suggest about how student voice is understood?**
How can a framework like this be used to develop student voice, and what impact will it have on practice? 1. No. Not 'evaluating' an intervention, rather illuminating experience and process. Conflicted in proposal and needs resolving 2. Partial at best until question refined	**How can SV be developed by individual teachers, and what does their experience of this suggest about factors that influence SV within their own specific context?** **What does the experience suggest about the impact of SV from the individual's perspective?**
What does the experience of activities and outcomes suggest in terms of: • **The sustainability of teacher-pupil dialogue within a Secondary School?** • **The role of outside professionals such as EPs?** 1. Again needs qualifying 2. Yes in respect to the first and maybe the second bullet if planned carefully. 'Sustainability' needs defining- i.e. current approaches in school are sustainable but are they meaningful?	**What does the individual and collective teacher experience of activities, process and outcomes suggest in terms of:** • **The development of meaningful teacher-student dialogue within that context?** • **The role of professionals such as myself in supporting staff within this context?**

Appendix B- Process Outline

Identify a secondary school
Map context to interest and hopes

Identify 4-6 participants within the school
Identify working group(s) of students– 6-8 (X2)

Participating Staff workshops
- Student voice and research aims
- Theory of change
(Baseline TSES for staff involved)

Student Focus Groups on Success in School
- Share aims of research and process
- Initial focus group mapping
- Check out and validate once analysed

Emergent data shared with staff participant group
- Capture thoughts and feelings in relation to data, and use as stimulus for on-going student voice development work

Researcher-Participant meetings on a half-termly basis to explore practice developments and experiences

Staff Focus Group
- Experience of engaging students in this way
- Thoughts on usefulness and benefits; and impact on success
- Views on sustainability
- Views on outside support

Appendix C- Consent Form and Parent Letter

Dear **Parent/Carer name**

Pupil Voice Research and Development Project

As you may be aware, XXXXXXX College is exploring how they can best promote the emotional wellbeing and effective learning of all pupils who attend there. Over the next 3 terms I hope to work with a small number of staff, developing ideas to support work in the classroom in this respect.

This work will involve listening to what students have to say about their experience of success in school. I plan to set up several meetings with groups of six to eight Year 9 students in each. In each meeting a combination of practical activity and discussion will be used to explore their views. These views will then be developed into understandings that can inform teacher planning, and lead to ongoing dialogue between the staff involved and students around the area of effective learning. The impact of this will be evaluated from both the teacher and student perspective at the end of this process.

The meetings with the students will be recorded to support the analysis of what they say. Findings would also be used as part of wider doctorate research within this area, and full anonymity is guaranteed in this respect. I hope that the initial meetings with students will take place in early January, within school and during the normal school day.

If you are happy for your child to be involved in this project, please sign the form below and return it to school by **DATE**. The students themselves will be given the option to participate or not as they wish and it is entirely voluntary in this respect. Mrs XXXXX, Assistant Head Teacher, is my main link person within the school, and if you would like further information please feel free to contact either her or myself. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely

Peter Mulholland
Area Senior Educational Psychologist
For the Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services

Participant Consent- Parent

Name of Young Person _____

I hereby give consent for the above young person to take part in small group research in the spring term 2011 at XXXXXXXX College. This will conclude during the autumn term 2011. I understand that the information gathered as part of this process will be anonymised but will be used within school and as part of doctorate research with Newcastle University to better inform practice within the area of pupil voice and effective learning.

Signed _____

Relationship _____

Please return to:
   Mrs XXXXXXX, Assistant Head Teacher
   XXXXXXXX College

Participant Consent- Staff

Pupil Voice Research and Development Project

I understand that by signing this form my anonymised views and any other data collected as part of this research and development project will be used for the purposes explained to me by Peter Mulholland, Researcher and Durham Educational Psychologist

Signature: _____

I would like to be provided with a written summary of this research once it has been concluded

Thank you

Yes	No

Int 4 ▇▇▇ 14.12.11

Timespan	Content	Initial Notes
0:00.0 - 6:23.4	Res recap and query as to what has been happening	

Well we had a meeting (focus group), and a couple of them shall we say brought in a couple of ideas of what they thought it (feedback sheet) could look like. And we mocked up one ..ahm.. and gave them one essay with some feedback.. and then just like say informally some of them involved in the group said this bit was good, this bit was ahm didn't really benefit us in any way. I mean they were getting involved ahm... a lot of the other students in the class in some ways were apathetic towards it all.. but I don't think in terms of those that involved within the group.. like within.. that come to the focus group say.. they were making a lot more use of it because they now know the process behind it. And I think it's quite interesting in terms of the change in what I am trying to do.. and it's. Whilst the process has been said and shared with them about the feedback and lack of feedback. Or the lack of the use of the feedback I should say.. they haven't actually interpreted that as 'I've got to actually pay attention to what feedback I've been given.' So I don't think it's been as effective.. And then I've found that by talking to them they would prefer like immediate feedback to writing say a paragraph. Immediate feedback on that.. so instead of even having any paperwork behind it, it's been them writing a paragraph or a relative point on an exam question.. and as a group peer assessment and peer marking it.. and then getting them to read out (laughs).. and me at the front saying stop there.. What does everyone feel that that would be given in terms of ahm.. because they've been taught all the levels and how to mark it.. then incorporating the discussion from there in terms of the feedback. And they seem to actually, in terms of the feedback, they like that immediate response and they like the oral response as opposed to a written response. But obviously in terms of can you sit down and give individual feedback to every single student then no you can't. Even with that process you are sort of hitting about half the students in the lesson, and you are may be trying to hit different paragraphs. So I haven't (laughs). I haven't got an answer to how

to develop.. and will it improve results? I don't know. Have I seen an improvement in their writing styles? Yes. They now understand more how to hit the levels that they need in the exam. But is that because it's in a class situation or a homework situation? How will they do in the actual exam situation? Will it all go out the window? Until I get my marks in March I don't know.

Res reflecting back tension expressed between doing what the students want [redacted] to do and the fact that this does not allow them all to access feedback consistently, which [redacted] feels they need.

Well there are one on one mentoring sessions that they can actually come along to with a piece of work, and we can talk them through it. I mean that is all we are able to do.. and it is more a voluntary basis.. we can target people with these one to one sessions as well.. if we feel the need to. But as I said it's still not even that's not even a band aid to cover everybody.

Res query whether [redacted] has other thoughts on this

I mean obviously in terms of the immediate feedback, there is in terms of the lesson idea. The feedback within that and actually trying to get them to learn from others statements, and how others have achieved level 4s. So in some ways it's like.. I don't know.. proximal development in a way. Where they are all learning from the people around them, and in some ways trying to scaffold their whole answers into that framework that... I honestly.. I don't know. I can do it in lessons but I can't give that immediate feedback if they submit an essay.

Because if they are doing a 40 mark essay.. I can't go through go through each essay and say: right start reading, stop, what's that bit, stop. It is not effective, and that's why I'm trying to also continue with these feedback forms, and the essay feedback forms.

Res asking what message [redacted] feels the students are giving

It's not that they don't like them. The ones that are involved in the group.. they like the idea behind them. Because basically there's a ticky box 'You've done this. You've done this. You've done this.' Ticky box checklists and then there is another box that says this is

Left margin annotations (handwritten):

- Uncertainty that doing what students want will improve things
- Right created by trying to respond to student views that aren't producing
- Ideas of conditioning learning socially
- Sense of personal responsibility
- Tension of trying to respond to views that are not produced
- Need to justify own views

6:23.4 - 11:20.8

Right margin annotations (handwritten):

- Uncertainty that will improve results
  - impact on writing styles
  - develop understanding of how to hit levels
  - questioning whether will generate to exam situation
  - marks in March will reveal
- Trying to create opps for anyone to student views
  - that is all we are able to do
  - not even a band aid to cover everybody
- Ideas of: nature + agency — need for care + intervention
- Possibility of learning from others (all slipping)
  - trying to get them to learn from...
  - ↳ idea of having to push or force them
  - learn almost against their will
  - as pivotal — sense of personal responsibility ↳ moral
- Tension between assumed good pedagogy & what students want
  - not of it not being 'effective'
  - force to get own ideas into play
  - ↳ It's not that they don't like them

Appendix E- Example of how emergent themes were organized
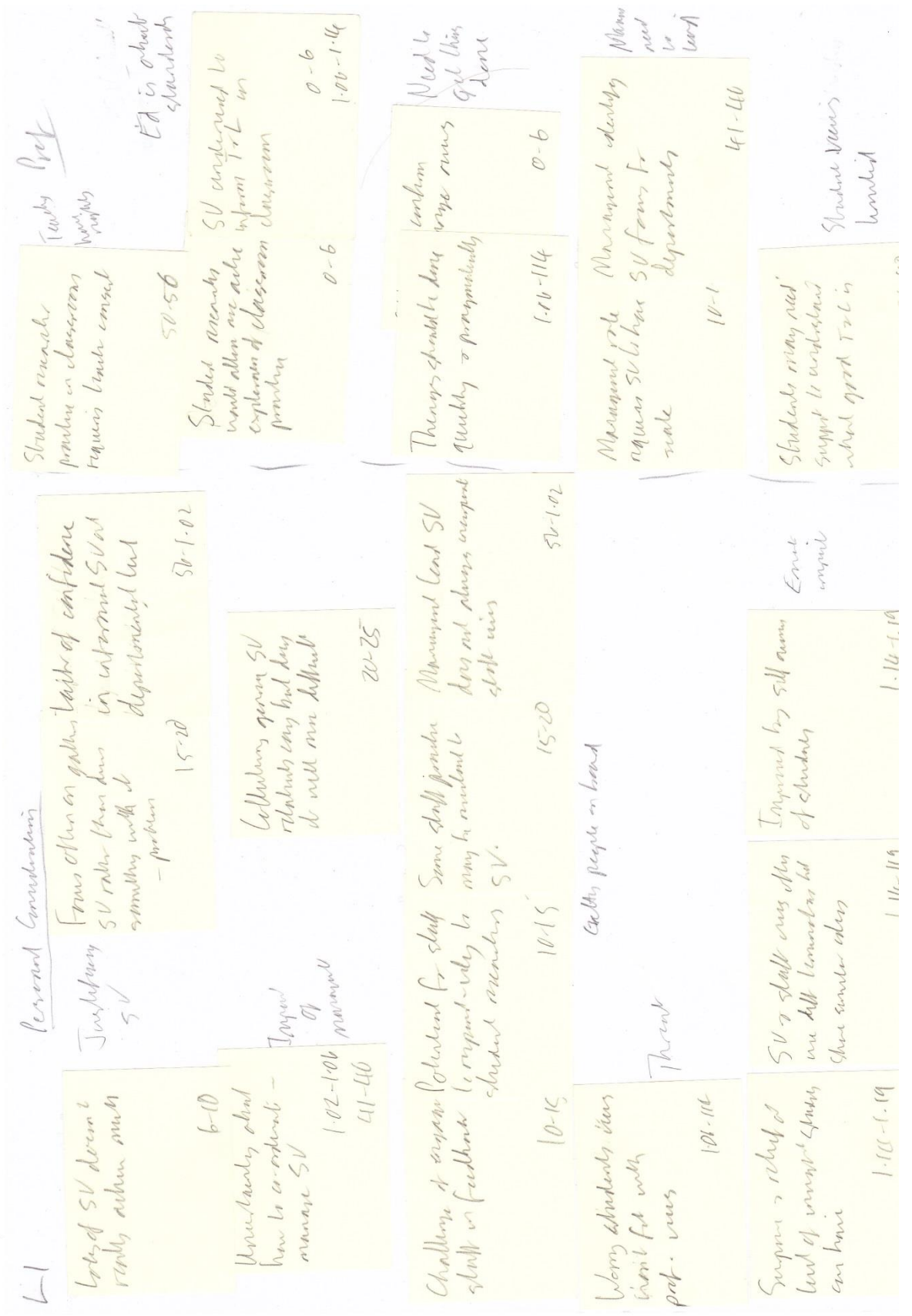
Appendix F- Example of Participant Summary Table for Practical Challenges

Interview Number	Superordinate Themes	Emergent Themes	Reference (time)	Keywords
1	Something bespoke	SV requires written and verbal feedback	0-5	So just having a questionnaire or just having a focus group.. neither is sufficient. I think it needs to be both
		Timing of SV affects who benefits	5-10	That will give me the written feedback I need for this year. Which isn't very useful for the students who are currently leaving
		Process pointless if wring questions asked	5-10	I do need to make sure I have the right information. Because if you put out a questionnaire and it doesn't give you what you need to know. It's pointless isn't it
		Questionnaires need to be designed to fit purpose	0-5	Because I can't see any difference between a Year 9 student and a Year 11 because I haven't framed my questions in a way that builds on what they should be able to do in terms of the outcomes
		Different tools and timescales for different purposes	15-20	Do I do it at the end of a topic? Do I do it at the start and then I can see progress at the end? Or do I do it every lesson. I think it depends on what I am using
		Questionnaires designed with a desirable outcome in mind	25-31	So you can see clear progression (through the responses)
		Developing scale involves standardising scale and involving others	5-10	But I still haven't got to the point where I have actually involved other people in the process
		Sufficient samples of views when dealing with large cohorts	25-31	I don't need that many, so four tutor groups will probably be sufficient
		Benefit of working with others to develop SV	25-31	And I think that is probably why the process has really been helping, because I've been working on two fronts. I've been working with yourself but I've been working with Connexions and my assistant. And together we are sort of coming…
	Enabling engagement	Anonymised, easy access and short questionnaires enable more students to complete them	25-31	If you make a child put their name on it will they give you an honest response?,,,, and I said I want it to be very simplistic, short.. very

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		Involving others requires a clear focus and good organisation	40-45	Particularly this year because I am trying to explain what I want to somebody else, and that's made me really focus because that person needed to understand what I wanted
		Involvement of other staff can cause delay	49-57	I'm still waiting for one tutor group….that's another issue…. If you are relying on other people
	Making sense	Questionnaire responses can be ambiguous	25-31	What is the distinction between 'Some' and 'Not much'?
	Time	More active forms of SV require additional effort	10-15	But I probably won't take that extra step until I know I am getting regular information…. So I need to do this before
2	Something bespoke	Focus groups allow discussion	5-10	The idea of a focus group is that they talk about their career's journeys
		Questionnaires allow larger numbers to contribute views	26-31	Because all of the Year 9s have taken part in the questionnaires, but not necessarily all of the students in Year 9 took part in the focus groups
		Importance of thinking through design of questionnaires to get what you want	31-38 (4)	I've never really gotten what I wanted from it, and so I keep changing it. But I've never had the opportunity to before to really sit and think it through
	Time	Takes time to develop discussion with students	5-10	But the focus groups were 20 minutes to half an hour, and they weren't long enough
		Pressure of Timetable constrains SV options	10-15	We are trying to do this through registration time.. because in terms of being sustainable which is really important to me, I can't see me being able to take people out of lessons
			10-15	And then it wouldn't be sustainable. What we would end up with is piles of recordings that would never be listened to
		More complete summarising of discussion wouldn't be sustainable	26-31	But if I am analysing them by hand (laughs) I'm not going to ask for every person to do it, I'm going to do a selection
		Time and effort required constrains numbers who can take part	26-31 31-38	So it was using the same…. It was using the same format, but what she did was record some of the….
		Standardisation reduces effort required to collect views		I have all the documentation in virtual forms, so I can go in very easily and change
	Making sense	Large amounts of data harder to manage	26-31	it's confusing me because it's all on double

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		and track		backed paper
3	Something bespoke	Organised SV needs a structure, sufficient time and good questions	15-20	And it needs a structure to go with it, and it needs that extra time. But there are some issues maybe with some of the questions
		Needs a structure so that you know when to do things by	35-40	So it's about having a structure as well in the year so that we know when to do these things
		Supported by having the right product tools	35-40	It doesn't necessarily mean that it is perfect, and it does need some tweaking, but you don't have to worry about it because the next time I need to put a questionnaire out I've got one (laughs)….it's easier for A as well
		Need to think through what you are doing	35-40	What was happening in the past was everything was done in a bit of a rush….so you are not really thinking through what you are doing
	Time	Practical constraints of timing, realistic options, and limited support	0-5	Completely different (process) and a different type of time of year as well because we've tried to run sessions this term, but of course it is too early….but there aren't a lot of apprenticeships out there
		Busyness impacts on ability to analyse data and do something with it	50-56	Because when you are really busy well then the data just sits there doesn't it (laughs)
	Making sense	Sampling views more manageable when dealing with large numbers	26-32	I've asked different tutor groups on different weeks….so we're not working with 500 forms
4	Something bespoke	Questionnaires provide a quantifiable snapshot	31-40	I think the idea of having questionnaires is to have a kind of quantifiable response from all the students, at least a significant percentage
		Focus groups allow a deeper exploration of views, 'why', and options	31-40 40-48	But I think the focus groups offer something a bit different, because you can dig a bit deeper So I am interested in understanding…. 'why'
		Process of starting with questionnaires and then moving on to focus groups	40-48	And also we can use the focus groups to think a bit more about the things we could change
	Making sense	What students want is often group specific	16-21	But what we realised a couple of years ago was that it was all kind of whatever the cohort likes
		Can be recurrent themes in SV from certain groups	21-27	You know there is always a recurrent theme in student voice depending on which group it is
5	Something bespoke	Targeting perspectives for particular	0-6	The Year 13 students would be the best

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		purposes		placed to tell us what might work in June
			0-6	However saying that, the change is already afoot. So I think it's about saying to the Year 13s this year we are going to do it slightly different…
		Groups not always benefitting from own SV		
			20-25	
		Timing of student involvement often close to when decisions need to be made		But the think with students is we tend to not make them aware of anything until very near to the time
			35-40	
		Having key staff to co-ordinate SV might enable better engagement and empowerment		But next year….we're thinking that maybe it would be one person delivering to 7, 8, and 9. So it would be the same person who would have free reign over the three year groups, who would be really committed to involving the students in lots of different things
	Enabling engagement	Can be difficult to engage students voluntarily	25-30	We have put notices up before, and we've asked for volunteers to come along…
			25-30	
		Accessing students a practical challenge		So it's about which students you can ….let out of lessons and all that stuff. And particularly on this site they don't tend to do things voluntarily
	Time	Wider staff responsibility affects time available and what is possible	10-15	It depends on my teaching commitment….if I've got very little teaching then I can probably do…
6	Something bespoke	More immediate timescale and opportunities would allow students to benefit from own SV	0-6	There is an opportunity when they've done the first few weeks to gauge their opinion for September
			6-10	
		Benefit of specific group of students who can work together with staff on particular agendas		I still think ideally I would like my own group that are dedicated. Not just careers but maybe that whole pastoral cohort
	Enabling engagement	Risk of some students always contributing	6-10	But the more you ask the students to do, the more danger you have that you get the same students all the time. There only a limited number who are willing to give up time and commitment…

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Appendix G- Summary Table for Characteristics of Student Voice

Characteristics of SV	David	Simon	Julie	Lynn
Collaboration and Compromise	• Staff collaboration • Value and involve • Dialogue not demand • Informal direct SV best • Coming to terms	• Focus developing out of tension • Focus and tension leading to goals • Collaboration and empowerment • Dialogue and change • Involving	• Involving • Developing focus • Dialogue and change • Accountability • Compromise • Depersonalised and safe	• Balancing views and needs/Involving • Dialogue and change • Accountability • Focus and purpose
Developing and evolving	• Being responsive • Taking action • Developing focus	• Developing shared focus • Being responsive • Uncertain and organic • Reviewed	• Reviewed • Responsive to context • Integrated • Increasing skills • Developing focus • Sustainable process	• Learning and insight • Determining focus • Managed and led
Needs to benefit	• Leads to change • Real	• Personal gain for students • Better achievement and enjoyment	• Leads to change • Personal gain for students and staff • Sense of empowerment • Potential benefit for all	• Better attainment • Leads to change • Cost effective cpd
Different types of SV	• Informal dialogue • Survey data sets context • Combination best	• Fitted to context • Dialogue and conversation • Survey	• Evaluates and informs • Continuum between information and involvement • Focused on academic, personal or other • Work at different	• Different forms, different focus • Checking out • Includes responding to individual concerns • More or less formal • Focus determines level of student

			scales- small best	control
			• More of less formal	
			• School centric vs student centric	
Part of something bigger	• Not just about attainment • Part of school improvement • Reflects context and method • Part of stakeholder voice • Embedded in relationships	• Reflects teacher voice • Reflects context • Embedded in relationships	• Part of stakeholder voice • Reflects context • Reflects culture and ethos • Embedded in relationships	• Part of stakeholder voice