Getting involved from the word go: students as researchers in the first year undergraduate experience.

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'Seeing the Signs' Project

- A project funded by Northumbria University's research-informed teaching initiative.

- Focuses on some of the ways in which students have been encouraged to think of themselves as apprentice or developing researchers in the early stages of their undergraduate studies.

Focus of the project

- On introductory modules, large numbers of students became involved in EBL/project work which actively engages them in

  - Collection and analysis of authentic data relevant to their subject area
  - Working in teams to try out their ideas, debate and encounter different theoretical perspectives and controversy
  - Student conferencing and dissemination of their work-in-progress
  - Publishing their findings in informal settings for a diverse range of audiences
  - Networking and building effective research communities
  - Contributing to their discipline
  - Working across disciplinary boundaries to explore educational issues
  - Co-presenting in staff-student partnerships at academic conferences

Case study 1: Signs of Childhood

- Year-long key theoretical module
- Essay-based field
- Interdisciplinary
- MEDAL project work had already identified some key challenges in developing students' academic literacy in this area
  - CS less 'bounded' than some subject areas →challenging student experience

Why use Enquiry-Based Learning (EBL)?

- To encourage students to adopt a model of active studentship
  - Reframe learning as a matter of active enquiry
    - Meaning-making, authenticity
  - 'Antidote' to traditional concepts of teaching, in which teacher packages abstract knowledge and concepts
  - Emulates 'real world' research, which starts with a question
    - Process mirrors working lives of academics, who contextualize their own thinking via participation in communities of practice

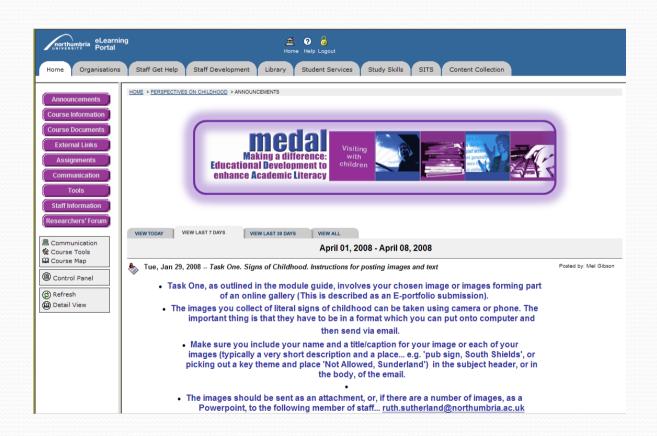# Model of the Student Research Process

- Collection

- Selection

- Reflection

- Projection

Signs of childhood

Students gathered data

Researchers' Forum established on e-learning portal

'Signs of Childhood' student research conference

Students' views of research on entering university

- "I thought it was just about finding information from leaflets"

- "I'd just go on the internet"

- "You don't give much thought to research in the beginning"

- "We'd expect the lecturer to tell us exactly what to do, expect loads of direction"

Students' perceptions: becoming a researcher

- "I thought research was a big thing to do, it required lots of people and money. I thought it was scientists and stuff. I know it's not now. I know I can do it. It's about being critical, looking at what other people have done, then finding a methodology and asking questions"

- " I think research is about learning how to find things out. Being critical and being able to analyse. It's hard at first, quite scary, then it gives you confidence".

- "Research is like a big un-known, you just like, dip your foot in. It seemed not necessary, pointless, I just wanted to get to the actual doing stage. Now I find the research the most exciting stage. It's still a big un-known, but now you have a map, it makes things meaningful, what to accept, what to reject, skills, I guess".

Case study 2: 'Charvas' and 'Chorbas' - engaging students in research with staff

- Part of first year undergraduate module Language, Culture and Communication

- Students engaged in active collaborative research project with staff

- Aim to get students to view themselves as active 'researchers' and contributors to theory early in their experience

- Focused around a social and cultural construction of young people – the 'charva'

Focus of the project

- Students met once a fortnight throughout the second semester
- Active discussion groups supported the collaborative collection and analysis of data
- Data gathered was used by students to individually write their end of semester projects
- Objectives of the research group were integrated with the teaching, learning and assessment objectives of the module

Emergence of the 'chav'

- Sudden appearance of mass media and popular reference to 'chavs' in 21st century
- 'virtually zero' references in UK national newspapers 1995-2003
- 946 during 2004-5 (Hayward and Yar, 2006)

- 'chav', 'chavo' and 'chavvy' have been used by labourers in the southeast of England since the 19th century.
- much evidence that 'chav' derives from the Romany word for boy, 'chavo' or 'chavi'. John Sampson's *The Dialect of the Gypsies* of Wales lists it under cavo, "a son" or "boy", and relates it to the Sanskrit equivalent, "sava"

Students' research

- 'A study of modern youth culture with reference to the 'chav'
- 'Are youth subcultures about thoughts and opinions or simply taste in music and fashion?'
- 'How and why is the word 'chav' used in modern Britain?'
- 'How does the label 'chav' relate to the inhabitants of the west end of Stokesley?'
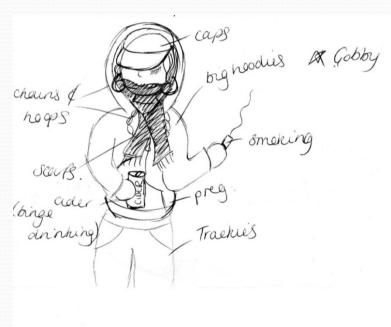
An example from the research: Being a 'chav'

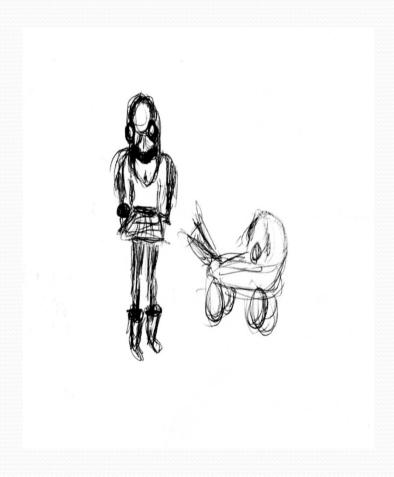- Dress, appearance and behaviour
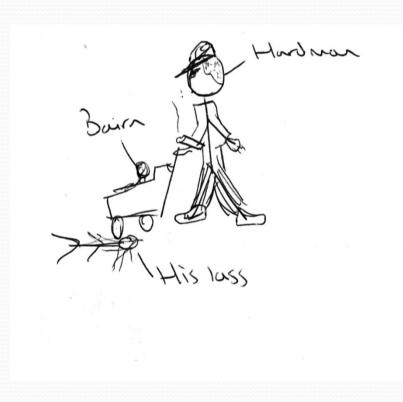- Place
- Consumption

- NOT about class?

Dress and appearance

Parenting?

Aggression and 'loose morals'

Place

- Street corners
- 'toon' centre (at night or evenings)
- Outside shops
- Back of a bus or bus stops
- Parks – skate parks
- Council Estates
- Everywhere/anywhere and always in groups

- Specifics: Dunston Monument; Bigg Market; MetroLand; Meadowell

Consumption

- Blockbuster
- Alldays newsagent
- Gregg's pasties and 'Fruit Shoot'
- Matalan
- Primark
- White lightning cider; Bellabrini wine; special brew
- Particular brands: Fred Perry; Burberry and Berghaus; Lacoste
- Listens to 'New Monkey'

'chavs' in a nutshell

- Physically: 'spots'; 'fat heads'; 'missing teeth'; 'deformities'

- Associations: 'scummers'; 'loud'; 'brash'; 'poor'

- Fear: 'unnerving'; 'intimidating'

- Language: 'nasal drone'; 'elongates the way they speak'; 'put mate at the end of every sentence'; 'swears a lot

- 'no potential'; 'illiterate'; 'of limited intelligence'; 'like hyenas'

- 'A rude obnoxious dreg of society who thrives off rebellion and the degeneration of society'

Named as 'the other'

- '...though the term chav/a now circulates widely in Britain as a term of disgust and contempt, it is imposed on people rather than being claimed by them' (Lawler, 2005: 802)

- According to Burchill (2005) this form of 'the other' is about envy, says more about the person using the word and pinpoints the exact area which the name-caller is most anxious about – eg hard work vs idleness; over-sexed vs undersexed. Also many contradictions in popular arguments – too many working class children vs not enough middle class children

Is the 'chav' a fiction?

- All media reports talk about people ARE 'chavs' whereas a lot of articles in press talk about people 'dressing' as Goths

- 'Two teenage boys have been jailed for life for the murder of a woman who was killed for dressing as a Goth' (BBC News 2008).

Exclusion, marginality and social control?

- Age-old villification of the 'undeserving' poor? (Shildrick et al, 2008)

- '...the chav phenomenon partakes of a social process in which consumption, identity, marginality & social control converge; consumption practices now serve as the locus around which exclusion is configured and the excluded are classified, identified and subjected to (increasingly intense) regimes of management'. (Haywood and Yar, 2006, cited ibid).

Student perspective on the project

- 'a step away from normal learning'
- Working with a group of students who were also using other methods but conducting similar research was valuable
- Taking part enabled me to learn a lot about the subject and also myself and my abilities
- Learned about my own preconceptions and 'prejudices'

Opportunities from the research

- given the chance to present a little of my research at the 21st Century Teenager conference in Leeds earlier in the year

- discovered my own learning style and have taken new skills into my further studies

- research got me to think for myself and link the results with the theory, developing my critical evaluation skills

- given me the ability to express my opinions and ideas without fear of ridicule, something I will take with me beyond university

Staff perspective

- students managed to access data that I would have found impossible get at

- able to construct ethnographically inflected accounts from their friends, family and other young people

- evidence of students being able to achieve beyond what they expect of themselves and what we as staff expect of them

- changes in the students' views of this negative social stereotype shows the potential impact of including students in research and enquiry at this stage develops academic skills and may accelerate personal development

Impact

- The project has demonstrated the potential of engaging students in scholarship alongside staff and rethinking the traditional roles of staff and students