Listening to Voices of Children and Learning with Them: Action Research in a Primary School

Sue Attard

Submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD)
November 2009

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

CONTENTS

Chapter 8 Introducing 'Children as Philosophers'   **154**

Chapter 9 Research Partnerships in the Classroom   **179**

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an action research project carried out in a primary school to address the issue of 'pupil voice'. Consulting with stakeholders has risen in prominence in the political context of schools. A number of government directives to encourage schools to engage have been put forward, including the expectation of the establishment of a School Council. The formation of the School Council is the first cycle of action presented in this dissertation, which then continues to develop through three further action cycles: listening to the voices of teachers, 'children as philosophers' and action research partnerships in the classrooms. Preliminary work prior to the introduction of School Council sets the context.

The conceptual framework has been developed through consideration of the work of Shier (2001), Fielding (2001) and Hart(1994) which has contributed to the establishment of a taxonomy of 'pupil voice' development. The methodological approach emerged from the works of Elliott (1991), Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) and Whitehead and McNiff (2006) through the development of 'circles of influence' which rose and diminished in importance throughout the action cycles. Three circles of influence are identified as *'self'* including reflexivity, *'methods'* including ways of engaging and analysing the data, and *'literature'* pertinent to the area of action as well as the methodology itself.

The contribution the subsequent thesis offers to practice is threefold. Firstly, there is the *'methodological messiness'* (Dadds & Hart 2005) which occurs when conducting action research which necessitates listening to the voices of the participants in order to determine the next cycle. Secondly, there is the development of the 'pupil voice' taxonomy which embeds the pupils within the process and is groundbreaking in 'pupil voice' research in primary schools. Finally, there are the action cycles themselves which offer the lived experience of engaging in 'pupil voice' action research partnerships.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Introduction

The current policy position in England in relation to children's participation in decision making is constructed around the notion of 'voice'. The statutory guidance (DfES, 2004) requires Headteachers, governors and local education authorities to *'give children and young people a say'*. The Children Act 2004 has legislated that local authorities must give children and young people a say in the development of the statutory children and young people's plans. The OFSTED Self-Evaluation Framework (2005) requires schools to evaluate how they gather the views of children and young people and how they take action on these views. Notions of 'pupil voice' and its benefits are becoming prominent in the United Kingdom. The focus on voice is built on a narrow view that, to secure ideas on what children want, adults should ask them and gather the responses as they 'give voice' on the things they were questioned about.

This thesis seeks to uncover the rhetoric associated with the political gains of imposing the application, through statute, of a narrow system of gaining stakeholder views. Within the exploration of the realities of 'pupil voice' actions in the education field and the development of action enquiries, this thesis offers a suggestion of a way of authenticating children's voices in a learning partnership with teachers. The term 'pupil voice' directs the reader to a division of roles between that of the children and the adults they work with. It supports a conventional construct of childhood in which those who have the power (adults) assist the development of rational thoughts in school age children; pupil being generally a term associated with those attending school. It is assumed (Marshall 1996) that voice is a tool by which the child can progress, through rational thoughts expressed freely with consistent opinions, conscience and interests. Voice in this research encapsulates views, understanding, choices and the responsibility which humans have at their disposal with deep roots in power relationships. It also extends a responsibility to the listener to hear and act on the agency of the giver.

I have constructed two positions based on the notion of childhood; one in which the adult is gatekeeper of the voicing of opinions, and the other in which the child takes ownership of opportunities to voice opinions as of right.

The construction of childhood based on the adult as gatekeeper can be tracked back to the notion of child possessing *'emerging rational capabilities'* (Marshall, 1996: 94) on which educational philosophies in the twentieth century have drawn on Rousseau's ideas set out in *Emile* in 1762. Rather than being merely obedient the child is seen as a subject with ideas that can be developed within a framework in which adults hold the power as gatekeeper. Within this social construction of childhood, the teacher has the authority to unlock the potential of the not yet rational child, creating limitations to 'pupil voice' in terms of authentic social change. Authenticity in this sense for the children would be to become authors contributing to the viewpoint about 'pupil voice' that would be judged to be reliable, which is in conflict with adults as gatekeepers.

The other position is the construction of childhood based on the discourse of rights in which the child asserts natural curiosity from which to voice opinions afforded to them by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF) detailed in 1985 and ratified by the UK in 1992. Of particular note is Article 12 which states;

> *"Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.* (UNICEF1989).

Such an approach places the child at the centre of the decision making process whilst holding the power base in the role of the adult who decides on the levels of maturity. Marshall (1996:94) argues that this position also romanticises the child as naturally competent and

reasonable, rather than incompetent and irrational, bringing into question the suggestion that this approach aids authentic 'pupil voice' work.

Both positions, regarding the construction of childhood, show that the power of adults is neither natural as in adults as gatekeepers nor absent as in children's rights. It is with this realization that I do not hold power, in a simplified way and that voice work has the potential to shift power that has led me to the development of an action research approach in which my role and that of the participants is clearly highlighted. It is through understanding the nature of discourse and power, and that our subjective understandings are constructed through social events of verbal interaction, that we struggle together for shared meaning as we live the practices we are engaged in. This thesis links these two positions in the exploration of childhood to weave a rich picture of how the world of the child and that of the teachers can be combined to use an approach that listens to the voices of both.

Background about the school in which the research took place

The school in which the research takes place is an oversubscribed, mixed gender, state funded Primary community school in the East of England UK. The children on roll range between three to nine years and the criteria for admission are created by the Local Authority using categories of vulnerable children, catchment area, siblings attendance and then distance from the school as the categories. The population is mixed and full inclusion adhered to.

At the time of the research there were 9 full time teachers and 270 children. Also employed at the school were 24 other posts holders with various classroom and school roles which have not been included in the samples as part of this research, due to my focus remaining on the child and teacher relationship.

At the start of my research, I was in my thirteenth year of Headship having led the school through three 'outstanding' OFSTED inspections (1999, 2004, and 2007). The approach to school improvement, which was to formulate actions for change from the evaluations of the previous year, had been a feature since 2003. All teachers had been inducted into the school as newly qualified teachers gaining knowledge from within and shaping their ideas in a narrow base of experiences. They were highly effective practitioners when measured against the DfEE (2004) core competencies for qualified teachers with particular strengths in engaging and motivating the children. Standards measured at the end of Key Stage One were exceptionally high when compared to national and similar school figures for the three years (2005, 2006. 2007) during which the research took place.

This work is a culmination of research over a period of four years (2005 – 2009) but is based on many years of soul searching as I pondered aspects of 'voice' which had framed my personal journey. I view the term 'voice' to be much wider than sounds uttered by the mouth to a sense of the way that something is expressed or communicated. The ownership of the words and the way others listened were to frame my childhood memories and have a deep rooted role in the way I now see the world.

I began my enquiries with the consideration of the rights of the child to express their opinions and views in decision making in our primary school, and the exploration of means to increase the opportunities for them to do so. The voicing of such opinions would form the basis of the actions for change, with the children, and later their teachers, exploring the opportunities in partnership. My role as Headteacher and researcher remained central in the research with my reflections assisting my understanding of voice and power relations.

Other researchers in the field of 'pupil voice' such as Hart (1994), Fielding (2001), Shier (2001) and Rudduck and Flutter (2004) focus specifically on the children's perspective of the experiences they have in school and through exploring their points of view**,** they examine how participation in school decision making is taking place.

About my thesis

This thesis is the articulation of an action enquiry approach in which I engaged in a series of action cycles based on a generic question *'How can I understand 'pupil voice'?'* and the more specific question *'What actions can I, we and they take to understand the implications of young children having their say?'* It is presented as an account from which others may learn about shaping a methodology that seeks to focus on significant circles of influence leading to actions for change in pursuing 'pupil voice' as a way of transforming decision making partnerships in school. I have had to become flexible when developing the methodology regarding the methods used in order to encourage the younger children to offer their views more openly hence creating greater *'reflexivity in methods to advance the field through facilitating interdisciplinary research'* Green and Hogan (2005:37).

This thesis is designed to communicate the development of the research methodology and then the cycles of action within a school setting that other practitioners may relate to. The research has much to contribute to new understandings about practitioner research in classrooms. Through developing a methodology to capture the experience of living the theory each day I show how action was taken to effect change that transforms the voices of children and their teachers to discover the factors which led to a partnership which centred on listening and learning together. I offer descriptions, explanations and reflections as I seek to understand what transformative 'pupil voice' actions in school looks and feels like.

At a practical level the thesis examines an approach that addresses the criticism that:

> *'Decades of calls for educational reform have not succeeded in making schools places where all young people want to and are able to learn. It is time to invite pupils to join the conversations about how we might accomplish that'.*
> (Cook-Sather 2002:12)

With changes into the nature of childhood in which children are seen as *"becoming social actors"* Christenen P and Prout A (2005:43) suggesting that children are less compliant, there is a moral imperative to seek to find ways that the voices of those who enter the classroom are listened to *'not only in the construction of their own learning environments, but as research partners in examining questions of learning and anything else that happens ion and around schools'* Edwards and Hattam (2000:4)

The focus of this research begins with the voice of the child, by exploring their world in the school environment, and builds on their perspectives through engaging in change processes with their teachers and myself as Headteacher. The formulation of a model of ascending stages of child involvement in decision making leads to the partnership of child and teacher in their aspirations and openness to change in terms of the opportunities to express opinions about life in the classrooms they share.

Generally, children's roles within research projects, in which their viewpoints are gathered, are objects of research and the interpretation of their words seen through the focus of an adult's world. Although I interpret the words of the children through actions for change, they will have been part of the process in which they can clarify what they were saying within the focus groups by revisiting the transcripts or reflecting in later actions. This way of working places them as subjects of research. Encouraging an approach where young children are researching alongside adults is important due to a scarcity of research in *"asking children,*

especially young children, to describe their own feelings and behaviours or to evaluate the services of care provided to them" (Green and Hogan 2005:28).

The framing of the research journey in terms of my role, the relevant literature at each stage or cycle of action and the "messiness" of the method guided the processes and my reflections throughout.

In Section One I develop the methodology of action research framed through developing circles of influence *self* (how am I improving my practice?), *literature* (what have others said about this and how have I used that knowledge?) and *method* (how does this allow the voices to surface?).

Chapter 1 explores the development of the action research methodology in which I explore my values and reasons for a focus on a process in which change happens. It sets the scene for three further chapters in which I live 'methodological messiness' (Dadds and Hart 2005) as I strive to understand 'pupil voice'.

Chapter 2 takes the self circle of influence and maps out how I became aware of how I was influencing the actions for change. It weaves the through the cycles showing how I became more reflexive as I gathered evidence.

Chapter 3 takes the literature circle of influence and shows how I examined the work of others in order to shape the actions taken. I categorised the literature in terms of pupil voice content and methodology to focus on actions from outside the school.

Chapter 4 takes the methods circle of influence in which I considered the effectiveness of the methods used in order to accommodate the changing and developing roles of the participants.

In Section Two I develop each of the cycles of action research building on the baseline of observable features at the starting point.

Chapter 5 Introduces the starting point of 'pupil voice' within the school. It formulates the structure of the conceptual model of taxonomy of levels of participation of the child in decision making, on which the actions for change in other chapters are measured.

The action research chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 are structured using an adaptation of ideas of McNiff and Whitehead (2006) in which the action research account is written through examination of critical questions. I ask:

1. What is the concern?

2. Why are we concerned?

3. What have others written about the field of concern?

4. What experiences can we describe to show why we are concerned?

5. What kind of data will we gather to show the situation as it unfolds?

6. How will the evidence support a claim to knowledge?

7. How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate?

Chapter 6 therefore explores the introduction of School Council as a structured body to enhance 'pupil voice'.

Chapter 7 expresses the need to listen to the voices of teachers and builds on the feedback about the raising of the voices of the children in decision making before the teachers are ready for it.

Chapter 8 begins the development of a partnership of actions through an approach that uses the ideas from children as philosophers approach, and Chapter 9 shows how the development of research partnerships in the classroom enhances the voices and listening skills of both parties.

The third and final section explores the originality of the idea as an active pursuit through actions for change within a system which embeds 'pupil voice' beyond tokenism into a whole school setting through the use of a model of ascending stages of child involvement in decision making. The shaping of a methodology that seeks to view self of the researcher, literature from the field of actions and appropriate using methods is brought together to enrich the 'pupil voice' field. It will guide a practice based researcher in developing a methodology which encompasses living practices in their organisation.

The text is written using emotional reflections and terminology, which are living parts of a vocabulary developed within the school environment. I have chosen to present a narrative of the methodological developments as they unfolded shaping the way I saw the research journey. I stay true to my participants by using their words to represent the illustrations of the actions that have developed the voices of each human being.

Through the unfolding of this thesis the reader will discover my desire and passion for educational change which:

- Embeds research methodology into classroom practices;

- Focuses on reflexive engagement through the cycles of actions and makes it explicit;

- Engages with the ideas presented from others from outside the school;

- Builds on the living experiences of those in school everyday;

- Portrays the successes and failures of everyday actions for change;

- Places improvement in the hands of those who can listen and learn together.

Section One Defining the Research Methodology

In this section I show how I framed my action research approach that encompasses the models of significant writers in the action research field (Elliott, 1991; Zuber Skerritt and Perry, 2002; Dadds and Hart, 2001 and Whitehead and McNiff 2006). I take what I have termed a cycle, in which, an issue is identified, planning for action defined, actions taken and then outcomes are evaluated in order to frame the next steps. The single loop process is underpinned through reflexive engagement at each of the stages, through which, I frame critical questions about *content,* asking what? *process* asking why? and *premise* asking how? My awareness of external factors that can cloud my judgements are further explored through my three circles of influence model in which I define the effect of *self*, *literature* and *methods* on the action research cycles. This period occurs prior to the primary data collection stage which is explored in Section 2.

Chapter 1 The Messiness of Action Research

In this chapter I explore my values which formed the basis of the development of an action enquiry approach to 'what is pupil voice' and engage with the voices of others for whom action research connects with classroom practice. Whilst trying to understand the location of my work I moved from a period of clarity to ambiguity as I discovered the complex nature of researching in my own organisation. I display a working example of framing a methodology that links previously developed action research models with significant circles of influences that diverted my gaze, thereby living the notion of 'methodological messiness' (Dadds and Hart 2001) as I seek to find a way of accessing the voices of the participants beyond tokenism towards authenticity.

The starting point for the exploration of a methodology began with the investigation of which values of mine underpin the actions I would take leading to an outward gaze towards others who explored an action research approach to classroom concerns. My enquiries centred around 'pupil voice' in the school and in engaging in a process of investigating my practice as an insider researcher involved in practice based enquiry. I desired to devise and then provide opportunities for the development of the voice of the children in aspects of their education in school living the principles of Article 12 of the UN Conventions of the rights of the child (1989). My perception that I frequented a world that denied my voice as a child was my internal driver for the approach I would take and formed the basis on which I explored my values and beliefs.

1.1 Coming to terms with my values and beliefs

My values and beliefs that centre on the right on individuals to have their say has led to a way of working that locates me within the school in which the enquiry takes place and an understanding of 'I' as a practitioner researcher.

Having reflected on early childhood experiences, my 'Headteacher' role and position of developing researcher, I decided to discover the basis on which I elicit my assumptions and beliefs by developing four position statements, which served to underpin the ideas as the actions for change occurred. These beliefs, which I considered and realised through the development of my thesis, made a contribution to the development of my humanity and humility, and I realize now that I held these at the outset of my research: epistemological, ontological, methodological and social.

My epistemological beliefs grew from the recognition that knowledge exists in different forms. My understanding of coming to know about the world is through an inclusional approach where dialogue is shared. I see a way of knowing being developed and enriched through dialogue and therefore centring on the use of voice. The cycles of actions in the research process create emerging and developing themes which are articulated through the voices of the participants formulating in some circumstances new ideas that lead to further change. As I collected data during the change process I discussed the outcomes with the participants to discover their interpretation of the statements they had offered in written and oral forms. I considered this approach as enriching the dialogue and deepening the aspects of inclusion of the participants in the research. Working within the educational field had developed further my views that education is a life affirming process through which I have come to value the development of knowledge. Through such personal enquiry I became a researcher who was consciously and critically reflective in all areas of my investigation. Founded on the assumption that personal experience is a valid source of knowing about how the participants come to share views about what is happening and that critical reflection is an essential process in how I come to know about *"knowledge taking different forms"* (Marshall 2001:434 - 439). This, in my view, provided rigour and understanding in my research purpose, as I investigated the issues raised within the realm of my personal lived actions.

My ontological belief is that other people have the capacity to discover their own way which I view as valuable in giving meaning and purpose to their lives. I believe that people within their intellectual capacities, possess what Polanyi (1967:4) termed *'tacit knowledge'* or *'we know more than we can tell'*. Such capacity in all people to create their own knowledge, to be insightful of the knowledge from others can show how they can explain their influence on their learning and that of others. It is through these beliefs that I have come to a research approach that is inclusional of the participants and seeks to listen to the voices of those in the classroom.

My methodological belief involves myself and others engaging in systematic enquiries as we understand improvements that need to be made in our work. I hold on to the notion of emergent understanding informed by *" methodological inventiveness"* (Dadds and Hart 2001:169) in which I become more courageous in creating an enquiry process that enables new and valid understandings to develop, so that participants can be empowered in developing 'pupil voice'.

Previously I saw research more in terms of formal processes to follow such as a clear methodology, analysis of data and publication of findings in order to be accepted by those in the academic world who would be reading my research papers as part of the accreditation process. This allowed a structure by which I could work and offered, what at the time appeared to be, clarity. Most of my research (between 1977 and 1994) was taking place at a time when action research in classrooms was developing and I was unaware of the studies written about the role of the researcher in the field of study. This became a difficult idea for me to grasp due to the fact that my background in small scale research in classrooms had been shaped by investigations with participants, and creating generalisations from the data. I

had not considered my personal stance going any deeper than thinking to explore my context, social position and voice (Savin Baden 2004:366).

My social belief is underpinned by values that promote equality and democratic practices. I aim to begin to dismantle the ideas and practices that deliberately exclude and alienate others through the application of categories such as colour, ethnicity, gender, age, or any other that justifies or supports powerful voices within the social sciences. My social values are transformed through dialogue as I encourage others to interrogate their own assumptions and the norms of their cultures in search of a more inclusive way of living.

1.2 Action Research as a methodology

I will show how I began with a model of action research, which I interpreted as a process that is done to people, developed awareness of myself deepening the action steps and finally made an action based process alive in the situation in which I found myself through the development of a circle of influence model. Through dialogue with participants and reading significant texts, I began to engage in discourse that made it possible for me to create what Bruner (1986: 25) refers to as my 'virtual text', in which I create subjective meaning through the filters of the participants who show multi perspectives through a set of prisms, each catching a part of the reality. I explored action research as my developing methodology in the following four ways:

1. Action research beginning;
2. Deepening the action research enquiry;
3. Finding my own way
4. Circles of Influence

1.3 Action research beginnings

My first encounter with action research was back in the 1970s when I was new to the teaching profession exploring the work in my classroom as a teacher researcher based on the ideas of Stenhouse (1975). I considered myself to be a valuable part of the learning process, and a more active player in researching my practice, and began to study the work I was doing with the children in the classes I taught to enhance my teaching and the involvement of the children. I remained influenced by the work of others whom I felt theorised about knowledge acquisition to underpin my understandings and create a structure such as Lewin (1948) and Elliott (1991). The action steps which composed of a circle of planning, action and fact finding about the result of the action resonated with the way I was beginning to work in the classroom.

I assumed from following Elliott's action research model that the process was fairly straightforward which led me to question whether it was rigorous enough for my purpose. Elliott (1991) claimed that 'action research' might be described as *'reflection related to diagnosis'* and was happy for teachers to carry out action research themselves, or to commission *'someone to carry it out for them'* (ibid:355). Action research, in my view increases understanding of the social situation in which the participant finds themselves it is subjective, concerned with a problem and the actor within the problem. It should be written using the voice of the teachers so that it could be authenticated by them involving participants in self-reflection and facilitated *'unconstrained dialogue'* between researcher and participants – *'there must be a free information flow between them'* (ibid:356). This supported the development of a way of knowing both for me and in partnership with the participants.

Advising teacher researchers on how to proceed, Elliott (1991:356) stated in action research, *'theories are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice'.* Teachers are encouraged to look carefully at the facts of a practical

situation, and generate hypotheses or explanations which they could explore further, and which could lead to a *'general plan'* being constructed to enable intervention to take place with the intention of improving the practice. I considered that Elliott's model could provide a structure on which I could frame my enquiries into 'pupil voice' through creating stages of development:

- the general idea;

- what actions are to be taken;

- seeking permissions;

- resources required;

- devising an ethical framework.

As an action researcher I would then be ready to implement the 'action steps' and could use methods that would record the actions from the viewpoints of the participants such as research journal, document analysis, focus groups, interviews, participant observation and written accounts. Elliott advocated 'reconnaissance' to make sense of the monitoring, before implementing a further action step. I knew that the research would start with a series of actions to inform understanding and understanding to assist action may through each cycle lead to clarity.

My assumptions and perspectives would be challenged in my journal alongside reflections on the process and content of the stages within the cycle. In this way not only am I finding a voice and thinking with others, but formulating the enquiry stages (Winter 1998).

I was aware that an action research approach had been open to criticism about the depth of knowledge and framework for truth and rigour that is exhibited in action research projects conducted by teachers in classrooms. Bogdan and Bilklen (1992:223) term such research as a frame of mind, *'a perspective that people take toward objects and activities',* which locates

with my view of action research as an ideology and my research charting developments in terms of the method. Action research emphasises practice and has outcomes of reflections which include different types of knowledge; propositional or theoretical (connecting with rationality and truth), productive (making action) and practical (praxis – informed action) (Dick 2003:7).

During the 1960s action research suffered a decline in popularity as a research method due to associations with radical political activism (Stringer 1999:9). After a decline in favour for Government scale research, the action research approach was taken up in later decades by educationalists and teacher trainers as a convenient way for professionals to improve their own practice in an isolated environment. Kock (1997:10) suggests that whenever a series of educationalists get hold of an idea and pass it on, that it will, *"degenerate through reductionism and end up as a token, shallow caricature of the original"*. It was with these views in mind that I decided to explore further action research as a paradigm which is developmental in nature, moving in a hermeneutical cycle, in which the whole is understood by exploring the sum of the parts.

1.4 Deepening the action research enquiry

I explored the location of my research within several paradigms in what Guba and Lincoln (2005:191) refer to as a '*new paradigm inquiry'* in which there is a '*blurring of genres'* with action research becoming prominent. This led to exploring roots of my methodology which I began relating to 'critical theory' (Guba and Lincoln 2005:192) in which reality is shaped by taking a historical perspective, looking through the lens of political, cultural, economic, gender and values which become crystallised over time. Therefore a 'constructivist' (Guba and Lincoln 205:192) paradigm began to offer a direction for shaping and qualifying my

strategy. However, through a desire to be much more in partnership with the participants as subjects of my research rather than objects, my work was edging towards a 'participatory' (Guba and Lincoln 205:192) paradigm. It is within this area that I can explore communities of practice (Wenger 1998) co-researching towards actions for change. Rather than as a researcher devising an action for change and then implementing and evaluating the outcomes I decided to work alongside the participants in devising the steps of change.

I encountered the work of Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) in which the action research model is underpinned by reflections on the *content*, *process* and *premise*. During an early cycle of action research which underpins this thesis, the school council stage of the research (chapter 6), I reflected on the use of this model to deepen the evaluation of the research.

1.4.1 Content exploring 'what'

The school council is used here as an exemplar of exploring the Zuber-Skerritt and Perry model (2002). In order to examine the development of the early stages of the School Council it was important to plan the introduction to the children and the voting systems that were to take place. Throughout the six months of implementation, informal discussions took place with the children and their teachers as well as colleagues sharing viewpoints. Alongside this was a more formal data gathering process of written reflections by teachers and focus groups of children and teachers. This level of reflection is termed *'content'* in which the researcher, alongside the participants, *'thinks about the issues. What is happening? What is diagnosed, planned, acted on and evaluated is studied and evaluated* (Zuber Skerritt and Perry, 2002:173).

I developed key questions on which I would approach the reflection on *'content'* as follows:

- *What is the issue and why does it concern me?*

- *What have others said about this issue?*

1.4.2 Process exploring 'how'

The development of the process involved reflecting on how the School Council was under way. The more informal measures of finding out how things were going were important to support the more formal research processes of reflective logs and focus groups. The evaluation of the actions or *processes* being taken as the children developed in their role became part of the actions for change thereby:

> '*Thinking about strategies, procedures and how things are done. How diagnosis is undertaken, how action planning flows from that diagnosis and is conducted, how action follow and are an implementation of the stated plans and how evaluation is conducted are critical foci for inquiry'* (Zuber Skerritt and Perry, 2002:173).

I developed key questions on which I would approach the reflection on *'process'* as follows:

- How have we developed actions for change about the issue?

- How is data captured as the emerging issue unfolds?

- How will the evidence I collect make a claim to knowledge about the issue?

1.4.3 Premise exploring 'why'

The assumptions that were underlying the introduction of a School Council were that 'pupil voice' would lead to transference of power to the children in their decision making. The teachers were open in their dialogue with their classes about life in school which prior to School Council developments tended to be less formal. Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) used the term *premise* to refer to the unspoken values that governed the sub culture of a set of actions which would be important at the early stage of opening up opportunities for the voices of the children in decision making thereby critiquing *'underlying assumptions and*

perspectives. Inquiry into the unstated, and often non conscious, underlying assumptions which govern attitudes and behaviour The culture or sub culture of a group working on the project has a powerful impact on how issues are viewed and discussed, without members being aware of them' (Zuber Skerritt and Perry, 2002:173).

I developed key questions on which I would approach the reflection on 'premise' as follows:

- Why have I drawn these conclusions?

- Why would others listen and how would I modify the ideas?

I reflected in my journal about the linking of the two models of action research (Elliott, 1991) and Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002) during the actions for change involving School Council (figure 1). I have chosen to present this piece here because it exemplifies the period in my research when I felt clarity and the ability to implement what I considered to be an effective external idea for engaging 'pupil voice'. It shows the 'tokenistic' nature of pupil voice I was later to discover alongside an expectation that adults would approve.

The combining of the two models began to deepen my understanding of engaging with criticality in order to make sense of the actions that were being taken. The example of school council provided on the surface a clear cycle of action steps: training a teacher, offering children roles, implementing the roles with actions and gaining feedback. The reflections on the linkage between Elliott's (1991) model and that of Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) was to strengthen the questions I would ask of my research under the heading of 'content', 'process' and 'premise'.

Journal Entry 10 Feb 2006
I need to link somehow the model presented from Elliott and Zuber-Skerritt and Perry to deepen the reflection in and on the actions I have taken. How will I use Elliott's model (1991) in classroom and school actions?

Cycle 1
Initial idea:　　　　Introduction of a School Council.
Reconnaissance:　　Facts came from School Council UK training by teacher facilitator.
General Plan:
　　Step 1　　　　Four committee members chosen by teachers from Year 4 two
　　　　　　　　　　boys and two girls.
　　　　　　　　　　Class councils elected from class group in a secret ballot.
　　Step 2　　　　Meetings taking place facilitated by teacher with set agenda.
　　Step 3　　　　Feedback to children and teachers.
　　Step 4　　　　Implementation of ideas discussed.
Monitoring implementation and Effects:
- Feedback from the school council members
- Feedback from the teachers

Reconnaissance:　What are the children and teachers saying?
Where do the key questions around 'content' process and premise from Zuber-Skerritt and Perry come into this cycle? At each of the action steps taken during the cycles would I gain something more about what I am doing as insider researcher by engaging with the work of Zuber-Skerritt and Perry? I would try at each of the steps to ask the critical questions that linked to content, process and premise.

CONTENT Questions
What is the issue and why does it concern me? *Issue is the implementation of the School Council which is an external body imposed to give voice to the children which I am not sure about.*
What have others said about this issue? *We are being asked by statute to consult with children and the school council movement offers a toolkit to do it.*

PROCESS Questions
How have we developed actions for change about the issue? *This was relatively straight forward the teacher facilitator went on a course and was given a toolkit to follow and we implemented the ideas.*
How is data captured as the emerging issue unfolds? *We would have a series of focus groups, informal chats about the school and teacher evaluations and reflections.*
How will the evidence *I collect make a claim to knowledge about the issue? The evidence should open up the children's thoughts about what they were doing. I would ask the ones elected formally and informally others. The teachers I thought would feel it was a democratic process they agreed with. Straight forward evidence base.*

PREMISE Questions
Why have I drawn these conclusions? *I am experienced at asking open questions I must be able to find out what people were thinking and draw conclusions about the School Council links to 'pupil voice' after all isn't that what school council says they do?*

Why would others listen and how would I modify the ideas? *Others doing school councils would be able to locate their work with mine and begin to ask more challenging process type questions.*

Although the combination of the two models assisted my understanding further of action research I wanted to show that practitioners within classrooms could have an important role in creating educational theory through which colleagues could relate to. Whilst developing the research proposal I asked myself two significant questions *'What is my current concern about 'pupil voice'?* and *'Why would others want to listen'?* Both questions came from ideas developed in the field of living action research in Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, a pedagogical text which showed how criticality can be modelled within an action research approach. This work showed that I too could begin to create theory from the practices I was living with the children and their teachers in the classrooms. I understood that my work could not be generalised but I hoped for trustworthiness in the way others would use some of my ideas to generate their own theories in use.

I took Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's (2002) model and linked it with Whitehead and McNiff (2006) ideas to create a way of unlocking the potential of the cycles of action in generating living theories to formulate a series of questions. Each action research cycle addresses the following questions:

1. What is the concern? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006) links to 'content' (Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

2. Why are we concerned? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006 links to 'content' Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

3. What have others written about the field of concern? *(I have added this question to allow my practice to be informed by others in the field)*

4. What experiences can we describe to show why we are concerned? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006 links to 'process' Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

5. What kind of data will we gather to show the situation as it unfolds? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006 links to 'process' of Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

6. How will the evidence support a claim to knowledge? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006 links to 'process' of Auber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

7. How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006 links to 'premise' (Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

8. How do I modify the ideas in the light of the new learning? *(Whitehead and McNiff 2006 links to 'premise' of (Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002)*

I show in later chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9, how these questions informed the way I engaged with the action cycles.

1.5 Finding my own way

I became clearer about an action research approach, as I have defined above, but still wanted to reflect on three areas that seemed to affect the way I was looking at and engaging in the research. Being an insider researcher I discovered that *self* was vitally important in each aspect of the work looking inward as well as outward. I discovered that what I thought, and how and why I carried out actions affected the way I was engaging in the action for change.

Throughout the process I turned to *literature* in two areas. I categorized these into content linking to 'pupil voice' and 'methodology' in turn linking to action research approaches, and theory related to particular methods. The outside world voices as I saw them turned my attention to *literature* to capture what others had said about my concerns.

Finally I was more closely drawn to the development of the *methods* I had chosen to bring to the surface the views of the participants in a way that could attempt to move from tokenism to authenticity that shows the authorship of the evidence base is reliable.

The content area of 'pupil voice' required the participants to be engaged in the research as they developed the changes required to embed a system that could be acceptable to both the children and the teachers. My role as insider researcher required a proactive approach that

signified reasoning behind my actions and engagement in reflexivity. I was aware that I would have to make my viewpoints more explicit as I engaged with the action enquiry and that I would have to show all areas that had informed my judgements. I developed what I called circles of influence those of:

1. *Self*

2. *Literature*

3. *Methods*

The three circles were significant because they formed a way that I saw the research journey having influences; *self* as I developed as a researcher becoming reflexive, *literature* about 'pupil voice' and action research that was to root my thoughts and actions in the theory base of the work of significant others, and developing *methods* as tools for discovering and taking actions for change.

1.5.1 The significance of exploring the *self* circle of influence

In order that the position I held could be more clearly defined within each of the cycles of action research**,** I decided to reflect on the role I had and the underlying assumptions and influences that were speaking to me at any particular time or stage. The focus throughout was to remain fully committed and aware of my professional learning rooted in the practice based research occurring in my own organisation. This circle of influence had to be carefully developed and exposed in order that I could understand my own voice as Headteacher and researcher and how it connected with significant others as they began to share the research role. In chapter 2 I show how the *self* circle of influence affected the way I approached each of the four action cycles.

1.5.2 The significance of exploring the *literature* circle of influence

Throughout the action research process it was important to consider the literature about the content (pupil voice) and methodology (action research) as each of the cycles of actions developed. This circle of influence would show how the work of writers in the field have influenced my thinking and added to the critical reflections prior, during and after the enquiries. In chapter 3 I show how the *literature* circle of influence affected the way I approached each of the four action cycles.

1.5.3   The significance of exploring the *methods* circle of influence

In order to examine the roles of all participants in the research, including my own, I had to seek to identify the methods or tools used to elicit the voices of all those involved. The circle of influence that involved examining the methods used allowed my engagement in the debate of the purpose and use of observation, focus groups, interviews and surveys. In chapter 4 I show how the *methods* circle of influence affected the way I approached each of the four action cycles.

1.6   Developing a living methodology

I decided to link the developing ideas of the overarching paradigm of participatory educational research, methodology of action research and methods with the circles of influence *self, literature* and *methods* that I had reflected on during the early stages. The work for each cycle of action was underpinned by a series of critical questions asked about the purpose, nature and conclusions of the approaches taken and data gathered. This is graphically represented below (figure 1).

Figure 1   Mapping the research process

Paradigm: '*Participatory' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) Educational Research*

Methodology: Action Research within a Qualitative approach underpinned by *'Critical theory'* and *'Constructivism'* Denzin and Lincoln(1994)

Methods: for data collection and change will test or challenge my emerging interpretations.

SELF   LITERATURE   METHODS

Finding my own way came through circles of influence of **self** (practice based and engaging in professional learning) **literature** (within the field of 'pupil voice' and action research') and **methods** (exploring ways of capturing action for change). The circles increase or decrease in size according to their prominence at that particular cycle of action research.

Critical Questions
What is the concern?   Why are we concerned?   What have others written about the field of concern?
What experiences can we describe to show why we are concerned?   What kind of data will we gather to show the situation as it unfolds?
How will the evidence support a claim to knowledge? How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate?
How do I modify the ideas in the light of the new learning?

Figure 1: Mapping the Research Process

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how my values and beliefs led me to an action research approach that would seek to raise questions about actions in the school around 'pupil voice' and I begin the journey on the road from tokenism to authenticity. I engage with the models of action research developed by Elliott (1991) and Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) in order to create the cycles of actions that are rooted in reflexive practice that explores *what*, *how* and *why* for each stage in the cycle. I enrich the way I engage critically through the development of questions of my practices, informed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006). Finally the way I developed the practices required me to make explicit to both myself and the reader the direct influences that were underpinning each cycle, namely the circles of influence *self*, *literature* and *methods*. In the next chapters I take each circle of influence and show how it informed the way I engaged with my data in the stories of the research action cycles.

Chapter 2 Exploring self circle of influence

In this chapter I explore how I came to know that I was being influenced by my childhood experiences, my values and beliefs, the work of educational researchers and the dual roles I held as Headteacher and insider researcher. I explore the notion of early reflexivity in the development of my understanding of my drivers and motives that led to the focus on 'pupil voice'. It displays the realisation of the base point of my epistemological position and develops how I came to know through each of the four stages of the cycles of action research. At this point my research speaks to me and contributes to knowledge "to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher's being in the world, and so elicits the response 'that's exciting' taking exciting back to its root meaning, to set in action" (Reason and Marshall1987:112). I show how I developed within a 'methodological messiness' to identify the first of my circles of influence.

Reflections on the process I would use in the research lead to the need to seek to understand what I have termed the *self* circle of influence. It explores the beginning of the research journey in which I reflect on the reasons for selecting to explore the development of 'pupil voice' in a school linked to tensions within my roles as Headteacher and insider researcher that underpin my values and beliefs. It is at this stage that I developed an understanding of my role in the research and took me from a period of clarity to ambiguity.

In this chapter I show the process that led to the decision to choose self as a circle of influence in the following ways:

1. An autobiographical journey underpinned by 'pupil voice';

2. Exploring reflexivity to unearth myself;

3. Defining the impact of influential thinkers;

4. Choice of *self* as a circle of influence;

5. How the *self* circle of influence impacted on the cycles of action.

Through an examination of the background and starting point of the research I will show the school context in 2005 and how the beginning of my thesis crystallised my thinking towards the planning for future cycles of action. The research grew from my desire to listen to the

views of young children in order to support their learning and enable them to make choices. It is based on an appreciative approach in action research that values what is already in place but in partnership with participant's plans for change.

2.1 An autobiographical journey underpinned by 'pupil voice'

At the beginning of the journey I began to engage with reflexivity in practice but had not understood what effect it would have in developing the methodology in terms of re-conceptualising changes within my assumptions and view points. The decision to explore my passion for 'pupil voice' came from what I can now see were three significant aspects of my autobiographical journey:

- My childhood in a school setting;

- My training to become a teacher;

- My role as a Headteacher.

2.1.1 My childhood in a school setting

I reflected on my school days and ways that opportunities to voice my opinions had been in my view denied as a child myself and on many years of soul searching as I pondered aspects of 'voice' which had informed my personal journey. I see the term 'voice' to be much wider than sounds uttered by the mouth to a sense of a way that something is expressed or communicated. The ownership of the spoken word by the giver and the way others listened were to frame my early days and have a deep rooted role in the way I now see the world.

In order to understand why I had such a passion for listening to children's views I had to reflect back to my own earliest memories which were of moments as a child with little to add as a contribution to the opinions of others. This was most prominent when expressing my

views in public situations, as I grew up on a council estate in central England. Fifty years ago I wanted to ask *'why'* but was never encouraged to.

My family provided the basic requirements of love and material goods within their limited resources but life evolved around my mother's desire to move house on a regular basis. Such moves involved a change of geographical area in which I had to change schools, making new friendships, which I found difficult. The lack of continuity in my schooling led to some gaps in my knowledge base which were to show later in poor performances in examinations and a subsequent fear of failure. I struggled both academically and socially with the changes and found that voicing my feelings was not what I should do. Losing the friendship groups on each occasion meant that relationships and trust of those around me at school had to grow on each new move. I found this particularly difficult to share both at school and at home.

My first memory of a significant encounter with failure was the 'eleven plus' examination in which all thirty of my friends in my primary school also failed. I went to my local secondary modern school with my friends, happy and contented for a period of three months prior to one of the house moves, which led to my arrival at another school who failed to recognise my mathematical skills. I can remember only once voicing my true feelings about change as I recalled the simple calculations in the lowest ability set to my mother. It was not acceptable within the culture of my parents to challenge a teacher's judgment but my mother did hold a conversation with the school about my fears and this led to my opinions being sought and an encounter in what I felt was 'pupil voice'. It was at this point that I began to see school as a factory which produces individuals for predetermined roles. I found it difficult to connect with the teaching arrangements at that school and eventually I was asked to take the 13 plus examination and secured a place at the local grammar school. I was not sure it was what I wanted, but the voice of the adults around me persuaded me it was a correct move.

I arrived at the girls' high school an outsider beginning what was then called 4th year at the age of fourteen after missing the foundations of the previous three years. I had an overwhelming feeling of being an outsider which remained prominent for the next four years not succeeding in achieving good 'O' level results and finally failing to even pass my 2 'A' levels. This is the point at which I developed views about knowledge creation and humanity in which I would come to question the value of pure memorisation and a strong desire to pursue my belief that all humans have the right to be listened to, and need to feel secure that their contribution is welcomed. I was lucky to be able to express my desire to teach at an interview for teacher training college and was offered the opportunity to engage in developing skills in a profession I have grown to love with a passion.

2.1.2 My training to become a teacher

The study of a relatively new subject at college in 1974, Sociology, opened my eyes to my social interaction difficulties and perspectives. For the first time in the education system I felt at home and listened to. Through the next three years I grew in confidence and became a successful student who would seek to engage the children in a variety of experiences. All of my experiences on teaching practice were in schools in the Black Country in the West Midlands UK, with more than 50% of children who found the learning process difficult and displayed learned behaviours to mask the frustration. It was during this time that I reflected on the term 'hard to reach' which was to follow me through the next thirty years of my career.

I followed such children into my first teaching post as a probationary teacher in a residential school for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties who at that time were labelled 'maladjusted'. Although they tried very hard to persuade me they were really tough, I knew that I would be able to unlock some talent they would feel good about. I gained much success

in this role over the year in post gaining the confidence of a group of children who were rarely heard or understood and accepted by highly experienced teachers. I knew one day I would be pioneering the voice of the 'hard to reach' child. At the end of my time at the school I understood more clearly about some of the future difficulties I may face in the educational system.

2.1.3 My role as a Headteacher

During the fourteen years in post as a Headteacher I have held onto the desire to raise the voice of children which I had found so difficult to do in my own school days. Listening to the voices of those I have termed *'hard to reach'* (Attard 2006) has underpinned my work in the field of 'pupil voice' in this primary school setting. Seeking to educate the whole child by finding ways in which that child can learn to willingly take some responsibility for his/her own actions and the development of his/her own potentials, has been the driver for my continued enthusiasm and passion for the role.

The use of a whole school approach to change, by involving the voice of the children was in the early stages of development in the school at the start of my research and I wanted to explore the features already in action as well as involving the children and teachers in actions for change. Such work had been a feature of the development of this school since 1996. My teachers in this school were generally ready and skilled in reflecting on their practice and discussing it within what we felt was a developing community of practice (Wenger 2002). When I began my research I was aware that I was about to begin a difficult journey, that of researching in my own organisation with the participants being children under nine. Although the power I had as Headteacher was clear to me, I still naively felt that I would be able to separate the role of Headteacher and researcher whilst being with the participants of

my research in the same organisation every day. I wondered about the impact of the voice of all children and their views about how decisions were made.

It was at this point in 2004 that I suddenly became interested in the pupil voice movement and the work of Fielding (2001) and Rudduck (2004). Much of this research was using the voice of the pupils in order to gather evidence of what was happening to them in schools. I wanted to seek ideas for using pupil's views to shape change across an organisation. My confidence as a Headteacher was high but entering into the world of research would have its difficulties not least in the area of developing a 'pupil voice' approach before I would be ready to engage in actions within the field of 'pupil voice'.

2.2 Exploring reflexivity to unearth myself

In order to be aware of any reflexive engagement in my professional practice or research it had been necessary to seek some clarification around the term reflexivity and what makes it different to reflection. The internal dialogue I engage in as part of my professional role had led me to discover the reasoning behind each aspect of my work which previously I had termed reflection. Alversson and Skoldberg (2000) offered a useful definition which I used as a starting point:

> *"Reflection means interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author"* Alversson and Skoldberg (2000: forward)

Through a critical analysis of these words I began to consider that reflection is something I did on my own to discover a deeper understanding of my perceptions. I wondered, could reflexivity be beyond that, through, opening up my ideas to others within a dialogue or is it just thinking deeper?

In my previous research studies it had been enough to reflect on what I was doing in order to support the work in terms of clarity and understanding for the reader. The entries in my journal tended to be entered as part of the field study only to test my own perceptions and never to make explicit to the reader my emotions. I saw research more in terms of formal processes to follow such as a clear methodology, analysis of data and publication of findings in order to be accepted by those in the academic world who would be reading my research papers as part of the accreditation process. This allowed a structure by which I could work and offered what I felt to be at the time, clarity. The ambiguity I was feeling as I undertook the research was mainly hidden internally and expressed only in my reflective journal. To have revealed such issues or concerns at that stage I considered to be a weakness. Most of my research (between 1977 and 1994) was taking place at a time when action research was developing and I was largely unaware of studies written about the role of the researcher in the field of study.

This became a difficult idea to grasp due to the fact that my background in small scale research in classrooms had been shaped by investigations with participants and then creating generalizations from the data. I had not considered my personal stance going deeper than thinking to explore my context, social position and voice (Savin Baden 2004:366).

Another aspect of reflexivity that was becoming clear was that of consideration of my position within the research as offered by Nightingale and Cromby (1999):

> "*Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter. Involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research*" (Nightingale and Cromby 1999:228)

Therefore, in order to have reflective engagement in my research, does that mean I acknowledge my role and the influence that I have on my research; and should I subject those reflections to the same critical analysis and scrutiny that I do to preparing questions or interpretation of data? (Ryan 2006:3). How will I know when I am being reflexive?

It was becoming evident that critical self questioning engagement within my research would allow my perspectives and assumptions to be explicit and would therefore begin to support my original contribution that practitioners can develop a methodological approach that involves participants as subjects in a research partnership. In turn this would 'elicit biases, motivation and behaviour within the research project to support assertions, claims and findings' (Schram 2003:8).

Reflexivity underpins each aspect of my research as I seek to understand what the factors are that will lead 'pupil voice' beyond tokenism to authenticity, in addition to being inside an organisation exploring a culture in which I am a stakeholder. With that in mind I consider the words from Ryan (2006:6):

> *'The reflexive act can change and colour research, the researcher and some argue that the actions and statements within any field could only be fully understood within the context that they were produced'*.

To explore my reflexive engagement in the world of research I took two positions in order to examine reflexivity: 'personal' and 'epistemological' (Nightingale and Cromby 1999:228).

2.2.1 Personal Reflexivity

Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our *'values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research'* (Nightingale and Cromby 1999:228). In order for my work to elicit the authentic voice I began to consider my personal stance in order to judge the basis on which my assumptions at different levels make up the perceptual glasses I wear. To change these

glasses I must make new choices through a process of moving deeper within. In order to transform 'pupil voice' it may be necessary to let go of what I thought I knew clearly and enter into a state of ambiguity.

2.2.2 Epistemological reflexivity

Epistemological reflexivity encourages reflection on the *"assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research and the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings"* (Nightingale and Cromby 1999:228). A new way of knowing about my assumptions and the implications of the interpretation would become central to the analysis of the participants written and spoken words. Epistemological reflexivity encourages questioning to occur at each stage of the research cycle thereby checking the process and conclusions I may be formulating. This links with the way I have framed the action research cycle based on the work of Elliott (1991) see Appendix 1 and Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) see Appendix 2 and informed by the questions to ask of our research based on the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006) see Appendix 3.

2.2.3 Applying personal and epistemological reflexivity early evidence base.

At this early stage in the research I drew on experience in school considering the culture that focused on the voices of the children and began to frame what I thought was an approach to the action research which would involve participants in school. My personal reflexive approach held onto the humanitarian values that we are all unique and have an opinion and linked my epistemological reflexive approach that assumed that somehow development of 'pupil voice' was about culture. I thought it was clear and could be represented in a simple pictorial format. The evidence base at my disposal was vast and led to confusion about what would actually be the focus. I devised a pictorial representation. I thus thought that a conceptual framework could be represented in a pictorial form and the reader would know immediately what I was going to research and even showing almost a path that led to a conclusion.

The actions that were being taken formed the root base of my reading about theories of education and other research undertaken in juxtaposition with my tacit knowledge about the schools gained through many years of experience. Emerging themes (see figure 2 "roots" in orange text) are a useful way to structure the enquiries that are taking place in school and formed the baseline to the action research cycles.
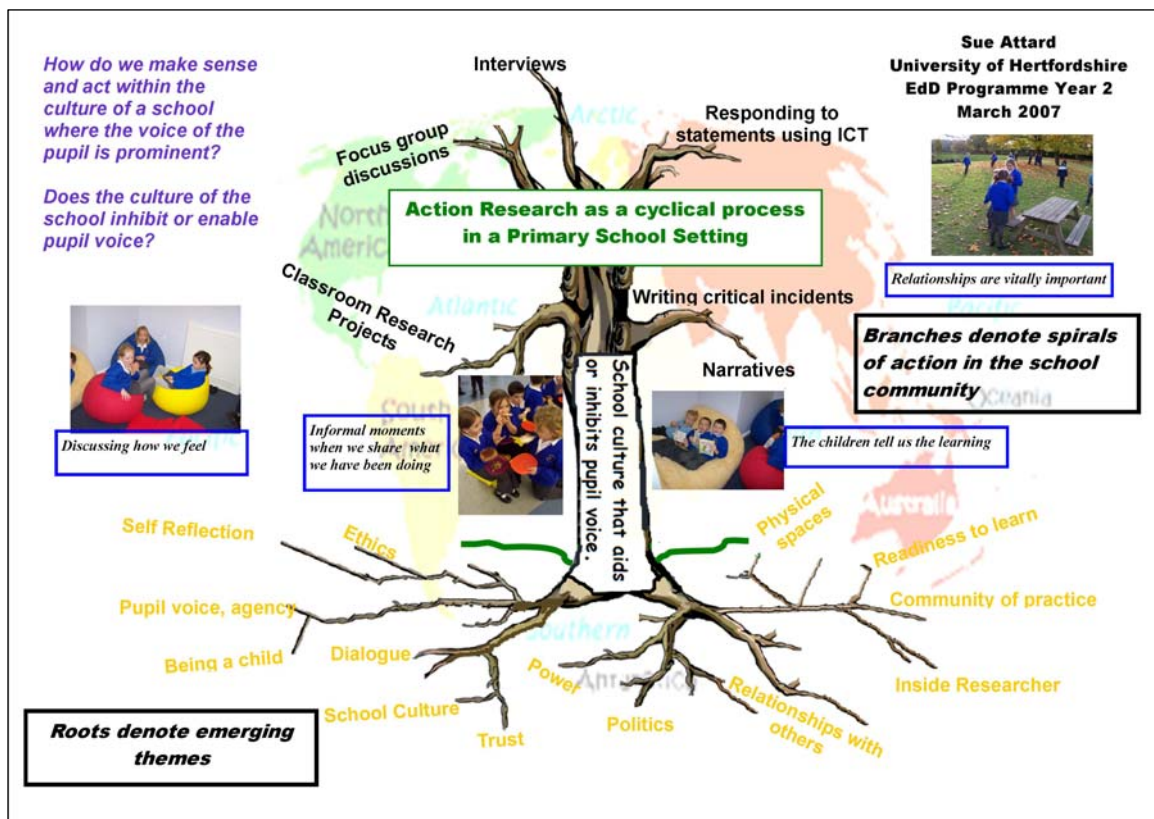
Figure 2 A pictorial representation of a period of clarity in my research

Being reflexive allowed the methodology to begin to open up and I realised that I could now document observations and conversations within the school. It is the work of Dadds and Hart (2001) and Coghlan and Brannick (2005) that encouraged more depth in my research within my own school. I was becoming part of a rapidly growing slipstream of research that was enabling communities of practitioners to think and act differently in their daily work and lives. This linked to a clearer understanding that all information can be used in the process of conceptualisation and theory generation which made the insider researcher role less frightening for me.

2.2.4 Linking reflexivity with insider research.

I discovered the notion of reflexivity as an aid to supporting my insider researcher's role in addition to the evaluation processes. I understood much more clearly that I would become rooted in this work and as I sought to gain clarity I would need to turn the lens more in the direction of the personal biography I bring to the research. Holian and Brooks encourage insider research by stating the following advantages that can be bought to the research:

- *'high levels of subject matter and cultural knowledge and experience;*
- *established credibility and working relationship;,*
- *legitimate access to otherwise confidential information;*
- *conceptual breadth and depth to bring to analysis and;*
- *interpretation of findings.'* (Holian and Brooks 2004:12)

It is through reflexivity I produced the grounds for critique of my practice which has led to my questioning of my assumptions, nature of being and the generation of knowledge. Epistemological reflexivity underpins the critical questioning actively encouraged by Whitehead and McNiff (2006) to occur at each stage of the research cycle thereby connecting with *context, process* and *premise* (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry 2002) when formulating conclusions. When working within an organisation to explore, examine and change the actions, I discovered that having a reflexive stance allowed an analysis of my viewpoint in connection with the interpretations of the participants in my study.

At the beginning of the research journey I had very few ideas of how I would approach my research having had little experience of how research paradigms formed the basis of my approach. In the struggle between critical theorist and social constructivist paradigms I discovered that a new paradigm shift towards a participatory approach will best suit the requirements of action research with young children's voice. Whilst endeavouring to locate my work in a particular paradigm I had to explore my assumptions about the nature of children and childhood. This has helped develop my beliefs about the kind of knowledge it is

possible to gain about children, about myself and others as researchers and about the role children should take in research.

I arrived with a view of wanting to change the world by raising the participation levels of pupils through their voice and agency. I now know that through my work the concepts and ideas I develop can be just a starting point to be critiqued by others.

On reflection the journey I have travelled on so far has convinced me that my previous work, in the field of education, especially around pupils as researchers would be of more value, if I could apply my knowledge and perspectives, in order to enrich the powerful examples of classroom practice that are emerging. The route that my work would now take would be strengthened through reflexive engagement with each aspect of the action research both at core level and within what Schein (1992) refers to as the *'meta cycle of enquiry'*. Hence I would seek to be more explicit in my journal entries about the reasoning behind the actions and my assumptions and assertions. I firstly needed to look back at researcher's who had influenced my early thinking as I grew into my role as practitioner researcher.

2.3 Defining the impact of influential thinkers

Becoming reflexive had led me to considering where I had developed my ideas and strengthened my thoughts about practitioner research and the importance of raising the voice of all the participants including my voice. From within the educational research field I thought I would discover the seminal text that would inform my thinking when it was discovered. Such a search only served to divert my attention away from my writing about practice. The full extent of the work of significant others, namely the teachers, only surfaced during the non participant observation and focus groups of the children at the starting point, as I began discovering what was present in school on which to build the action cycles. I

formulated what was to become a key question for me *"Who also noticed and talked about this?"*

I reflected on two significant writers in the education field as I considered myself as an integral feature within the research; the work of Stenhouse (1974) in encouraging teachers as researchers and Schön (1983) as I came to reflect in and on actions. It was in my reflective journal that I had conversations with myself as I struggled to understand influences over my practices. The extracts taken from my reflective journal, informed not only field study actions but aided my critical review of key texts, as I struggled to locate the root of my knowledge and understanding that was informing my practice.

2.3.1 Stenhouse on teacher research

I found that my practice based knowledge was underpinned by elements of the work of Stenhouse (1974) but was not yet making the connections of theory with practice. Stenhouse's work became significant in Chapter 7 (listening to the voices of teachers) when the teacher's voice became prominent.

> *Journal entry January 2006 on Stenhouse*
> *I remember hearing about the work of Stenhouse during my time at teacher's training college between 1974 and 1977 but somehow thought it to be irrelevant due to the fact that the Humanities project was in secondary schools and I was centred and committed to younger primary children.*
> *The idea that an external researcher should be present to devise the project and guide the spirals of actions full time was almost acceptable as I struggled to understand the purpose of practice based research in the field of developments in education. I felt that such a role would allow an expert in research to analyse and put into academic words what I was incapable of as a teacher.*

The work of Stenhouse in my interpretation during 1970s emphasised the role of the teacher as an important and valuable part of the research process in terms of studying their practice and recording the outcomes. My research required the teachers in their classrooms to study aspects of 'pupil voice'. The difficulty I was to encounter in Chapter 7 was to raise

inadvertently the voice of the children above that of the teachers. Stenhouse talked about teachers *'bettering'* their teaching by studying their classrooms to increase understanding of their own work, which I could relate to, but I found the notion of advice and guidance of full time research teams to help them, by interpreting classroom observations and planning improvements, as devaluing the practitioner researcher's role I so wished to develop.

2.3.2 Schön of reflection in and on actions

Whilst engaging in research within my own classroom I would require actions that raised my knowledge and understanding of what was happening. It was to be reflective practice (Schön 1983) that deepened my understanding. The response to Schön's work raised my desire to have a voice as a teacher to develop actions in classrooms in which I could begin to critically analyse my practice in consultation with the children. My journal responses offered internal discussions about ideas I had gathered in my early professional life.

Journal entry February 2006 Schön
*The work of Schön was something I had heard about but I had not been inclined to discover the depth of why it was useful. I often said I had reflected on something or evaluated but had not separated the **in action** from **on action** as important. When I returned to the text I discovered that both areas were important but have not yet made the link to learning as I struggled to discover if knowledge was about learning. The term tacit knowledge has now arrived is this I know already from the fruits of my reflections and how do I made them known. I need to find out more!!!!*

This is where latterly as a classroom teacher I developed assessment for learning opportunities. Children talking about what they were learning and my reflections on the way I was teaching developed my classroom practice. I would practice daily either *'in action'* whilst engaged in the craft of teaching or during evaluations *'on action'* Schön (1973, 1983, 1987). Schön's work was to become much more prominent in the development of the spirals for action in which the children and their teacher's were developing practice especially in the partnership development in Chapters 8 and 9.

2.3.3 Finding a way forward for myself

Through thirty years of experience in teaching I had found that I was committed to an approach that highlighted the role of the teacher practitioner in changing practice to engage with the learner. The notion argued by Schön that social systems must learn to become capable of transforming themselves without intolerable disruption through what he termed *'dynamic conservatism'* (Schön 1973: 57) had an important place in developing my theories in use. In the role of a Headteacher of a school showing many signs of success, in terms of standards and attainment and other aspects judged through OFSTED framework for inspection, it was important to view change that allowed the maintenance of the unique identity whilst engaging in transformation through the ideas of the participants. I wanted to enrich what was happening rather than create a chaotic situation.   If I was to engage in whole school change, what would happen about those teachers as Schön (1983:69) said, who were, *'locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, finding nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection?'*

I decided to return as a matter of urgency to Stenhouse's ideas of teachers as researchers and Schön's reflection on action as I discovered if teachers in the school are reflecting and open to change through listening to the voices of children. The cycle of action research in Chapter 7 shows how I discovered the need to bring teachers voice into the research rather than concentrating on the children's voice as portrayed in spiral of action research in Chapter 6.

I looked back at my early career in which I had discovered the work of Schön in reflective practice (1983) and applied the same rationale to my newly acquired researcher's role. The initial review was much too wide and fragmented and many discussions at supervision led to an attempt to funnel and consolidate the ideas (figure 3)

Journal Entry March 2006 Where are the important texts?
I am getting so confused when I read. I keep looking at teachers practice and action research literature but am confused as to where I should place the pupil voice element. I can find research studies about teachers with outside researchers asking for ideas from children in their classrooms and playgrounds which are interesting but few about organisational change. How can I frame what I have read?
Funnelling down ideas

Pupil voice   AGENCY
                                              Teacher reflection
Action research   Working with
                              children   Insider researcher

SELF
LITERATURE
METHOD

Figure 3 Journal entry reflecting on the important texts.

The notion argued by Schön that social systems must learn to become capable of transforming themselves without intolerable disruption through what he termed *'dynamic conservatism'* (Schön 1973: 57) had an important place in developing my theories in use. It was important to view change that allowed the maintenance of the unique identity whilst engaging in transformation through the ideas of the participants. I wanted to enrich what was happening rather than create a chaotic situation.   If I was to engage in whole school change, what would happen about those teachers who were, *'locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, finding nothing in the world of practice'* on which to reflect Schön (1983:69).

2.4 Choice of *self* as a circle of influence

Whilst engaging with reflexivity I have discovered that the surfacing of my beliefs and values within my autobiographical journey had influenced the way I had approached the

development of the methodology. The *self* circle of influence, as I have termed it, began simultaneously with the other two foci *literature* and *method (see figure 4).* This starting point explained my initial stages of clarity through which I viewed the research journey.

Figure 4 All circles of Influence are equal

The beginning a period of clarity….All circles of influence are equal

SELF

Role of Headteacher separated from that of researcher.

In possession of the view that pupil voice was worthy of further research.

What is reflexivity?

How am I influenced by the work of Stenhouse and Schon?

LITERATURE

Pupil voice ideas seem to link to the notion of actions for change.

Is the model of Elliott's action research enough to develop actions for change in the classrooms?

METHODS

Following a set of actions I would find out about pupil voice.

Confidence I would find out what I already knew and would create change.

Experienced in the use of interviews and questionnaires.

Figure 4 All circles of influence are equal

I was to discover that my reflective journal supported a way that encouraged examination of my thoughts in action and link those with what I had discovered from the education field in years of experience. The development of *self* within the research was a surprise as I believed initially that I would be able to hide myself as I developed the role as researcher behind the confidence I had developed as a Headteacher. I was committed to 'pupil voice' work as a way of developing children and their teachers in discovering about learning in the classroom. I was confident that the power I had as Headteacher would protect the participants within the gatekeeper's role and that I could show a separation from that of a researcher.

The work already described by Stenhouse on teachers as researchers and developing the reflection in and on action as described by Schön added a critical edge towards the way I

would approach my own research. I therefore decided that I would seek to address the importance of the self circle on influence within each of the cycles of action research knowing that my values and beliefs would affect the way that I looked at the situations in action and the data I collected and analysed. I began with a clear view that the self circle of influence was not prominent at the beginning of the research process. I will describe how I came to know what the influences were as I engaged in the action processes in the school centred on the development of pupil voice'.

2.5 How the *self* circle of influence impacted on the cycles of action.

In this section I show how the *self* circle of influence expanded and contracted as I refocused my gaze based on the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants I engaged with. Within chapter 5 I show how I developed a baseline on which to formulate the actions for change in the school around 'pupil voice'. The self circle of influence became more prominent as I understood the application of epistemological and personal reflexivity as an insider researcher and applied it within the developing literature field (see figure 5). I had categorised content (pupil voice) and methodological (research approaches). The level of self confidence, as I discovered what was already happening in the field, enriched the approach I took to the child observations and focus groups. The *literature* circle of influence formulated in my view a voice of the outside world that was beginning to speak to me as I was reflecting on my role and what others were saying.

STAGE ONE 2005 - 2006
Year 1 marked a period of clarity

Research Question:
To what extent does the culture of the school aid or inhibit pupil voice?

Chapter 5 Base Line Position of 'pupil voice'

SELF
Role as Headteacher separated from that of researcher.

In possession of the view that pupil voice was worthy of further research.

A desire to change the world in terms of transforming learning through the eyes and actions of pupils.

LITERATURE
Explored researchers who has explored work with pupils in terms of decision making and sharing of views on conditions for learning.

Key texts
Hart (1994)
Shier (2001)
Rudduck et al (2003)
Fielding (2001)

Very few key texts that explored methodology as they shared outcomes.

METHODS
Action Research in which the question would be clear.

Following a set of actions I would find out about pupil voice.

Confidence I would find out what I already knew. would create change.

Experienced in the use of interviews and questionnaires.

Research Participants within this spiral
Child Observations
3 Year 1, 3 Year 2, 3 Year 3.

Child Focus Groups
6 Year 4, 6 Year 3, 6 Year 2,

voice

agency

Emerging elements and key questions.

Self
Headteacher and researcher
Can I hold both roles?

Professional responsibilities and power
What power do I have as a Headteacher?

Ethics
How do I protect my participants?

Previous knowledge of pupil voice
How will I explore what I already know?

Literature
Key writers in pupil voice
Have I got them all?

Method
Action research based on principles of practice based work.
Is this what we do all the time to find out where children are?

Tools: Focus groups and interviews.
Would these be straight forward to use?

Figure 5 Discovering the baseline position of 'pupil voice' in school

I was involved in the 'pupil voice' research directly as I gained insight into the opportunities for sharing opinions the children had in school. I used both my role as Headteacher and that of developing researcher in order to engage in discovering what was already in place. In addition to gathering information through observation, I engaged in a series of focus groups which enquired about life in school. This was linked to my interpretation of 'pupil voice' being within the hands of the participants, in this case the children, who would explain what they felt about their time in school. I became more aware of my influence and power in school and the requirements to reflect through the use of my journal, which became a way of exploring and unloading my emotions and concerns. It was evident at the times of the highly prominent self circle of influence there were more self reflective journal entries.

Within Chapter 6 the self circle of influence (figure 6) was much less prominent as I engaged in the actions associated with the implementation of the School Council.

STAGE ONE 2005 - 2006
Year 1 marked a period of clarity

Research Question:
To what extent does the culture of the school aid or inhibit pupil voice?

Emerging Themes and key questions

Whose Voice
Whose voice is most important in School Council?
Hearing
Who are we hearing and why?
Agency
Who owns the actions for change especially in decision making within School Council?
Roles
What is the purpose of pupil bodies in decision making in school?
Power
Who holds the power?

Chapter 6 School Council for representative 'pupil Voice'

Research Participants within this spiral

10 children focus groups
5 girls 5 boys School Council members

9 teachers in a focus group

Teacher facilitator account

METHODS
Implementation of School Council using and Action Research cycle

Location of research within several paradigms
new paradigm inquiry' Guba and Lincoln (2005) Exploration of the following:
Critical theory looking through the lens of political, cultural, economic, gender and values.
Constructivist theory participants as subjects rather than objects of the research.
Participatory approach (Guba and Lincoln 2005) Spirituality in human inquiry is what moves constructivists towards this approach. Participants as co researchers is beginning to emerge through the Action Research.

LARGE AMOUNTS OF DATA HAS BEEN COLLECTED. LACK OF CLARITY ABOUT WHAT TO DO WITH IT.

LITERATURE

Content Literature School Council as a decision making body. UNICEF CRC Article 12 Methodology Literature Linking Elliott's (1991) model for Action Considered Zuber Skerritt and Perry model (2002) to underpin reflections

SELF

Insider researcher links to action research models. Reflections about roles.
How can I move from controlling pupil voice?

Whose voice ?

agency

hearing

Figure 6 Does School Council meets all the requirements of 'pupil voice'?

I followed what seemed to be a straight forward action research process which connected with the model of action research formulated by Elliott (1991, see Appendix 1). There was urgency in my work to introduce a 'pupil voice' system that would progress more quickly towards addressing the rights to be heard for all children. This was a period of the research in which I was not applying the reflexive approach that I had previously discovered so enlightening. It was this lack of focus that ultimately led to unrest amongst the teachers.

In chapter 7 there was a rapid re-emergence of the self circle of influence (see figure 7) as I discovered that I had inadvertently injected a 'pupil voice' system that most of the teachers, except the School Council Facilitator and I, were not prepared for.

As one teacher responded:

 "The children have more time with the Headteacher to tell their point of view than she offers to the staff. That should change as we need to all work together as a whole team". Teacher C

The children not elected onto school council interpreted the roles differently to what I had expected. As one child said:

"I don't know what School Council do. Sometimes James is bossy in the playground. They (school council members) *say they will 'tell on us' when we are doing nothing wrong. I think the teachers listen to the children more on school council".* Yr 4 boy.
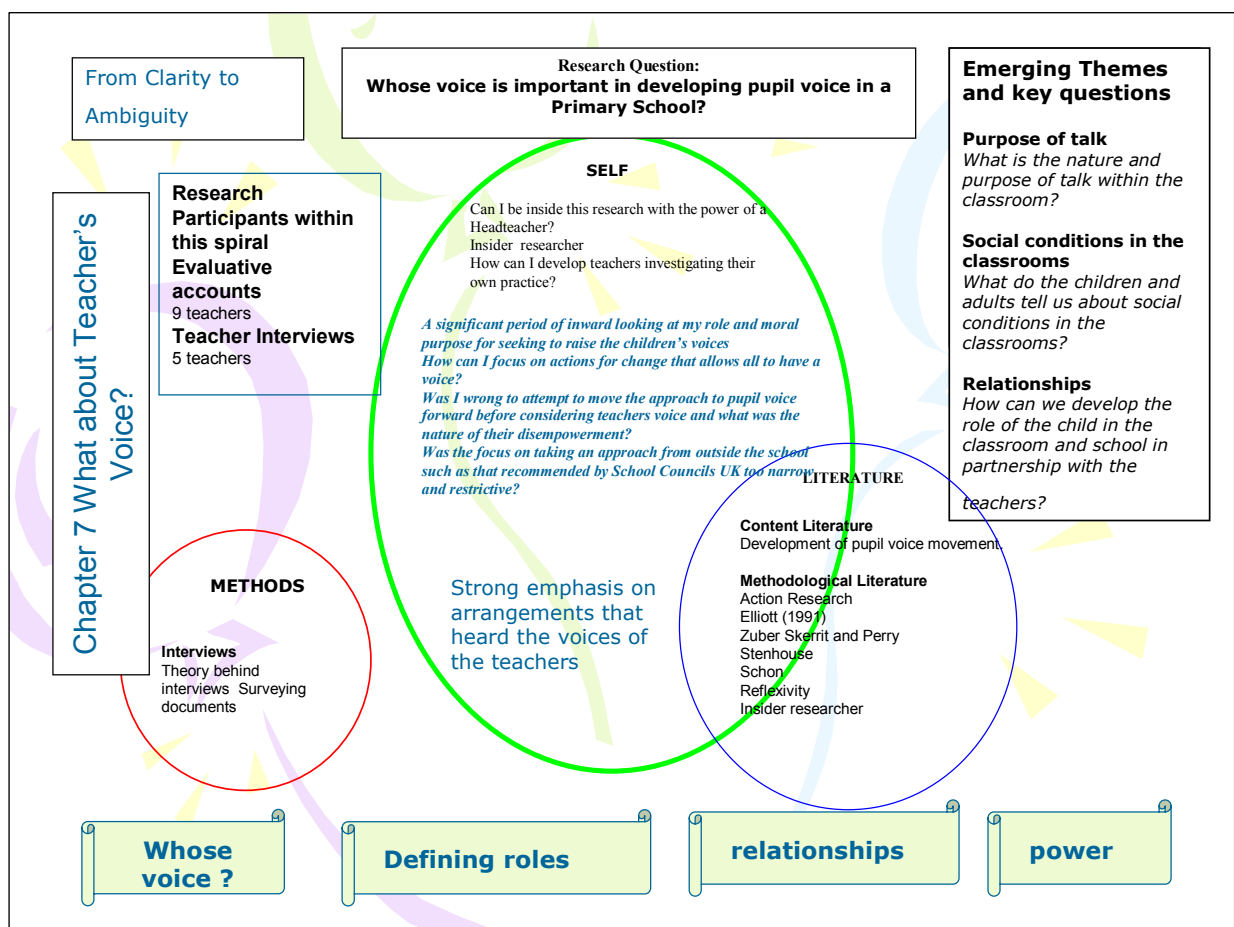
Figure 7 Discovering teacher's voice

I had taken an approach which introduced a body of School Council raising the voice of the children with the support of one of the teachers who had been trained externally and then returned to disseminate the processes. I had not realised that others teachers felt disempowered until I received feedback in the interviews. This led to deeper thoughts about

the purpose of raising the voice of the children and where teachers and other adults would feature in that. I had not considered that the implementation of a structured body to allow children's voices to be heard would be translated by adults as a shift in their power. It was at this point that I felt that the research work had now taken me right back to the beginning of the journey and self doubt began to rise again.

It was at this point that I considered what the teachers were saying in terms of their role in the development of 'pupil voice' and the linking of the research work to their world in the classroom and their continuous professional development. The *self* circle of influence was highly prominent as I unearthed what adults were saying about the introduction of more structured 'pupil voice' activities in school. I began to listen so that I could understand the point of view of the teachers.

In chapter 8 I built on the desire of the teachers to formulate their own approaches to raising the voice of the children within classroom actions. The *self* circle of influence was insignificant at this stage as I decided to transfer the action research approach into the hands of the teachers and their children (see figure 8). I had to reflect on my approach and come to appreciate the way the theory was developing within the school.

Developing pupil voice activities

Research Question:
Is everyone's voice welcome?

Emerging Themes and key questions

Developing research partnerships
How can the children and teachers develop systems to research their experiences together?

Talking and listening
How can we develop a system for talking and listening to the voices of all in the classroom?

Children thinking about learning
Could children become critical thinkers about their learning?

Teacher and learners relationships
What are the features of the teacher and learners relationships that support pupil voice in school?

Chapter 8 'Children as Philosophers'

Research Participants within this spiral
Teacher's comments after CPD sessions 9 teachers
Class of children and teachers comments after the sessions
30 children in each class 9 teachers
Teachers evaluative accounts 9 teachers.

METHODS

Action Step 1
Teacher's learning about children as Philosophers approach

Action Step 2
Reflecting in action gathering the views of children about the process.

Action Step 3
Implementation accounts

Emphasis on an action research approach but this time owned by the teachers

SELF

Developing a new role that allows the research to be carried out by the participants.
Visiting living theory approach.

LITERATURE

Content Literature

Children as Philosophers Haynes 2002

Methodological Literature
Schon Reflective Practice
Argyris and Schon Double loop learning
Dewey Reflective thought
Bruner Metacognition

Purpose of talk

Social Conditions in the classroom

relationships

partnerships

Figure 8 Using 'Children as Philosophers' Approach to 'pupil voice'

Finally in chapter 9 I had returned to view the three circles of influence *self, literature* and *methods* as equal but not now separated but intertwined as they all has influenced the way the actions had taken place (see figure 9).
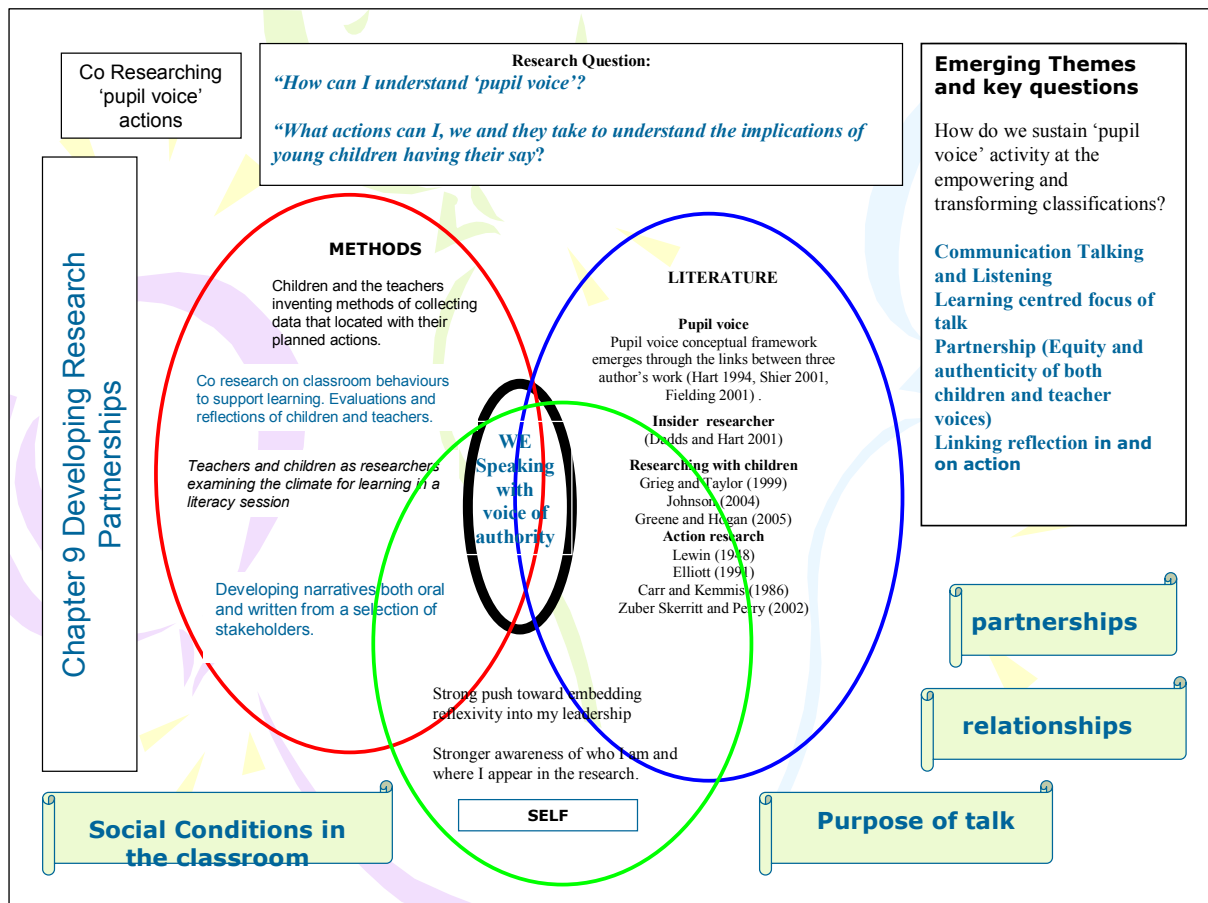
Figure 9 Development of classroom research partnerships

The action research cycles had enabled the focus to change as I gathered and interpreted the data. The strength of the approach where literature informs the chosen method enriched the way I saw things and moved my thinking towards the effectiveness of partnerships in the development of 'pupil voice'. I had proceeded from initial clarity, through ambiguity when the "messiness" of the methodology became more prominent and ending with a deeper understanding of working partnerships with the participants, through sharing together a model of methodology that was always changing.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the methodology has been enriched within the processes lived by the participants as seen through a *self* circle of influence which was formulated through reflexive engagement and the recognition of my values and beliefs as I approached the interpretation of the data I saw before me in the actions for change. The next two chapters unfold the other circles of influence those of *literature* and *methods*.

Chapter 3 Exploring literature circle of influence

> *In this chapter I explore how I came to realise that I was being influenced by the work of others in terms of the literature I located with and how I formulated a conceptual model to interpret the levels of 'pupil voice' involvement in the school at the starting point and how that developed through actions we were engaged in. I divided the literature in two categories content directly related to 'pupil voice' and methodological literature relating to the action research process.*
> *I was led to examine the idea of good research to a 'second' audience* 'It is **for us** to the extent that it responds to concerns of our praxis, is relevant and timely, and so produces the response "that works!" from those who are struggling with problems in their field of action' (Reason and Marshall (1987: 112-113) *I show how the literature circle of influence became a focus as I engaged in the enquiry processes.*

In order to shape the methodological process that I was engaged in, I focused on circles of influence which I considered as I engaged in data collection and analysis leading to my evidence base. The first circle of influence described in Chapter 2 was to focus on my role to seek an understanding of 'self'. This chapter turns outward to survey the literature I discovered that offered a further understanding of action research methodology and 'pupil voice' as a movement towards participation of children in decision making.

In this chapter I show the process that led to the decision to choose *literature* as a circle of influence in the following ways:

1. Defining the *literature*;

2. Methodological Literature to develop the action research process;

3. Content literature in the field of 'pupil voice';

4. How the *literature* circle of influence impacted on the cycles of action.

3.1 Defining the literature

I defined the *literature* circle of influence as the thoughts and knowledge of others engaged in practitioner action research and the linkage with the 'pupil voice' field in order to create a working methodology as the enquiries began. I knew from the beginning of the research that I would seek to be involved in actions for change within the school, in which I am

Headteacher, and that the messages and development of the actions would be coming from the participants as subjects in the research. Initially I divided the literature into two categories; methodology that was linked to the way of finding out, considering others viewpoints about research enquiries and 'pupil voice' a relatively new field in which children were seen as stakeholders with opinions to share. I will show how these two categories connected as the cycles of action research developed.

3.2 Methodological Literature to develop the action research process

The methodological literature starting point was described in Chapter 1 as the influence of Elliott's (1991) model underpinned by Zuber- Skerritt and Perry (2002) through a focus on the notion of content, process and premise during each of the steps in the action cycles. The linkage between the action research cycle of Elliott (Appendix 1) and Zuber Skerritt and Perry (Appendix 2) offered a methodology that focused on a dual approach - that of both action (practice) and research. Throughout the enquiry stages of action cycles I addressed responsiveness and rigour in participation with others through the interconnection of the 'action research cycle' as a learning cycle (Kolb 1984) and Schön's (1983, 1987) *'systematic reflection'*, to develop an effective way for practitioners to learn. Through the reflexive stance I encourage practitioners to engage with my work to see beyond a frequently espoused phrase *"I do that every day in the classroom"* towards deeper conversations that unearth *'deliberate and conscious reflection'* and the *'sceptical challenging of interpretations'* (Dick 2003:7).

The framing of the research enquiry journey therefore became a cyclic or spiral procedure in which the collection and interpretation of data shaped the next steps of the change process. The literature on models of action research structured my approach with a view that a person's actions are based on implicitly held assumptions, theories and hypotheses and with

every observed result my understanding of theoretical knowledge enhanced. This approach emerged from Carr and Kemmis (1986) and McTaggart (1991) being defined as emancipatory action research in which my engagement in 'pupil voice' would seek to change the 'status quo'. Such an approach connected with my view that group dynamics and dialogue were powerful in determining the living experiences in the classroom raising critical questions about the practice that is discovered.

3.2.1 Shaping the research report

Within this action research methodology the generated theory informs practice and practice refines the theory in continuous transformation and for that reason it was important to seek to show in the cycles for actions the way the data had been gathered and interpreted as 'living theory' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I structured the descriptions of the cycles for change in chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 through the use of a pedagogical text as *'the whole idea of action research is that the kind of theory that is most appropriate for explaining the processes is already within the practices, and emerges from the practice as the research develops'* (Whitehead and McNiff 2006:2 see Appendix 3).

The cycles for change have been written as a research report in which I respond to critical questions on which to understand and display the quality of the data I / we have gathered in support of the content field of 'pupil voice'. I have chosen to weave into my approach specific work undertaken in the 'pupil voice' field which I have had to consider when critically appraising initiatives that may have been used in my actions for change cycles.

The other questions have been informed by the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006) and are as are as follows:

What is the concern?

Why are we concerned?

What have others written about the field of concern?

What experiences can we describe to show why we are concerned?

What kind of data will we gather to show the situation as it unfolds?

How will the evidence support a claim to knowledge?

How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate?

How do I modify the ideas in the light of the new learning?

When considering *what is the concern?* I have presented the cycles of action that have been taken either from the baseline or the remaining concerns surfacing within the conclusions of each of the chapters of my primary research. I seek to show how I have taken an approach that centres on explicitly defining the quality of the research findings within the school in which I have chosen to centre the enquiry.

Why are we concerned? shows how I as researcher in collaboration with the participants was engaged in the generation of the knowledge and understanding of 'pupil voice' through exploring the depth of knowledge we have created as insider researcher / practitioners and participants as subjects of the research.

What have others written about the field of concern? became an additional critical question which I generated due to current practice in the educational field involving the imposition of Government led initiatives on a school, some of which I may find useful in discussion of next steps with participants. I wanted to use such political based approaches and the research of external researchers in 'pupil voice' to compare their viewpoints with that of our interpretations to bring the outside world inside.

When considering *What experiences can we describe to show why we are concerned?* I decided to make explicit the reflexive stance I had taken in collaboration with others to shape

the beginning stages of each of the cycles of action. The descriptions of the actions taken, shows the way that points of view have emerged from the data and then added to the area of concern in the next cycle.

What kind of data will we gather to show the situation as it unfolds? Seeks in my view to explain how the chosen methods of data gathering are informed through the actions for change and how within each of the cycles different methods are selected and the process of their selection analysed as part of method becoming a circle of influence.

The decision to theorise as the data is presented and analysed formulates the critical question *How will the evidence support a claim to knowledge?* It is at this point within each of the cycles that I will show the developing themes that are emerging and the opportunities to share with other practitioners the outcomes.

How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate? I explore the validity of my claims to knowledge and how I reached the conclusions which formulated the next steps in the change process. Within the conclusions comes the consideration of *How do I modify the ideas in the light of the new learning?* It is within this section that I consider the implications for my research for the wider developments in 'pupil voice' field.

I can only account for the deliberate methodology choices that I put in place during this action research project. As the project progressed through the cycles you will see that the methodology took on a life of its own as the teachers and children supplemented, altered and took ownership of the action research process, adopting my work as their own.

As the aim of the action research was to explore 'pupil voice' denying the children this empowerment would have been counterproductive to the nature of the project.

Hence I have learnt to live with the methodological inventiveness and messiness that emerged in this project and it is why methodology is prominent within the literature circle of influence and informing the final circle of influence, that of methods throughout this thesis.

3.3 Content literature in the field of 'pupil voice'

For the purpose of my work I use the term 'pupil voice' to describe the work of others, in the field, that have informed the theoretical basis of the actions to be taken. 'Agency' is used to describe ways which children and their teachers communicate and share their views and aspirations within what Berger and Luckman (1966) framed "a dialogue between two or more, who may have different ideas to share with each other". This links with the social construction of reality within our community of learners. Rudduck (2004) describes children "becoming active players in the education system, co-constructing knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning, problem solving, and developing policy and practice about the curriculum". I will use a similar interpretation of voice when using the views of the adults in the co-construction of knowledge. Voice research is rooted in the notion that all children, like adults are active agents in their own learning and are entitled to participate in research pertaining to their interests (Ravet 2007:234).

When defining 'voice', I take the view that participants have the right to express an opinion with 'agency' implying some degree of power. Arnot et al (2004: 3) suggests a cautionary note about the consequences of *"injecting strong pupil voice into a classroom teaching system that has evolved over two centuries without listening to such voice"*. Such a view links to the *"notion of voice…. as a constructed entity"* occurring through different actions and practices (Howard et al 2002:14). The exploration of 'whose voice?' is a point that will be debated in all aspects of my research in this area. The most powerful voices may inhibit or restrain others from participation as Arnot et al (2004: 43) asserted in response to Bernstein's

(1996:12) work regarding whose voice is actually heard in the *'acoustic of the school'*. My driver early on to consider further 'pupil voice' was rooted in my dissatisfaction with the research studies in the field which I felt were creating, unintentionally, a false appearance of inclusive practices viewing children as *'objects'* of research rather than *'subjects'* (Green and Hill, 2005: 3).

The framework of the content literature draws on pupil participation research by Hart (1994) Fielding (2001) and Shier (2001) exploring different levels of engagement, in the 'pupil voice' process, as stakeholders encouraging the children to be actively involved. My work in 'pupil voice' has developed from previous studies in schools in which evidence was collected about pupils' attitudes explored in and out of classrooms (Fielding, 2001, Arnot et al., 2003; Rudduck, 2004). In order to connect the literature it has been important to create a structure that considers aspects of pupil participation. It will be through dialogue that I will *'reflect in action'* (Schön, 1987:28) and begin to formulate themes and perspectives about 'pupil voice' through a variety of research methods. Such an approach begins the structure of a community of practice formed by people who:

> *"engage in a process of collective learning in a shared area of interest and requires the following characteristics: the domain; the community; the practice. The domain is the area of interest; the community is formed by the relationships (conversations, discussions etc.) between members; and the practice is what community members do with learning derived from their interaction"* (Witt et al: 2007:12).

Research studies such as those portrayed by Arnot et al (2004) and Fielding and Bragg (2003) offered common themes for considering the development of 'pupil voice', with the strongest of the themes being the *'concern of pupils to learn and be helped to learn to learn'* (Arnot et al 2004:86) and value placed on *"opportunities to make decisions about, pace of work, where and with whom they sat and what was worth recording about their learning"* (ibid:87).

The Human Rights Act, UNICEF Article 12 (1989 ratified in UK 1991) and the criticism of its implementation (UNICEF 2002) led to a plethora of legislation (Children Act 2002, 2004, Every Child Matters 'ECM' 2004) emphasizing the voice of the child in decision making as active participants (Johnson 2004:3). Much of the legislation stressed the involvement of young children in decision making (Alderson 2003) but little movement in practice has been evidenced (DfES 2003).

Other calls to listen to the voices of children came from research led by Ruddock in which suggestions were made that schools were outdated (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004) and the development of positive relationships to secure trust in students as researchers was proposed (Fielding and Bragg 2003). The application of so much legislation and the resultant change in social fabric caused tensions in the area of accountability for schools in the form of a *'new orthodoxy, mandated, monitored and measured from the top down'* (Rudduck et al 2003:92) or policy getting *'unhooked'* from *'events at the point of application'* (Huberman 1992) in terms of the readiness of schools to engage with levels of participation.

3.4 Creating the taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice'

I reviewed the works of Hart (1994), Shier (2001) and Fielding (2001), and from the juxtaposition of these theories formulated taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice' in four categories: control (being in school);delegation (being consulted);empowerment (being consulted and listened to); transformation (Listening to each others voices and learning together).

This taxonomy is proposed as my conceptual framework and is graphically presented in *figure 10.* My intention is that I will map the actions for change through the ascending stages of the taxonomy with each action informing the methodological choices made. The higher classification on the taxonomy, the greater is the emphasis of the children in leading the

60

methodology. In this thesis, the actions for change through the developing cycles will be linked back to this structure that explores the four key areas of controlling, delegating, empowering and transforming in the conceptual framework.

PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	**3.**Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	**2.**Students as Active Respondents	**5**. Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	
CONTROLLING *Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.*	**2.** children are supported in expressing their view **1.** Children are listened to	**1.** Students as Data Source	**3.** Tokenism **2.** Decoration **1.** Manipulation	

Figure 10 A taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice'

3.4. 1. Controlling 'pupil voice'

I categorized the starting point of the taxonomy as controlling 'pupil voice'. Within this level the children's voice is controlled by those adults who have a legal safeguarding responsibility for them as part of their paid employment. The children can be asked for their opinion which may be freely given but it is filtered through the adults. Hart (1994) is particularly critical of the control level which he classifies as not participation but 'manipulation, decoration and tokenism'. However I consider this may be a starting point for all schools to measure their

perceived levels of 'pupil voice' activity. Much of Chapter 5 explores the opportunities in my school 'pupil voice' in which the control level on the taxonomy (*figure 10*) is evident along with Chapter 7 in which the dissatisfaction of teacher's regarding their own lack of voice returns the research to the status quo of control.

3.4.2. Developing 'pupil voice'

Level two involves developing the children's voice in terms of a giver of information to adults who ask focused questions. It begins to develop a two way process of dialogue that enriches the opportunities and includes the children in sense making of their world in school. Their views are heard and noted as part of a process of evaluating their experiences in school. They begin to negotiate a role in finding out more with adults who care for them. Although at this level the dialogue and actions remain adult initiated the children have an allocated role in fact finding. Chapter 6 explores the introduction of School Council which displays a movement upward in the taxonomy (figure 10 p61) to developing pupil voice alongside the initial stages of development of 'children as philosophers' in Chapter 8.

3.4.3 Empowering 'pupil voice'

Level three is about the starting point of transferring power to the children entitled 'empowering pupil voice' because of the shift in emphasis from them being information givers to developing partnerships in decision making. This level begins to address a need for children to be involved in the decisions which affect their lives and can be practised through classroom activities, thereby living the UN Convention of the rights of a child (1989) particularly Article 12 (see page 2) . In Chapter 5 my decision to observe the children and engage in focus groups to discover the baseline for action for change was also being seen as empowering 'pupil voice' by the teachers as at this point the children were the only voices I had heard. In Chapter 6 within the development of School Council the children were

displaying evidence of taking such power, much to the displeasure of some of the teachers. In the final stages of Chapter 7 there is movement against the taxonomy (figure 10 p61) towards living the empowerment of 'pupil voice' through the development of the teacher / child partnership. It is within empowering 'pupil voice' that the children can not only become actively involved in decision making but co- research with teachers what is happening in and around school.

3.4.4. Transforming 'pupil voice'

Level 4 lives more fully the principles of all the articles of the UN Convention for the Rights of a Child offering opportunities to participate in decision making within areas initiated by teachers but also suggested by themselves. This occurs within a partnership approach to research in which the voices of both the children and teachers are interconnected. The classroom partnership in Chapter 9 displays both this in action and also the conclusions in which I show how the systematic enquiry has moved on beyond the lifetime of the primary research period. It is working within this level that the children are able to initiate their own actions in gaining the power to make decisions. They have opportunities to find out some facts about life in school from others and then share some of the responsibility for change. The culture of a school in which the pupils are engaged in 'pupil voice' activities that are transformative encompasses at the highest level of the taxonomy (figure 10 p61) the work of three key writers in the field, Hart (1994), Shier (2001) and Fielding (2001). These works can be considered as a whole in which the highest degree of alignment between the pupils and adults sees decision making as a shared experience of *'power and responsibility'* (Shier 2001) that *'enables'* pupils (Hart 1994) to *'deepen their understanding and learning'* (Fielding 2001).

3.5 How the *literature* circle of influence impacted on the cycles of action.

In his section I show how the *literature* circle of influence expanded and contracted as I refocused based on the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants I engaged with. From a position equal status of the three circles of influence *self, literature* and *methods* at the beginning of my research, I encountered changes in focus as each of the cycles of action research unfolded. Within chapter 5 I had confidence in the ability to know myself through reflective practice that built on the desire to use a model of action research that I felt comfortable with Elliott (1991). The way I approached the discovery stage I viewed as straight forward and therefore the *literature* circle of influence became intertwined with the *self* as I engaged in information gathering (see figure 5 p46) both were of equal influence with methods not yet finding a position. Through self reflection in my journal entries (figure 11) I engaged with 'pupil voice' literature to gain a way of discovering what the children already experienced at school that could be defined within the field. I recorded in my journal an early level of confidence that used the Elliott (1991) action research model.

Spiral One Engaging the voices of children

RECONNAISSANCE (FACT FINDING & ANALYSIS)
"What is the culture of the school that enables or inhibits pupil voice?"
This question causes many more sub questions to emerge as I reflect on the actions I see around the school every day.

There is something in the school that helps the children to feel confident but what is it?,
How do we move towards the children sharing with us what they feel?
How do children voice their opinions?
Will they tell me what they think I want to hear?

I think that methods known to the children at this stage might be better to use. They know that adults watch what they do in order to move on their learning. A major part of the Early years curriculum is participant observation and I am often seen around the school watching.

GENERAL PLAN (ACTION STEPS)

Find out by observing the children what life was like for the small group.

Action Step 1 Focus group ideas
Formulate from the observations four key questions to ask the children in focus groups about life in school.

Action Step 2 School Council group
Implement a structure in which the voice of the child began the decision making.
Introduce School Council

IMPLEMENT
Focus groups
School Council

Forgotten teachers

Figure 11 Over confidence in using Elliott's model leading to "forgotten teachers"

Chapter 6 was built on the desire to practice a 'pupil voice' action through the development of the School Council. The literature about the formation of School Council School Council UK 1993;was influential only to the extent that it informed the *methods* within the action research cycle that was being followed in order to implement a School Council body for decision making. The literature circle of influence became less important as the action research cycle was followed and the School Council information received in the training programme was systematic (see figure 6 p47).

Chapter 7 saw the rapid re-emergence of *self* circle of influence as the discovery of teacher's voices showed that 'pupil voice' actions had not been introduced in a way that everyone understood. The *literature* circle influenced the reflexive practice as I realised that the model of Elliot (1991) required my deeper understanding of *content*, *process* and *premise* (Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2002).

I reconsidered both my role as insider researcher and what I had discovered about teacher research from Stenhouse (1976). I linked this to ESRC 'pupil voice' literature in which teacher's work in classrooms had shown similar reactions when the voice of the children questioned the status quo (Fielding and Bragg 2003; Rudduck and Flutter 2004). I needed to become more reflexive to understand why teachers had reacted in the way they did to the implementation of the School Council. I used my journal to record my state of confusion with the action research approach and the discovery of the viewpoints of the teachers (see below). I would return to the action research approach in order to find a way forward in which I could unearth more clearly my assumptions, beliefs and assertions.

Chapter 8 describes the significant rise in the literature circle of influence (*see figure 8 p 50*) as the development of a 'children as philosophers' approach developed in which the teachers began with the control through their professional development and then opened up the ideas to the children. This was the basis of the actions developed by teachers and children. It gave the teachers ownership of the approach in which there was no right or wrong answer or set structure. It would be developed within the joint discussions or shared voice of both parties.

Chapter 9 saw the return of equal status of the three circles of influence of *self, literature* and *methods* but in this cycle they became interrelated (see figure 9 p51) as the participants took ownership of the classroom research projects and I connected with the construction of childhood (Prout 2002) as a way of linking the taxonomy with the messiness of the participatory research.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how I structured the literature review into two categories content 'pupil voice' and methodological action research which formulated taxonomy of development of 'pupil voice' on which to address my generic research question *'How can I understand 'pupil voice'?'* and the more specific question *'What actions can I, we and they take to understand the implications of young children having their say?* I articulate how I have been influenced by literature in the development of the action research cycles and how I came to know through looking at the work of others who had taken actions for change in the 'pupil voice' field. In the next chapter I will explore the final circle of influence that of *methods*.

Chapter 4 Exploring *methods* circle of influence

*In this chapter I explore how in order to be true to the voice of the children and of the teachers I would need to seek methods that offered the opportunity for sharing orally what the stakeholders felt about the processes they were engaged in with regard to 'pupil voice' actions, and how to shape the way the data was collected to take account of the voices. It explores the aspects of data gathering and the way that I used critical questions as I interpreted the outcomes. The methods circle of influence was important as a way of showing how, within participant action research, some of the more traditional qualitative research methods such as observation and interviews could be linked to evaluation and reflective practices already present within the school setting, and how they were adapted to widen opportunities for all to engage. I located with a second audience. 'It is **for us** to the extent that it responds to concerns of our praxis, is relevant and timely, and so produces the response "that works!" from those who are struggling with problems in their field of action' (Reason and Marshall (1987: 112-113). It is through the application of different methods that the practitioner researcher can come to terms with the messiness of emancipatory action research.*

The third circle of influence links together my inward reflections *self* and outward perspective of others in terms of the *literature* in order to understand the methods that can be adapted to encounter participatory action research in which the insider researcher shares the responsibility for gathering and interpreting the data to formulate actions for change.

In this chapter I show the process that led to the decision to choose *methods* as a circle of influence in the following ways:

1. Defining the reasons for selecting *methods*;

2. Exploring the *methods* used;

3. How the *methods* circle of influence impacted on the cycles of action.

4.1 Defining the reasons for selecting *methods*

Within this action research methodology I adapted a number of research methods as a means of collecting, analysing and making sense of the data. Within each of the methods selected I questioned my actions through engagement with reflexive practice.

I asked critical questions at the onset, during the data collection stage and as the analysis emerged. I based these on three key questions:

1. Why have I chosen to do this? (*Premise)*

2. How is it going? *(Process)*

3. What have I found out? (*Content)*

4. Each of the questions were underpinned by Zuber Skerritt and Perry's (2002) model (Appendix 2) School Council UK 1993;

 in particular *premise*, *process* and *content,* in order to make explicit to myself and others the roots of my decision making process with regard to the methods I selected.

4.1.1 Why have I chosen to do this?

Each of the methods was chosen as the cycles developed with some being added within a cycle in response to suggestions from the participants. I wanted to raise an awareness of the underlying assumptions I or others may have had about the purpose of the data and the way it was collected. It offered an opportunity for living the actions I was espousing about the way all humans have a right to express their opinions.

The words of the participants were used to change the direction of the research as evidenced in Chapter 6 (see page 105) in which a comment gathered from an interview with a teacher led to a shift in focus:

> *The children are often consulted and have more of a say than the staff. The School Council find out, talk about classroom changes and behaviour and, then come back to tell the class before we were told by the facilitator"* Teacher E.

The change in approach resulting from this set of comments refocused my attention from the child leading 'pupil voice' across the school to listening to the voice of the teachers (see Chapter 7). I have chosen to use the term teacher A, B. C etc rather than invented names to maintain confidentiality of the participants within the school that is known for work in this field.

4.1.2 How is it going?

During the research process, I thought deeply about the strategies that were being deployed, and how each aspect of the cycle required not only an analysis of what changes occurred, but what was going on in the minds of the participants. In keeping with the theme of pupil voice I was drawn to a significant comment made from a 6 year old about capturing evidence; *Why don't we talk about our school by saying what we see, hear and feel?*. This became the baseline for most of the questioning within the mixed methods adopted, which encompassed some of the more traditional data gathering approaches such as focus groups and interviews with processes that are used for termly evaluation in school.

4.1.3 What have I found out?

The methods selected were linked to the ways of working in the school and not bolted on to a pre determined structured framework. Therefore documents such as self reflective journals, offered with the permission of the teachers, became a source of data that enriched the participant's role in actions for change. I found that following the exploration of the teachers viewpoints in Chapter 7 (see p126), the subsequent cycle became more reflective and the sharing of ideas gained a critical edge. Feedback was enriched as encountered in a quote within cycle 3 Chapter 8 (see page 149) from a teacher who previously expressed doubts about the value of 'pupil voice':

> *"I have found Philosophy to be far more successful than I could have imagined this year. Children's enthusiasm for the subject is something to behold and the dynamism for which topics are discussed is inspirational. I continually have found myself to be surprised by the depth of thinking and maturity of thought that has ensued". Teacher D.*

The use of the Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) Model ensured that at each stage of planning, engaging in and evaluating the research, the methods used to elicit the data were also under question.

4.2   Exploring the *methods* used

The methods developed within the actions for change which were mapped against the taxonomy of pupil development of 'pupil voice' (*figure 10 p61*). Several methods that embedded the use of voice, such as interviews and focus groups, remained a constant feature but changed in formation as critical analysis of the process occurred. Other methods emerged as a particular focus of interest was actioned. The main methods used were:

1. Participant observation;

2. Focus groups of children and teachers;

3. Journal entries as field notes;

4. Interviews;

5. Surveys of evaluative documents

4.2.1 Participant observation

Participant observation was chosen because I had no firm assumptions about what children would be voicing and for a short time I could immerse myself in their lived experiences.

> *"Rather than using data to confirm or support existing theory researchers use participant observation to discover theory. They try to gain an understanding of human action and social process by entering as far as possible the worlds of those whose behaviours they are trying to   understand"*. (Gray et al 2007:181)

I was drawn to the field of participant observation and research following a particular pragmatic approach (James 1907 updated in 1981) in which the value of truth is dependent on the person holding it. Pragmatism emphasises that social life is not fixed but changing and it is the role of the myself the researcher to record experiences of the transformations in terms of the effects it has on relationships and interpretations. It involves others in 'meaning making' alongside myself the researcher as we are all part of the environment in which we shape the culture. This technique is least likely to lead to researchers imposing their own reality on the social world they seek to understand. The role of the researcher is to understand

by observing social life in which individuals are subject to change as they gain knowledge of themselves.

My role as insider researcher, seeking to understand what is happening in 'pupil voice' in school, was supported through engagement in participant observation. I could be part of the classroom and playground activities as well as observing what was happening in the world of several children. I deepened the observation notes by identifying assumptions through my journal.

> ***Journal entry 11 March 2006* Participant Observation**
> It is really hard to look back at my rough notes about my observations of the children   I had selected to follow around school. I wondered did I ask the right ones. I tried to   have a cross section based crudely on academic attainment measured by teacher's assessments. However it didn't seem to make much difference as I looked back at   each child because those finding the more academic work difficult reacted in a similar way to those recognised as academically higher achievers. Certainly talk in classrooms was dominated by the teachers who often asked questions they knew the answers to. Children keen to respond delivered the right answer usually but in a busy classroom were only heard at a superficial level. There was very little opportunity to offer opinions as it seemed the curriculum ran the thinking.
> *What decisions do our children make?*
> *How do they use their voice in the wider sense of agency?*

Participant Observation became a constructive method at the beginning of the development of my 'pupil voice' research for three reasons:

1.   I could begin to capture a moment in time of a social world of a child in which the imposition of my own reality is curbed;

2.   I would begin to understand why changes needed to occur:

3.   I could record what was happening and then reflect on my assumptions.

4.2.2 Focus groups of children and teachers

I wanted to approach the agency and voice research through dialogue in order to find out what is known, understood and shared by the participants in my research. With this in mind it

became a central feature of my enquiry to use a method that linked more obviously with the voice of participants. This led to an exploration of focus groups which, naively, I felt were simple to plan and deliver (Denscombe 2003) and would assist knowledge transfer (Cohen et al 2000).

Focus groups have become a popular method of gaining information about attitudes, perceptions, feelings and ideas (Denscombe 1998) and the agenda is dominated by the participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 1998: 290). They are useful to develop themes on which to generate meaning (Miles and Huberman 1994). Such a seemingly straight-forward approach offered a useful starting point for 'pupil voice' research. I viewed focus groups, rooted in sociological and psychological enquiry with the primary aim of hypothesis testing (Green & Hogan 2005:236), as a way to stimulate a richer discussion with the participants than within individual interviews.

In planning for the focus groups, and also from within the previously discussed participant observations, I uncovered two areas of concern: organisation and ethics. Consideration needed to be given to the location of the focus group activity in familiar surroundings (Greig & Taylor 1999) and the composition of the group as a whole. Suggestions that single gender groups for younger children and no more than six participants were tried (Greig & Taylor 1999, Greene & Hogan 2005) with early evidence showing mixed gender groups were dominated with the voices of boys, and greater than six participants were dominated by voices of the confident and articulate players. Ethical issues arose around the disclosure of information, and the notion of informed consent, when sharing to the whole group, as well as the researcher, and the responsibilities of safeguarding the participants by monitoring levels of stress and ensuring a thorough debrief (Green & Hogan 2005). Information about the

feelings of the participants with regard to their work in classrooms has been contained within first hand experiences.

The most appropriate methods for gaining information about the development of the new School Council (Chapter 6 p105) I deemed to be focus groups as these would offer some degree of opportunity for freer discussion than those trialled in the base line of the action research cycle. The adults created written accounts that reflected on their thoughts and observations prior to arrival at the focus group session. I made notes in my journal of actions that the school council was involved in, and reflections during the action for change.

The focus group sessions for the children were made up of single gender groups of children of the same age and selected from year one (6 year olds) to year four (9 year olds). The reason for choosing this grouping came from the previous cycle of action in which there was evidence reported in the field notes of mixed gender groups appearing to affect responses (see page 94). The ten children chosen represented sixty percent of the children on the School Council body and had a mixture of those in leadership roles and class representatives.

The adult focus group included all nine teachers who orally expanded on the reflections they had offered prior to sharing their views in a focus group which was held six months into the actions of the School Council. The teacher facilitator of the School Council also published a case study about the early days of introduction of a School Council for a target audience of others who may want to follow a similar path.

4.2.3 Journal entries as field notes.

I kept field notes in my journal during the research process which enabled reflection about my contribution and role as well as contextualising the groups during the discussion. The focus groups, discussed above, provided viewpoints from the children about how they learn

and what did or did not assist such learning. The work of Arnot et al (2004) in their research found a similar desire by pupils to learn in an environment where teachers understand their needs, as I was also discovering for myself in the observations and focus groups. I kept my journal entries alongside the transcripts in order to raise my levels of understanding of *context, process* and *premise* (Zuber Skerritt and Perry 2006) I structured my journal reflections around the informal conversations I had with the children and teachers alongside the notes I made as part of the meaning making of the actions for change.

4.2.4 Interviews

I designed the interviews from the survey of the evaluative documents responses to triangulate ideas from the teachers. Interviews on the surface seemed a simple way of collecting data when likened to conversations, however, when conducting interviews I discovered the importance of addressing a researcher's assumptions and understandings about the situation (Denscombe 2003: 163), thereby avoiding an *'illusion of simplicity'* (ibid: 164). A caveat when using interviews is what Denscombe (2003) refers to as *'the interviewer effect'* in which the responses to the questions may be affected by the perceptions of the person asking the questions. Certain personal attributes are *'givens'* but it is worth addressing the adoption of a passive and neutral stance which is designed not to antagonize or upset. Using such a passive or neutral approach in which *'self'* is kept firmly hidden beneath a cloak of cordiality and receptiveness (ibid). I felt sure that I was choosing to test what Elliott describes as *'the vision of a school as participatory democracies'* (Elliott 1991:28) in order to explore the enabling culture to research 'pupil voice'.

4.2.5   Surveys of evaluative documents

The method selected for gaining information about the views of the teachers was to use a survey of the end of year evaluation of outcomes documents. Each year the teachers produce

a document evaluating the outcomes of developments which is readily available within the public domain as an evaluation of school improvement actions that have occurred. I used the documents to discover information about the emerging themes related to 'pupil voice' and to discover other factors that were causing unrest with the new role of the School Council. The teachers also used their own reflective notes to complete the documentation. The teachers had agreed to take part in the action research across the school within 'pupil voice' and understood that all documents evaluated for this area would be part of the process. Following receipt of the evaluations I discussed with Key Stage Groups (mixed aged classes spanning 2 years) the emerging themes and my interpretation of their words in connection with the themes.

4.3   How the *methods* circle of influence impacted on the cycles of action.

The *methods* circle of influence became prominent as the actions for change developed and I addressed the subjectivity of myself as a researcher, which added a further layer of complexity to researching with children inside the school I lead. In order to move forward I would have to address power relations between the adults and children, by accessing methods that gave up some of the power within the research situation (Alderson 2005:10). In keeping with the exploration of *'pupil voice'* I decided to seek out methods that offered a role to the children as researchers. I would seek to use a variety of creative methods, focus groups, reflective accounts and conversations in which I remained open to the *"children's level of understanding, knowledge, interests and particular location in the social world"* (Greene S and Hogan D 2005:17). The rich variety of methods would provide triangulation which is not a fixed point but a facet of a crystal which *"reflects externalities and refracts within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on the angle of our repose"* (Richardson 1994:523). I would have to look differently at the ways I could seek to discover what the participants were informing me

as the action cycles occurred. For this reason *methods* would have to be a circle of influence in the way I framed the methodology, as the task of a social researcher as I see it, is to provide methods to enable interest in listening to children's views as reality, and the ongoing methodological analysis and critique is framed to ensure that we could listen to children in ways that faithfully represented their views and experiences of life. There is a *"scarcity of research asking children, especially young children, to describe their own feelings and behaviours or to evaluate the services of care provided to them"* (Greene S and Hogan D 2005:28).

Within the baseline stage of the research, as outlined in Chapter 5 (page 83), I approached the examination of the methods I would use with confidence, collecting data through observation and focus groups. I drew on the experience of observing children in my practice as a teacher and thought that focus groups would be straight forward as I asked a series of questions about being in school. They were designed around what school was like and centred on teaching and learning. I thought I could understand the world frequented by the children through observations, discovering what they desired or were thinking. I was soon to realise that the children thought about things more deeply than I had imagined, as one 6 year old told me:

> *"You cannot know what it is like to be a child in the playground because you are not 6 and anyway when you come outside the children behave better so they don't get told off"*

I discovered that I would have to return to the children with their transcripts in order to understand what the words were actually portraying, asking the children what they thought after hearing their words again. This was the first opportunity I had to involve the children directly but I still saw them as objects of the research and solely used methods that gathered data from them.

This baseline stage of the research (see figure 5 p46) engaged methods I thought would be straight forward; classroom observations and focus groups with the children to discover opportunities in which 'pupil voice' was evidenced. I was under the illusion that my years of experience in classrooms would be sufficient to form a basis on which to view what I was observing and be able to interpret what I saw or thought I saw. I interpreted focus groups to be group interviews in which I asked a series of questions that would receive responses from the children. I used the data from the observations and the group interviews to begin the action research process in which 'pupil voice' would be further explored. I discovered that focus group organisation would need to be more carefully planned because within my role as Headteacher I may elicit responses from the children that could be somewhat guarded due to the idea of *'suggestibility'* (Green & Hill 2005:9). This led to a deepening in the way I had previously approached the development of methods for data collection.

In chapter 6 I used an action research approach based on Elliott (1991) (Appendix 1) which implemented actions for change with the teacher facilitator and engaged me in developing further my approach to focus groups which had been investigational at the baseline stage. I returned to focus groups as a method of discovering the views of the children as a direct response to a change in the way 'pupil voice' was approached.

At this point the *methods* circle of influence (see figure 6 p47) became prominent because I considered 'what is happening?' in each aspect of the action research cycle, as I introduced the School Council. This deepened my knowledge of what was happening when the children began to take some of the power. I used focus groups because that was in keeping with the rise of importance of the voices of the children in decision making, and I listened to the voice of the teacher facilitator who introduced the notion of a School Council.

It was to be the reaction that stemmed from the teacher's focus group that emphasized the need to seek to use a variety of methods that would elicit the voices of all participants. I had not considered that there may be doubts from the teachers about the underlying intensions of transferring power.

I returned with a matter of urgency to the three key questions (see p72) to discover why I had chosen these methods, how things were going and what I had found out. I had not fully appreciated that my reflexive stance as an insider researcher would require a more thorough investigation into the chosen tools for the data collection.

Chapter 7 saw a return to what I considered to be more formal methods of data gathering; interviews of the teachers seeking their viewpoints about the future role of 'pupil voice' developments in school, and the regaining of power by the teachers. There was an emphasis on the *self* circle of influence with the use of my reflective journal as I tried to make sense of what was happening in the research journey. The *methods* circle of influence (see figure 10 p 61) was less influential within this cycle of actions for change.

In addition to seeking views of 5 teachers in interviews, I used evaluative documents, that I had devised in order to gather evidence about the school improvement actions, to ascertain the views of all teachers about 'pupil voice' activity to discover if there was a way forward to involve both the children and the teachers as objects of the research. The use of evaluative documents that were in the public domain as a way of summing up activities in school proved to be a method that offered a different way of collating viewpoints of stakeholders. It was one of the suggestions from this documentation that led to an approach in which the teachers developed their practices alongside the children with both voicing their thoughts on the processes. The linking of the way the teachers approached their professional development

training with a role for the children emphasized again the importance of the chosen methods to obtain all viewpoints.

The children as philosophers approach developed in Chapter 8 saw a further rise in *methods* as a circle of influence (see figure 8 p50) because during each of the stages of the cycle I developed a way of finding out what others were thinking and feeling as we tried out the new ideas. This was built on the reflections of my role identified in Chapter 6 (School Council) in which I failed to notice that one group of stakeholders were having more opportunities to voice opinions than another. The *methods* and *literature* circles of influence intertwined as I used a text related to developing a school owned approach to 'children as philosophers' (Haynes 2002) in addition to linking two action research models. It was at this time that the participants began to take ownership of the research activities within their own classrooms and reflected on the processes they were following.

The final actions for change in chapter 9 shows how the children and teachers developed further research partnerships in which they listened to the views of each other and acted on what was said. At this stage 'pupil voice' was lived within the everyday practices that I had hoped for at the beginning of the research process. The three circles of influence (see *figure 9* p51) were now equal again, but intertwined, showing that by focusing through three different lenses, I could practice reflexive engagement with action research, to increase knowledge and understanding of primary classrooms in the twenty first century.

4.4   Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how I addressed the influence of the chosen methods on the way I conducted the research processes. I have shown how I lived with the methodological inventiveness as I selected some more tradition methods and adapted others. The methods, such as focus groups and interviews, in keeping with the principles of 'pupil voice', remained

prominent but were supplemented by reflective accounts and surveying of evaluative

documents. The next section reveals the details of the primary research process and the

development of 'pupil voice' activities with the taxonomy.

Section Two Moving from clarity to ambiguity

In this section I show how I developed an understanding of my practice in order to theorise about what was happening in 'pupil voice'. Through addressing *'methodological messiness'* (Dadds and Hart 2001:12) I shaped my reflections on what was influencing me at the time, hence, the circles of influence developed in previous chapters informed my approach together with the application of critical questioning structured through the ideas of Whitehead and McNiff (2006). I began with clarity about my research practices but this was to turn to confusion as I diverted my attention to the use of the developing methodology in practice. I have organised this account of my primary research in four chapters building on the baseline position of 'pupil voice' in school and then developing the four action cycles in which each one is framed from the impact and critical reflection of the previous outcomes.

CHAPTER 5 Where is 'Pupil Voice' in School?

In this chapter I define the evidence base on which the future actions in
'pupil voice' is formed. I show how I was influenced by my own thoughts, linked with
the developing literature base about action research. I engaged first in observations
of children in the classroom and playground and then used my reflections to formulate
the questions for the developing focus groups.

5.1 Introduction

In order to discover the relevance of 'pupil voice' work in school I engaged in a period of

information gathering using participant observation to inform the focus group questions. This

was built on the reflections of my autobiographical journey in which I have shown how I

desired to have my point of view taken into account.

5.2 My concern - *developing 'pupil voice'*

I began with an overarching research question *How can I understand 'pupil voice?* within the

school in which I am Headteacher. I looked for actions that showed in practice the

development of 'pupil voice' through observing and reflecting on what was seen in

classrooms and the playground. I was concerned about the desire from the UK Government

to implement a process of gathering evidence from children about life in school and wanted

to ascertain if there were any naturally occurring opportunities for children to share views.

This chapter forms a baseline on which I and others can judge the readiness of the

participants to engage in 'pupil voice' activities and the entry position on the taxonomy for

'pupil voice' developments in decision making conceptual model (See *figure 10 p61*)

5.3 Why I am concerned about the role of the children?

This chapter opens up opportunities to develop the action research process involving one

specific group of significant others – the children as participants in the development of the

research. As mentioned earlier, historically, there had been a tendency in educational

research to view children as *'objects'* of research rather than *'subjects'* (Green and Hill,

2005:3). In this chapter I begin by observing children in the ways they use their voices, thereby following the traditional view of the children as objects of the research; and then through reflections, inform the structure of the focus groups in which I begin to transfer my view more towards the children as subjects of the research.

My concern was influenced by reflections on my childhood and over thirty years of experience in schools which I considered to be enough reason for beginning with the voices of the children to examine an early developing research question of *"What is the culture of a school which either aids or inhibits pupil voice?"* I considered my experience would facilitate the answer to this question quickly and all I would be required to do was find the evidence. My research focus was explained to the parents (Appendix 6) and their permission sought to observe the children in their daily lives in school to discover how they voiced opinions in classrooms and the playground. I made the active decision as the researcher to begin with the voice of the children as that was the root of developing the original research question.

5.4 Addressing what others have written about my area of concern.

I divided the literature into what I have termed content (pupil voice field work) and methodological (action enquiry methods and reflection).

Within the 'pupil voice' field there were calls to listen to the utterances of children, that originated from research led by Rudduck, in which, suggestions were made that *'schools were outdated'* (Rudduck and Flutter 2004) and the development of *'positive relationships to secure trust in students as researchers'* (Fielding and Bragg 2003) was proposed. Work within the field involving very young children was not well referenced as studies tended to research with children over 10 years old (Arnot et al 2004, Fielding 2001). The 'Children

Act' 2004, in which, it was proposed to secure a national philosophy where "Every Child Matters" was built on the views of young people over the age of ten. The 'pupil voice' movement interpreted children as active players in the education system, co-constructing knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning, problem solving, and developing policy and practice about the curriculum (Rudduck 2004). I used a similar interpretation of voice when using the views of the children and adults in the co-construction of knowledge. In my view voice research is rooted in the notion that all children, like adults, are active agents in their own learning, and are entitled to participate in research that centres on their interests (Ravet 2007:234).

My research would involve me seeking to make theoretical justification for the data I collected and the evidence base that supported my claim to knowledge. I began with the action research model developed by Elliott (1991) and linked 'pupil voice' with emancipatory action research articulated by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and McTaggart (1991). My personal involvement with actions would create changes to the 'status quo' and I engaged in critique of what I was observing or being told. I considered group dynamics and dialogue were powerful in determining what was happening as 'lived experiences'. Such an approach to the research embodies a multiplicity of views, commentaries and critiques leading to numerous possible actions and interpretations. I sought methods which would allow for ongoing discussion among the participants as they experienced the actions associated with developing 'pupil voice'.

Action research involved a spiral of steps *'each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact finding about the result of the action'* (Lewin 1948: 206, Elliott 1991:70) and offered an opportunity to engage in change with caveats associated with the dual role I held as insider researcher and Headteacher. I was confident at this starting point of the research that the process would be relatively straightforward, taking *'a perspective that people take*

toward objects and activities', and did not choose to consider issues related to the *"depth of knowledge and framework for truth and rigour"* Bogdan and Bilklen (1992:223).

I had lived experiences in schools for over twenty years during a period in which educationalists and teacher trainers discovered action research as a convenient way to improve their own practice in an isolated environment. Kock (1997:10) suggests that whenever a series of educationalists get hold of an idea and pass it on it will, *"degenerate through reductionism and end up as a token, shallow caricature of the original".* It was with these views in mind that I decided to explore further action research as a paradigm which is developmental in nature, moving in an interpretive cycle, in which the whole is understood by exploring the sum of the parts. The observations and focus groups were the starting points of exploring the 'parts' of 'pupil voice' in school.

5.5 Current practices that add to my concern.

The introduction of the Children Act (2004) raised the pressure on schools to find quick ways of recording children's responses to questions about life in school. Tokenistic ways of developing data quickly in order to complete Self Evaluation Forms required by OFSTED Inspectorate of Schools led to school leaders introducing questionnaires as tick sheets of responses. I wanted to discover if there were any processes already in place in school that would elicit the views of the children linked to my beliefs that each human being has as opinion to offer. In this way I would be addressing inclusional practices in which dialogue became prominent.

I was living *'contradiction'* (Whitehead and McNiff 2006) in that I had a personal desire to develop inclusional emancipatory practices whilst holding a role that had significant control and power attached. I turned my attention to reflexive practice   raised *self* as a significant influence in my research, with my thesis centred on children having the choice and right to

voice their opinions. Reflecting on the words of Whitehead and McNiff (2006:57) *"no one person has the right to tell another what to do or to assume responsibilities for the choices that others make"* added another layer of complexity as I struggled with the role of gatekeeper and safeguarding of children.

5.6 Data gathering processes and methods.

The data that I had chosen to generate evidence as I began the research process was centred on observing and engaging the voices of the children. I selected non participant observation as the first stage in the process because I considered it to be a way of discovering naturally occurring data using a method known to the children and it built upon my observation notes taken during the child focus groups. The baseline process modelled the cycle of action research that I would later engage with, beginning with *'reconnaissance'* (Elliott 1991) which is built on seeing and hearing the way the children's voices were evident around the school. It linked with my autobiographical reflections on living with the phrase *"children should be seen and not heard"*. I wondered what I would actually see and hear in everyday classroom and playground situations on which to baseline the 'pupil voice' opportunities. I recognised that action would bring about some kind of change in the community, and research would increase my understanding in the developments in 'pupil voice'.

5.6.1 Non participant observation for data collection

My practice of finding out what is happening was to visit classrooms and observe, a process that I used regularly in my role as Headteacher, and part of the world of the classroom interactions the children frequently encountered. The children had been part of the discussions with parents about my research previously and therefore knew that I would be engaged in seeking to understand about 'pupil voice'. The second stage of the process was to

use the evidence from the observations to inform the questions that I would formulate for the later focus groups.

To collect the data I tracked nine children aged from 6 to 8 years as they went around the school involving themselves in lessons and in playground opportunities for one week. I selected the sample, from the pupil tracking documents, of those children displaying National Curriculum levels of below average, average and above average in speaking and listening using a numerical approach prior to discovering the names of those within the chosen sample (see journal entry below). Parental permission had been obtained and the children were aware that I would be looking at the opportunities they had to talk about what they were doing.

Field notes Classroom observations 5th March 2006
Focus and criteria for group selection.
Enquiry focus
I was wondering what life in school looked like for some of the children.
- *How do they spontaneously use their voice in the classroom and playground?*
- *How is their voice heard and by whom?*
- *What are they saying?*

Sample criteria for selection
List of attainment levels in speaking and listening National Curriculum levels from teacher assessment not those registered as SEN.
List no from pupil tracking **15   25   40**
I took the list of children's attainment scores from the school pupil tracking document and selected those in each cohort in 15th, 25th and 40th positions out of cohorts of 45 children in total.
Yr 1   2 boys   1 girl   Yr 2   2 girls   1 boy   Yr 3   3 boys

---

In addition to seeing and hearing, I would centre my observations on voice and agency strategies employed. I had no firm assumptions about what children were voicing and for a short time I could immerse myself in their lived experiences *"rather than using data to confirm or support existing theory"*. I could begin to *"discover theory"* Gray et al

(2007:181). My role was to understand by observing school life the opportunities to voice opinions provided to the children.

This method supported my desire to avoid imposing my reality on the children's world and offered opportunities for the development of *self* through the field notes. I was aware that the sample was small and the information gained to formulate the questions for focus groups was limited. I embedded a continual process of reflection and refocus as I analysed the developments and this enabled more flexibility in the methods chosen.

As I engaged in the collection of data through observations I reflected in my journal about my role in classrooms and I considered that the children would not necessarily notice my presence being different to my usual Headteacher's role in school.

> *Journal entry 11 March 2006*
> It is really hard to look back at my rough notes about my observations of the children I had selected to follow around school. I wondered did I ask the right ones. I tried to have a cross section based crudely on academic attainment measured by teachers' assessments. However it didn't seem to make much difference as I looked back at each child because those finding the more academic work difficult reacted in a similar way to those recognised as academically higher achievers. Certainly talk in classrooms was dominated by the teachers who often asked questions they knew the answers to. Children keen to respond delivered the right answer usually but in a busy classroom were only heard at a superficial level. There was very little opportunity to offer opinions as it seemed the curriculum ran the thinking.
> *What decisions do our children make?*
> *How do they use their voice in the wider sense of agency?*

I made notes of what I saw as the children offered opinions in order to explore 'voice' and 'agency' with links to the culture of the school. In classrooms I discovered that children were being asked relatively closed questions by their teachers about the knowledge gained from the lessons, and that they shared emotions most often following an upsetting experience occurring in the playground. The nature of my observation of the teacher's questioning led to consideration about the opportunities children were having in terms of offering their opinions about what they were learning.

It was out in the playground that the children were making far more decisions about their lives and offering strong opinions about what they felt if someone was unkind. Certainly in this situation children were exploring voice and agency, in terms of humans making decisions and enacting choice.

Journal entry 11 March 2006
The children seemed able to talk more freely to their friends in their play and were making decisions about their lives in terms of who they wanted to be with and what they would play. *Are there any aspects of the informality I have seen by these children in the playground transferrable into the classroom settling?*

An example from one child showed how children can behave differently outside to inside the classroom. Decision making in terms of sharing ideas for learning tended to be the role of the teacher in the classroom and of the child in the playground, as this example of field notes shows:

---

6 year old boy Observation field notes 15/5/06
He looked at the teacher eagerly when asked how many 2s in 10. He knew the answer but waited to be asked. Others in the group made noises to be noticed and raised their hand higher than his. Once the answer had been shared he looked down and waited for the next question. After three attempts to answer a question which ended in no outcome he then went to his table to do his set tasks. He began the task without seeking further advice from adults and quickly showed in his written task his ability to achieve the correct answers. He waited until the teacher came to tick his work and smiled when ten ticks were present. He showed proudly his work to his friend and then went out to break.
Once outside he became animated organising three in a group to play an action man game. He became the leader and gave out roles to each of the children. Those in the game were comfortable with the roles they were given and awaited instructions. He displayed high levels of spatial awareness and organisational skills that had not been seen in the classroom.

Reflections *Why was he so passive and submissive inside but so outgoing out of the classroom?*

From the observations it was becoming evident that the children used their voice and interpretation of agency differently according to the situation in which they found themselves. The notes made in my journal, as part of the field study, informed the four key questions that I formulated for engagement in the focus groups.

5.6.2 Focus groups for data collection

The research questions devised for the focus groups came from the observed actions of the children and the desire to seek their viewpoint about life in school. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed with the written text given to the children and shared with their parents. The children listened to their words on the recordings and made any comments about what they had said. I decided to use this approach to show that I was valuing their contribution to the research. With this in mind it became a central feature of my enquiry to use a method such as focus groups that linked more obviously with the voice of participants, that I felt were simple to plan and deliver (Denscombe 2003), and would assist knowledge transfer (Cohen et al 2000). The use of focus groups aided the gaining of information about attitudes, perceptions, feelings and ideas (Denscombe 1998) and where the agenda is set primarily by the participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 1998: 290) and are useful to develop themes on which to generate meaning (Miles and Huberman 1994). I considered that such a seemingly straight-forward approach offered a useful starting point for 'pupil voice' research. I regarded focus groups as a method that would stimulate a richer discussion across the participants, than would be the case in individual interviews, thereby allowing those who may feel less confident to engage. I was aware that by offering the children the chance to offer opinions they might be inhibited by my Headteacher's role in their responses. I used the method for '*hypothesis testing as a qualitative research method*' (Green & Hogan 2005: 236 – 237) building on the non participant observations.

Attention would need to be paid to the formation of focus groups as single gender groups for younger children and no more than six participants were tried in other studies (Greig & Taylor 1999, Greene & Hogan 2005). Evidence showed that mixed gender groups were dominated with the voices of boys, and greater than six participants were dominated by

voices of the confident and articulate members. I devised the groups to be no more than 6 participants but paid little attention to the gender mix which I had not expected to be significant within this setting. This decision was to become significant as the focus groups developed.

Ethical considerations would need to be addressed as issues arose from the disclosure of information and the notion of informed consent when sharing viewpoints within the whole group. I would be required to ensure as researcher, with responsibilities of safeguarding the participants, that I monitored the levels of stress and ensured a thorough debrief (Green & Hogan 2005).

The questions were designed to help discover views about life in school and were built around the non participant observations I had made whilst in the classrooms. I have primary responsibility in the school for ensuring the safeguarding of the children at all times and I carefully considered the approach I would take if information was disclosed that was considered by me to be unsuitable for a group context. I decided to explain to the children that there may be times when we stop the focus group and talk about what has been said in more detail. However, information about the feelings of the participants, with regard to their work in classrooms, was contained within first hand experiences.

The original research question came from the notion that there may be something in the culture of the school which aids or inhibits the voice of the children. I supported the view that culture could be seen as:

> *"the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs."*
> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002)

With this in mind I framed four questions about life and interactions in school, which were to be used in focus groups. Through asking these questions I would be engaging the voice of the child hearing their responses. The questions were themed around school life, support for learning and the role of adults.

These questions put to the children came from the premise that they lived the experience of the school and they would, in their own words, show some understanding of cultural norms. I centred the questions on what they saw and what the classroom felt like. The final question was to be the most problematic for the school as it involved attitudes about the role of the adults.

I took a relaxed approach to the focus groups, believing that my 'professional craft knowledge' (Elliot 1991) of working with children in groups was highly developed and therefore the notion of focus groups would be simple to implement. The questions were designed to explore children's concepts about learning and the conditions which aided or inhibited their work in classrooms. I engaged in what I can now term a group interview and it involved three participants who took turns to answer the questions I asked. The lack of engaging with the theory presented by Green & Hogan (2005: 236), in which composition of groups both in numerical terms and gender balance was highlighted, led to the first of the difficulties I incurred (see example transcript p94). The group with two boys and one girl was definitely male dominated with four instances of the female stopping her discussion when interrupted.

Part of a transcript of a focus group.	
What helps you learn everyday in school?	
Researcher notes: *The questions were posed and then I waited until the children responded. The boys responded immediately talking over each other to offer what had immediately popped into their head. The girl waited for the boys to offer the viewpoints and then added to the discussion stopping for the boys to expand more on what she had said. The non verbal gestures showed the boys to be eager to present their point of view using good eye contact with me as researcher and the girl willing to remain more passive in the discussion until there was a chance to voice opinions.*	
Boy 1	I just like to learn……
Boy 2	I like to learn is History because you can learn about things like Henry VIII and Queen Victoria and the Tudor times.
Boy 1	everything at school.
Girl 1 *Interruption 1*	I like history as well 'cos I do like learning about Henry VIII it is really fun….
Boy 1	I did like it also when we reviewed about Henry VIII I don't know whether that is the right word but I liked it because we learned we already learned about him in one section and we done it again and we learned even more about him because we had to try and remember what we had already learned about him and that was hard
Boy 1	I enjoy all of it There's nothing I don't enjoy All the lessons are like really really fun 'cos we are doing stuff that makes it fun. If we weren't like making something or doing something that didn't include making it fun it would be boring. But it's really really fun.
Boy 2	I like every subject as well. The only thing I think is rubbish is learning logs. There is nothing we could improve about them really but it is quite boring 'cos you waste part of your lunchtime doing it. When it is lining up time we have to spend five minutes finishing our learning logs.
Boy 1	I think we probably could improve it by making it more interesting on the front cover and then we might like to do it more
Girl 1 *Interruption 2*	We do have to do our revision sheet. I think it is that anyway. You have to like fill all the bits in and ask…….
Boy 1	The teachers 'cos when it is a bit boring when you don't really know what to do and its not very fun for yeah If you just put your hand up say ****** (teacher's name) or whoever they come over to you and they can tell you something fun about the work you are doing and it just makes it more interesting. When children say they are bored it is the teacher is doing something that they don't really want to do it and you just don't like it so it's just boring because there is nothing to do.
Boy 2	Well I agree with Boy 1 with the teachers really 'cos when they come to you have just put your hand up and they read out the question and the reflection sheet they could read out the question and the person who is reading the question and you can't really hear them the teachers says please could you just repeat that question so we can hear it again.
Girl 1 *Interruption 3*	You wouldn't exactly be able to learn if teachers weren't there because it is kind of impossible because you need to learn something because it is really hard if you don't……
Boy 1	I disagree with Girl 1 because you can learn like you can learn you could you can learn how to play football or something like that and a teacher doesn't help you do that does it 'cos when I started to play football I just kicked the ball and I started loving it and then I started playing for the school team

What does your classroom look or feel like?	
Boy 1	It feels good 'cos when other people are learning being quiet so it helps you learn more like **** Child's name her table was being noisy so she went up to ****** Teachers name and said can I sit on that table please 'cos everyone is being good over there and really quiet so then she had only done that much (gestured about 3 cms of amount on the page) and like you said she has now done a whole page.
Girl 1	If you are in a real classroom it makes you feel……
Boy 1	What do you mean by real classroom?
Girl 1 *Interruption 4*	like you want to get in the mood of learning and you feel like you want to do it more than say if you are at home pretending to play schools. All of the classrooms are learning classrooms because they are real classrooms.
Boy 2	If you went to a Middle school into a new classroom you would feel a bit nervous really if you are going into a new year. And you might feel a bit worried just in case they might give you harder work than at your lower school
Boy 1	But you'll be smarter and you'll know it more 'cos like some people say we've got hard work here in this school and we have but when we go up we are making easier because we're smarter because if we do it like xx said in a Middle school I don't really agree because we are learning more so they have to give us harder work so we have to so that we are smarter.

The boys were willing to expand on their viewpoints even if it involved interrupting the flow of the statement made by the girl. I found the passive nature of the girl disturbing and decided that I would have to consider the gender mix of the focus groups in the future. Single gender groups on this occasion could have allowed more breadth to the answers (Greig and Taylor 1999).

The content of the transcripts identified the pupil's awareness of the word "learning" but I interpreted it to mean the activities that took place such as *"I enjoy learning about bodies"* and a dependency of adults for support was suggested by the children, for example *"you wouldn't be able to learn if the teachers weren't there"*.

This highlighted to me that when exploring ideas it may be necessary to examine the vocabulary used within the early stages of a focus group thereby developing an understanding by all of what is being discussed particularly, with participants as young as my sample.

The focus groups followed ethical principles adhered to due to a desire on my part to behave as a moral human being, and gain informed consent of both the child and their significant adult (Greig & Taylor 1999). Parents had seen the questions to be asked and the children and were fully consulted about their position in terms of being able to refuse to engage. Following the sessions the transcripts were checked and copies were given to the children. The children recognised their voices on the tape and during listening followed their written words, claiming that they remembered saying those things.

5.6.3 Using reflective journal to support data collection

I kept field notes throughout the research process. This enabled reflection about my contribution and role as well as contextualising the groups during the discussion. I mapped the cycle of the journey in my journal using Elliot's (1991) model of action research (see journal entry)

Engaging the voices of children Initial thoughts taken from Journal April 2006

RECONNAISSANCE (FACT FINDING & ANALYSIS)
"What is the culture of the school that enables or inhibits pupil voice?"
This question causes many more sub questions to emerge as I reflect on the actions I see around the school every day.

There is something in the school that helps the children to feel confident but what is it?,
How do we move towards the children sharing with us what they feel?
How do children voice their opinions?
Will they tell me what they think I want to hear?

I think that methods known to the children at this stage might be better to use. They know that adults watch what they do in order to move on their learning. A major part of the Early years curriculum is non participant observation and I am often seen around the school watching.

GENERAL PLAN (*ACTION STEPS*)

Step 1
Find out by observing the children what life in school was like for 9 children.

Step 2
Focus group ideas
Formulate from the observations four key questions to ask the children in focus groups about life in school.

IMPLEMENT
What can we do to offer decision making to the children that brings in the freedom they show in self directed times?

Who holds the power in 'pupil voice'?

The decision to use non participant observation to formulate the data gathering, backed up with field notes as journal entries, showed that I was being influenced by my 'self' as I reflected on each step of the process and literature as I trialled the approach of classroom research in Elliott's (1991) model. I hoped that the linking of my thoughts through journal entries would show that I was thinking inwardly when making claims generated from the evidence and that *'truth will emerge honestly and over time through a commitment to authenticity'* (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006:79, cited Habermas 1979). I ensured I applied a critical edge to my observations through the use of questioning my judgements that were checked out with the questions that I had devised for the focus groups. The responses were in turn directed back to the children for comment.

5.7 Evidence base that supports my claim to knowledge

The approach I have taken to formulating the baseline of 'pupil voice' activity in school is to examine the data from the premise of all having the right to voice their opinions. I initially separated the data sets into that gained from non participant observations and that from focus groups. The links between the two methods were made during my reflections in my journal.

I looked for evidence from the data that connected the senses of seeing and hearing with a values based judgement of feelings. From the coding of the data I considered the outcomes against the taxonomy of 'pupil voice' development (see figure 12 p100).

During the process of observing the children in action across the school I discovered the opportunities they have to voice their opinions. It became apparent that within the classroom, the dialogue, although enquiring of the children in terms of learning outcomes, was initiated and led by the teachers:

> *Children keen to respond delivered the right answer usually but in a busy classroom was only heard at a superficial level. There was very little opportunity to offer opinions as it seemed the curriculum ran the thinking 10/05/06* Field notes of observation

It was within the playground that voicing opinions more freely became apparent as one boy

organised the play of their peers.

> *He waited until the teacher came to tick his work and smiled when ten ticks were present.*
> *He showed proudly his work to his friend and then went out to break. Once outside he*
> *became animated organising three in a group to play an action man game. He became the*
> *leader and gave out roles to each of the children. Those in the game were comfortable with*
> *the roles they were given and awaited instructions. He displayed high levels of spatial*
> *awareness and organisational skills that had not been seen in the classroom. 6 yr boy*
> *10/05/06* Field notes of observation

Observing the action of the children around the school was part of the developmental process

used, and I had not focused on the way children voiced their opinions before. This led to the

exploration of the direct voices of the children and my questioning of whose voice was most

prominent, and hence the question about the role of the adults in the focus groups.

The children were able to discuss the learning strategies that they used for applying

knowledge in literacy and numeracy:

> *"When you are in English or something you try to use your strategies If you can't*
> *read a word or something say you break it up to help you and then you put it*
> *together".* Girl 8

> *"If you are doing a sum and you are stuck with it you could just skip the sum and*
> *when you have finished the sums you could go back to it once it has popped into*
> *your head".* Boy 9

> *"When I learn I get help from my teacher and my brain because they tell you*
> *what to do and make me able to understand"* Girl 7

> *"There is a lovely teacher there and they are talking to everybody and it feels like*
> *really good because if you want to learn with that teacher you can".* Boy 8.

They explained what was happening from what they could see or hear within their

classrooms but displayed little understanding of how or why things occurred. The

dependency on the adult was clear and there was virtually no evidence of children offering

their own opinions. A high level of compliance was apparent. Furthermore the children did not display any desire for or knowledge of 'pupil voice'.

It was when I explored how it felt to reside in particular classrooms with the focus groups that ideas related to safety became apparent. Feeling safe became a key theme within these focus groups through comments such as:

> *"If you are in a real classroom it makes you feel like you want to get in the mood of learning and you feel like you want to do it more than say if you are at home pretending to play schools. All of the classrooms are learning classrooms because they are real classrooms".* Girl 9

> *"It feels like safe because you have lots of your mates in your classroom"* Boy 8

> *"It feels like exactly the same as your house really but it's just there's people in the classroom that help you a lot"* Girl 8

Such openness supports the notion of the social world of the classroom being important in the lives of children. In terms of 'pupil voice' it seems that the children required an environment in which there is a structure that they understand and with adults they have relationships with. The question exploring the role of the adults began to show a lack of confidence the children had in expressing opinions. They often stated that teachers (term used by them for all adults) knew what they had to learn and therefore they could help them when they were 'stuck'. They also said that they knew when their adults were not as receptive to gathering their views and that on those occasions actively decided not to share.

> *"Sometimes my teacher is in a bad mood and so I think perhaps I should ask my friend today to tell me what to do so I don't upset my teacher"* Girl 8.

> *"When I came to this class my older friends told me I need to listen carefully as the teacher would only explain once. I have tried this but find it hard. Yesterday I did ask a question on what to do and it worked. I am happy now"* Boy 8

The evidence of 'pupil voice' opportunities in school was therefore showing that children were willing to share answers with their teachers to questions set, particularly in literacy and numeracy. They wanted to have relationships with their teachers that made them feel safe and were aware of times when they should not voice what they are feeling. They were

choosing not to either voice opinions or take responsibility for making a choice. I located my work with the findings of research studies such as Arnot et al (2004) and Fielding and Bragg (2003) who offered common themes for considering the development of 'pupil voice' with the strongest of the themes being the *'concern of pupils to learn and be helped to learn to learn'* (Arnot et al (2004:86) and value placed on *'opportunities to make decisions about, pace of work, where and with whom they sat and what was worth recording about their learning'* (ibid:87).

5.8 Development of the taxonomy

The evidence at this starting point position was showing 'pupil voice' developments to be at a basic level of control. The children were being 'listened to' (Shier 2001) but used as a 'data source' (Fielding 2001) and 'manipulated' (Hart 1994).

PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	3.Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	2.Students as Active Respondents	**5.** Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	
CONTROL *Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.*	**2.** children are supported in expressing their view **1.** Children are listened to	**1.** Students as Data Source	**3.** Tokenism **2.** Decoration **1.** Manipulation	

Figure 12 A taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice' showing baseline stage

From the evidence base I have developed a new understanding of the nature of 'pupil voice' in school. The children were able to offer ideas to support questions from their teachers and could show how they saw the world they frequent in school, however they were not readily offering their own opinions and living the articles of the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child (1989).

5.9 How I show that the conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate

For each of the actions I took, I intend to show how I establish my claim to knowledge is reasonably fair and accurate through addressing the issues of validity and legitimacy, not only through this thesis, but by presenting my evidence base to the critical scrutiny of others. Informed by the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006:97) I interpret validity in three ways; personal (ways I have formulated the methodology), social (sharing of findings within the school as the participants become researchers) and institutional (sharing findings beyond the school with critical friends from the practitioner and research communities). The legitimacy of my claims would be shown in each of the actions cycles as I displayed the data, evidence and my claim to knowledge generation.

5.9.1 Personal Validity

In order to be true to myself I decided to use my reflective journal as a way of having conversations with myself about the evidence I was collecting whilst being mindful of my roles as Headteacher and insider researcher at all times. I asked myself three key questions linked to the underpinning of action research cited by Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) about my field notes of non participant observation and focus groups: *What is happening?, How have I collected this data?* and *What am I assuming from this data?*

What is happening? centred on the connection between what I saw as I engaged in the observations and my choice to generate questions at the focus groups about learning and

adult roles. In order to discover more about 'pupil voice' in school I judged it to be important to find out what opportunities were available for the children to use their voice in structured and unstructured sessions and what adults did to facilitate that.

How have I collected the data? I considered data to include everyday situations that focused on 'pupil voice' and the focus groups asked the children to talk about aspects of the classroom practice that had been observed.

What am I assuming from the data? I assumed within classroom practice that the children would be somewhat compliant and able to respond to the questions asked of them by their teacher. I did not expect that in the playground the nature of talk and levels of personal responsibility would be raised and that the children had viewpoints about how to manage teacher's emotions.

I also considered what I have termed the circles of influence of *self, literature* and *methods* as part of defining personal validity because I was inclined to view things differently according to my area of focus. Having begun with all three circles of influence equal and detached, I discovered the importance of *self* in raising critical questions following deep reflection, and the importance of *literature* through the exploration of action research encouraging the development of a broad base of knowledge about the starting point of 'pupil voice' in the school. I devised critical questions associated with the most prominent circles of influence:

SELF: *How can I address the rights of the child as laid down by the UN Convention (1989)?*

LITERATURE: *Is the action research model by Elliott enough to show the validity and legitimacy of my work?*

The work of Shier, Hart and Fielding encourage a rise up a ladder of participation rights. How can I address this?

5.9.2 Social Validity

In order to establish social validity I decided to use the work of Habermas truth claims as a base when presenting the evidence in ways that were:

- *comprehensible, in the form the language is commonly understood by all;*
- *truthful, in that all recognised these as true accounts and not fabrications;*
- *sincere, so that all parties can trust what the other says;*
- *appropriate for the context, while recognising the unspoken, cultural norms in which their discourses are embedded*. (Whitehead and McNiff 2006:102).

At this point, to show the reader what I was considering, I decided to use the children to check the transcripts for comprehensibility and truth with my reflections.

5.9.3 Institutional validity

I decided early in the research to test out my claims to knowledge regarding the process of observing 'pupil voice' in action in the wider education field. The notion of systematically observing the children in action to discover the elements of 'pupil voice' led to interest from an external researcher who included the early stages of my findings as a case study in a publication entitled 'The shape of things to come: personalised learning through collaboration' (Leadbeater 2005). The school was highlighted as having a focus of *"drawing out contributions from others"* (Leadbeater 2005:10) with an openness to understand *"the children's point of view"* (ibid: 14). Such recognition of the way I had approached the observation of discovering 'pupil voice' led to a desire to design and capture a way forward for practitioners to relate to. I show in the next cycles for action how I shared the ideas with other practitioners.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter has described the process of observing the children in action across the school in order to determine the opportunities they have to voice their opinions. Building on the key features of the observation I have engaged in exploring the views of the children about both

life in school and the role of the adults. It has become evident that the children could offer ideas about the factors which affect their learning in terms of the environment and relationships and when given the opportunity to do so could articulate their thoughts. I have developed the themes of *hearing* and *whose voice* in order to discover the aspects of 'pupil voice' which are already in place and built upon the theme of agency which links with Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. The starting point for the development of 'pupil voice' has shown that the school is at the controlling stage (see figure 12 p100) in which the adults initiate the discussions around decision making with the children lacking the knowledge and understanding of the rights they could develop and use. It was with this point in mind I moved into the first cycle of action research: the introduction of the School Council.

CHAPTER 6 Introducing School Council

This chapter is the first chapter of the action research cycle. It builds on the discovery of 'pupil voice' opportunities that naturally occur in school and explores the introduction of an externally driven approach that contains the structure that I had perceived was required. It follows the journey of the introduction of the School Council and the evaluation after a period of six months. It explores the notion of whose voice and agency.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will show the further development of 'pupil voice' in school, based on the introduction of a new role for the children through the vehicle of a 'School Council' developed by School Council UK. It portrays the purpose and implementation of School Council as a concept through a School Council as a vehicle, and the links to developing the voice of the children in order that they can participate in decision making. Chapter 5 showed how the children have an awareness of the way they learn and some of the factors about environment and relationships which help them. At this stage they did not have an awareness of their rights to be heard or ideas on how they would do this.

6.2 My concern about lack of structured 'pupil voice' opportunities

I was concerned that there was a lack of opportunity for the children to participate in decision making that directly affected them. I wanted the views of all children to be represented and I was drawn towards a relatively new idea; that of School Council in which the children elected representatives and a teacher facilitated the group. My concern for lack of opportunities for the children to voice their opinions, or to make choices about their learning, led to the imposition of a democratic body for the children without consulting the teachers. I could see no reason not to develop an official body of children that represented the views of their peers and would feed back to the teachers. The following series of objectives formed the basis of implementing the School Council:

- To inform the children about the purpose of the School Council;

- To select a committee of four children in the oldest year group to lead meetings;

- To involve all the children in the voting process for their class representatives;

- To inform the teachers about the role of the School Council body;

- To meet regularly to discuss agenda items;

- To feedback decisions to classes;

- To monitor actions.

- To map the actions on the ascending stages of child involvement in decision making.

6.3 Why I am concerned

The school did not have a democratic body of child representatives to share in the decision making and therefore no structured voice to do so. The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child Article 12 (1989) was not being articulated or practiced in the school and I used my influence as Headteacher to impose a structure that would begin to address the balance. The opportunity to take an externally devised idea and apply it to the 'pupil voice' actions came at a time when it seemed highly appropriate, and the training of one of the teachers to become a facilitator started, what was in my view, the process of transferring power which I held. The need to obtain the views of the children about the school seemed to be embedded into the role of a council of representatives.

6.3.1 Creating the democratic body

The design of the School Council necessitated a committee structure in which four of the oldest children held leadership positions with the following criteria: able to articulate their views, listen to others, popular across a number of groups and possess the skills to guide the meetings in support of the younger children. Each of the classes had two elected representatives. Meeting were arranged at lunchtime once a week and followed an agenda

devised by the teacher facilitator. The meetings were led and managed by the children and coached by the teacher facilitator. The older children would assist the younger children to write down the main points and actions to be taken back to the classroom. The meetings allowed all the children a chance to offer their point of view but there was little evidence of the representative voice on which they had been mandated. Following the meetings the children would be required to feedback to their class teachers, and the committee members would feedback any decisions made to the Headteacher. The agenda items ensured that the discussions centred on the agreed areas and allowed little opportunity for diverting to other topics in the early development stage of the School Council.

6.3.2 The development of the School Council Role

An emerging role of School Council was to help examine, in a structured way, ideas the children and teacher facilitator had chosen to organise for fund raising and playground equipment. This built on the observations and focus group evidence gathered as the baseline to 'pupil voice' activity and I felt would be a starting point with which the children and teachers may be more comfortable. I did not intend to interfere with the agenda and the responsibility was passed onto the teacher facilitator to formulate and share with both the children and the teachers.

6.3.3 The evaluation of School Council.

Following the election of School Council I decided, after six months in operation, to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation along with any links to raising the application of 'pupil voice'. Three focus group sessions took place with 10 children elected as School Council representatives and all 9 teaching staff. The teaching staff prepared evaluations of School Council prior to the meeting.

6.4 Addressing what others have written about my area of concern.

Chapter 5 enquired about the 'pupil voice' activities and roles that were already in place in the school either implicitly (seen through children's action around the school) or explicitly (spoken about in focus groups). The information gained led to a search for some form of structure that would build on the informal work in the field of 'pupil voice'. The drive to introduce routes to extending participation of children in school decisions has gathered in momentum since the early 1990's with more systematic Central Government legislation prevalent in 2004 which was designed to encourage schools to seek the views of its stakeholders, including the children. I categorised the 'pupil voice' literature into four areas:

1. School Council UK 1993;

2. Carnegie UK Trust Evaluation of Pupil Participation 2002;

3. English Schools' Association Evaluation of School Council 2007;

4. The Children Act 2004.

6.4.1 School Council UK 1993

The introduction of School Council in our school was inspired by the work of Schools Council UK formed in 1993, an independent charity which promotes and facilitates effective structures for pupil participation in every school. The vision shared with participant teachers at their introductory facilitation training is of young people as decision makers, stakeholders and partners in their schools and communities. The charity asserts that councils of children involved in decision making develop important life skills, enhancing resilience to negative experiences, through a citizenship programme;

> *"School Councils can be a most excellent training ground in responsibility for future   citizens"* (Professor Crick, 1998:2 Report as Chair of the Advisory Group on Citizenship).

The Schools Councils UK 1993 training literature suggested the implementation of certain roles for the adults and the overall benefits of introducing such a decision making body. The message was powerful, encouraging senior leaders to act decisively to introduce the structure of the main committee and class councils at the start of the process. Regular meetings, systematic feedback to peers and teachers and a facilitator deployed who is sufficiently senior to make decisions and monitor what is happening were significant requirements. The argument for introduction of School Council became compelling for our school as we sought to structure and develop 'pupil voice'. The democratic process outlined linked well to seeing the children as active citizens and subjects of the research.

6.4.2 Carnegie UK Trust evaluation of Pupil participation 2002

The Carnegie UK Trust in 2002 conducted an evaluation of young people's participation in public decision making (Kirby and Bryson 2002) to examine the evidence to support the notion that listening to children has positive outcomes for them and their communities. Cleaver (2001) highlighted, with caution, the assumption that such actions were inherently good, claiming they were based on:

> *"An act of faith in development, something we believe in and rarely question. This act of faith is based on three main tenets:*
> 1. *that participation is intrinsically a 'good thing' (especially for the participants)*
> 2. *that a focus on 'getting the techniques right' is the principal way of ensuring the success of such approaches; and*
> 3. *considerations of power and politics on the whole should be avoided as divisive and obstructive"* (Cleaver, 2001:36)

Kirby and Bryson (2002) suggest that there more research was required in order to determine the overall benefits from participation in School Council for the children as commitment to involvement in decision making alone was not enough. Good participation work could improve relationships between children and adults, but conversely tokenistic consultation has been found to be associated with poor relations (Kirby and Bryson 2002:10).

In a quantitative study of School Council, Alderson (2000) found that young people who are satisfied with School Council are most likely to think their teachers listen to them. Those dissatisfied with School Council were more likely to think teachers do not listen to them, do not believe what they say and that their rights are not sufficiently respected. The author concluded *"a council that is seen by students as token has a more negative impact than having no council'* (Alderson 2000:133).

The evaluation from the Carnegie UK Trust concluded that when children are on School Council or forums that influence change, then they are *'involved in decision making processes',* although rarely do they *'share power and responsibility for the decision making',* except when young people are involved in running their own peer research groups (Kirby and Bryson 2002:38).

I believe the importance of involving young people in decisions which affect their lives necessitates an approach that brings the child's voice to the foreground so that their lives can be more clearly articulated by them and understood by the adults who hold the power. This led me to a use an approach that redresses the power imbalance between the research and the child.

The need to actively review the work of School Council to discover what the participants engaged in the process was saying became the driver for the research in this cycle of action. The implementation of School Council became particularly important when the thoughts and processes of the Council locked within the viewpoints of those individuals holding the power roles, both in terms of the child developing their skills and the adult observing the actions. Not only would we, as a School, be living the actions for change but we would be supporting the requirement to understand what School Council offers as a decision making body.

6.4.3 English Schools' Association (ESSA) Evaluation of School Council 2007.

The English Schools' Association addressed the need to evaluate School Councils as 'pupil voice' and is now included in the Education and Skills Act 2008. It was recognised that School Councils can be useful if properly run but *'more modern and inclusive ways are needed to fully represent the student voice'* (Lewars 2007:1). The attention given to the views of the children is seemingly greater now than it has ever been before, but the emphasis on School Council is only offering evidence that *'only 8 per cent of students thought their school council was effective with the problem lying in how the mechanism is realised in schools'* (Lewars 2007:1). The conclusion of this report was that many school councils are badly run with agendas set by adults:

> *'It is difficult to see how students can engage with and take ownership of their school, its teaching and learning, its curriculum and its buildings when how, when and what they discuss is dictated to them'* (Lewars 2007:1).

Suggestions that children be given the opportunity to engage with open questions in order to share their views is considered *'akin to anarchy in the eyes of some teachers'* (ibid: 1), alongside senior leaders' attitudes to 'pupil voice'. ESSA supported effective School Councils but addressed the need to widen the voice of the whole child population in a school by broadening the range of mechanisms to enact positive change in schools. There was a call to supplement the more traditional forms of 'pupil voice' with something far more radical (Lewars 2007:2). It was this report that led to the inclusion of teachers in the evaluation of our School Council.

6.4.4 The Children Act 2004

The Children Act 2004 established radical improvements in opportunities and outcomes for children driven by whole system reform which builds the services around the child. Every Child Matters (ECM, DCSF 2004) was established as a result of a consultative document in

order to measure what young people had identified was important to them i.e. *be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution,* and *achieve economic well being.*

The Children Act 2004 provided a structure on which to frame the participation of children in all schools with the five ECM categories emerging from prior discussion with children. Section 53 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to *"give due consideration to the views of children and young people before determining what (if any) services to provide where these may impact on children and young people"*. Each of the ECM areas is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). The legislation around the participation rights of the child made it even more important to examine any 'pupil voice' structures formulated in school to discover their effectiveness.

6.5 Current practices that add to my concern.

The compelling arguments for the introduction of School Council introduced some concerns. It seemed that once a school had implemented this democratic body they would be seen to be taking the views of all children into account. The lack of experience of the children in representing each others voice and limited discussion with the teachers about the over arching purpose led to my decision to evaluate the processes being implemented in my School. The use of focus groups was selected because it linked with 'pupil voice' principles. The teachers were also offered the opportunity to complete an evaluative account prior to the focus groups.

6.6 Data gathering processes and methods.

After a six month period of implementation I engaged a group of participants in evaluations and focus group discussions about the School Council in action. This was based on the emerging themes taken from Chapter 5; *'whose voice'* which linked directly to that of the child; *'agency'* a child making a choice about what they say; and *'hearing'* the voice of the

child. I built on the experience gained from holding the focus groups with the children to address more carefully the group size and membership to adhere to the issues raised, especially in mixed gender groups. I still considered this method to be in keeping with the data gathering of 'pupil voice'. I introduced focus groups with the teachers built on their prior reflections about School Council. I used an account, written for an external source by the teacher facilitator, as background information about School Council from the perspective of an insider closer to the actions taken.

6.6.1 Teachers' accounts of School Council implementation

Informal discussion groups were in the early stages of developing opportunities for adults to hear the viewpoints of the children. This process of enquiry in classrooms between teachers and children provided time and space to ask about developments in school, in this case, the newly formed body of School Council. Open ended questions in general classroom discussions encouraged the children to share what they were feeling about the activities undertaken by the School Council. One such comment led to adults discovering some unsettled viewpoints as the undefined role was developed by the children themselves;

> *"I don't know what School Council do. Sometimes J is bossy in the playground. They* (school council members) *say they will 'tell on us' when we are doing nothing wrong. I think the teachers listen to the children more on school council".* Yr 4 boy.

This significant comment led to the exploration within the teachers' focus groups of the points of view of other children not in School Council. I had only considered asking the members of School Council and teachers at this point denying others the opportunity and not living the intention of inclusion of all voices. The teachers were asked to reflect on their thoughts and observations from these discussions to uncover some of the children's perspectives. These accounts would form the basis of the focus group discussions. The teacher facilitator prepared a case study describing the implementation and points of view about the success of implementation of School Council.

6.6.2 Focus groups with teachers about School Council

The adult focus group involved all nine teachers who had had opportunities to personally reflect on the introduction of School Council and ask their children in the class in order to prepare notes to support the discussion. The nature of the focus group was to seek information about two key aspects of the development of School Council: whose voice was being listened to, and what are the roles and responsibilities of the children.

6.6.3 Focus groups with children about School Council

The children's groups were 2 single gender groups of 5 who were on School Council. The decision to use single gender group was based on the previous use of mixed gender focus groups in which boys' voices dominated the opinions of the girls' (see page 94). I was aware that other children in school were not involved in this spiral of research although they knew about the roles and actions of the elected body. The 10 children chosen represented sixty percent of the children on the School Council body and included a mixture of those in leadership roles and class representatives.

6.6.4 Action research cycle

I followed the action research model of Elliott (1991) to introduce the School Council in an effort to support the development of 'pupil voice' in the following ways:

1. Building on children's opportunities to voice opinions in class and the playground;

2. Introduction of School Council as a decision making body;

3. Feedback loops for evaluating School Council.

The teacher facilitator and I discussed the agenda items at the beginning of the action for change and then the coaching role was taken on fully by the teacher facilitator. The children had a committee role (chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer) or class representative role which

they understood and enacted. The teachers were not fully briefed either about their role or the decisions that were being made. The children elected to School Council met weekly with the teacher facilitator, who designed the agenda, and any feedback was discussed with the Headteacher by the four committee members. The class council members were expected to feedback to the children in their class immediately after the meetings. It was at this point of feedback that I expected the teachers to be informed about the processes and discussions. I had not seen a need to feedback separately to teachers as this role was left to the children with feedback opportunities variable across the school. The subject areas began with fund raising and playtime rules which were within the first hand experiences of the children. Those children on School Council discussed the predetermined agenda and the results of the discussions were taken back to the other children as decisions made.

6.7 Evidence base that supports my claim to knowledge

The evidence base to support my claim to knowledge was formulated from the three sources:

1. teacher facilitator's account;

2. teachers' focus groups based on prior reflection;

3. children's focus groups.

6.7.1 Teacher facilitator's case study extract

The teacher facilitator met regularly with the children elected to School Council, designing the agenda and facilitating the actions for change. There was a high degree of confidence in the role of School Council and the success of the process from this teacher's point of view was captured in the case study (*Figure13*).

Teacher facilitator's reflections on School Council as a case study Nov 2005 Rationale/ Philosophy: *Whole staff discussions regarding raising self esteem in the children led to the readiness for a School Council. Staff recalled their own school experiences and how 'powerless' it felt to be treated with a lack of respect and empathy, and to have no say in any decisions yet to be affected by all the decisions. What could we do as a whole school to improve the lot of the children in our care? How could we help make school life exciting, meaningful and raise self worth and self esteem? It was decided that involving the children in a School Council could be a valid starting point. The School Council is incorporated into the ethos of the school primarily by a committed Head teacher and myself. The children were informed in an assembly. A key point for its success is also an enthusiastic and well-regarded member of staff prepared to be Teacher Facilitator, i.e. the backbone behind the Council, ensuring meetings take place regularly, being a person the children respect and trust and can 'open' up to and feel comfortable in discussing what can occasionally be delicate topics of discussion. It is also incorporated into the ethos by a 'drip feeding' of praise and enthusiasm towards the elected members. If the class representatives are seen as having an enviable position within the school it has a knock on effect of more children wanting to know more and also wanting to take part.*
How it works *The School Council has overseen many successful projects. Fund raising has taken place for Blue Peter projects, Children in Need Appeals and raising money for charities at home, e.g. over £1000 for The British Heart Foundation, and charities abroad, e.g. Water Aid to provide taps in villages in Africa.* **Communication** *Initially communication takes place in the form of an Election for a new School Council each September. This is carried out in a democratic fashion, with the children presenting themselves for election, and secret voting taking place.*
Generation of ideas *The ideas for the Council come mainly from the children. At the end of each meeting they feed back to their class and ask for their views and opinions, which in turn are given back at the next meeting and form the agenda. Each class teacher is given a copy of the agenda so they can help with feedback, especially from the young members, aged 5 years. A strong emphasis is on verbal communication and posters, to cut down bureaucracy and costs.*
Sustainability *Through regular meetings it is possible to maintain enthusiasm and commitment. The children seem to have a wealth of ideas, from fund raising, competitions, ways to improve the school environment The children know their views are listened to with respect, discussed with the group, votes taken, and appointments made for further discussion with the Head teacher. They understand that some projects are long term and will carry on after they leave, yet this does not dampen their enthusiasm.*
Advice and Guidance *As Teacher Facilitator for the School Council, I would advise teachers to think beyond the usual immediate school issues and fund raising matters. Whilst acknowledging the importance of this form of citizenship, by allowing children a real say in matters such as staff appointment, it is exciting and enlightening. Children appear to be more confident and feel valued if their opinion is taken seriously. A School Council is more successful if all the staff are supportive and open to new ideas and the Head teacher is also enthusiastic and committed to raising the voice of the child. The choice of Teacher Facilitator is crucial too – someone who respects the views of the children and who nurtures new ideas and is open minded.*

Figure 13 extract from Teacher facilitator's case study

This account by the teacher facilitator asserts that teachers were involved actively in the actions of

School Council when stating *"it is more successful if all the staff are supportive and open to*

new ideas" and linking this with teachers reflecting on their own school life:

> *"Whole staff discussions regarding raising self esteem in the children led to the readiness for a School Council. Staff recalled their own school experiences and how 'powerless' it felt to be treated with a lack of respect and empathy, and to have no say in any decisions yet to be affected by all the decisions".* Teacher facilitator's account.

The passion of the teacher facilitator for School Council was obvious through a profound regard to offer deeper and meaningful opportunities for 'pupil voice' in school. Although the teachers were aware of the ideas behind School Council they had not been given the opportunity to share either their views or those of the children at the point this account was written. It also emphasizes the imposition by two post holders, *'The School Council is incorporated into the ethos of the school primarily by a committed Headteacher and me'* (Teacher facilitator's account). It became clear from this teacher's account that hearing the children's views about School Council was important in order to increase their confidence to feedback to others:

> *"School Council is also incorporated into the ethos by a 'drip feeding' of praise and enthusiasm towards the elected members. If the class representatives are seen as having an enviable position within the school it has a knock on effect of more children wanting to know more and also wanting to take part".* (Teacher facilitator's account).

6.7.2 Children's focus groups

I decided to compose the focus groups of the children who had been elected onto School Council and those holding the officer roles. The discussions were based on the open question *"Can you tell me about School Council?"* The children responded by sharing their ideas without prior preparation. There was no structure to the discussions and prompts were not used. I chose to use two single gender groups of 5 children to explore the thoughts and feelings of what was happening in the first six months.

The two focus groups began discussing activities that had taken place, such as charity fund raising, showing the role was important in raising money through managed events:

> *"We put up posters about the charities we will get money for and do Mufti* (dressing up) *days, we talk about discos and things and we do plays"* Vice Chair of School Council

It seemed from the conversations that the children enjoyed, and were proud of, what they gained from organising events of which they had ownership, but were not yet clear about their role to represent others in the decisions they make.

Sometimes the pressures of meetings meant that they were not able to play with their friends or were constrained by the behaviour of older children which led to some resentment of being on School Council:

> *"I miss some of my lunch and playing games with my friends. Sometimes people don't listen in meetings when we say stop. We shout over each other with ideas at our meetings. I find School Council meetings hard when older children are bossy".* 6 yr old boy.

With the lack of clear boundaries for the role, some of the viewpoints of children turned to trying to change the behaviours of others, which in turn led to resentment on the playground and in classroom.

> *"It is important to be on School Council because you make decisions for the whole of the school and save people and children. We help the school get better by respecting the school. People trust us when we are on School Council. We help the school to stop others fighting or sort out friendship problems".* Chairperson.

The early stages of transferring power held by adults had begun with the introduction of School Council but the older children were taking the authority to levels we had not expected.

> *"People are jealous of me being on School Council because they think I'm perfect and I'm not. I know some children cried when they did not get voted on because they had tried for two times and were well disappointed. The younger children are sometimes scared to talk in case the older children laugh at them"* 7 yr old.

In retrospect the development of the roles and responsibilities of School Council was not fully explained to the children at this stage and this led to those children who were elected onto the Council adopting roles that other children and adults may have resented. Although School Council can offer an opportunity to children to voice their opinions and gain a sense of power to make decisions when engaged in actions, it is important that they have clear boundaries which recognise the different roles.

6.7.3 Teachers focus groups

The teachers were encouraged by the teacher facilitator to support the introduction of the School Council through discussions linked to the behavioural policy changes and OFSTED assertions that School Council would improve behaviour, particularly at lunchtimes.

> *"The schools making sustained progress [in improving behaviour] sought feedback from the students about how well the new strategies were working. They ensured that the School Council was strengthened and that the students knew that their voices would be heard"* OFSTED, Improving Behaviour (2006:6).

The implementation of School Council by one teacher, and supported by myself as Headteacher, also led to some resentment, which I didn't notice at the time, amongst some of the other teaching staff. It was during the focus group discussion following periods of time to reflect that the views of the adults began to surface with regard to the raising of the voice of the children through the development of a School Council.

> *"I know that the children should be asked about how they feel and give their views on their learning, but, I find that I am not aware of the content of the discussions during School Council. When children come back saying 'we are sorting out the naughty boys' I get worried about what they think their role is"* Teacher F.

Teachers were reacting to the fact that the roles of the children in School Council were going beyond that of representing the views of their peers to that of taking some of the power associated with the roles of adults.

Another teacher questioned the purpose of the implementation of the School Council and the development of the role shaped in her view by the Headteacher and teacher facilitator. This led to suspicion of the purpose of the elected body.

> *"Sometimes I feel the approach goes along the lines of 'this is what the Headteacher and teacher facilitator feel is best' rather than actually being in the classroom and seeing what has gone on being in there and practicing what's gone on although I must admit the SLT does listen to opinions as to what is actually going on and so if it is different to anybody in the SLT opinion they will take that into account."* Teacher B.

Expressions of concern during the focus group showed that the decision to introduce a School Council had not been planned sufficiently to listen to the voices of the staff and define their roles.

> *"I am beginning to wonder whose voice is the most important in the school"* Teacher A.

> *"The children have more time with the Headteacher to tell their point of view than she offers to the staff. That should change as we need to all work together as a whole team"* Teacher C.

The focus group discussion was the first time teachers had been given the opportunity to voice their opinions about the development of School Council which was designed to offer a structure approach to 'pupil voice'. The responses provided unexpected criticism both of the way the children had developed the role for themselves and of the lack of apparent explanation from me as Headteacher and the teacher facilitator. I had to question my decision to begin with the voice of the child. I had discovered that sensitivities of the adults must be considered when moving to 'transform' the voice of the children. The warning by Fielding (2001) about difficulties occurring when seeking to change two centuries of control by adults in classrooms became a reality.

The School Council members elected were proud to wear their badges and attend weekly meetings to discuss school events. They were not specifically trained in how to feedback to their classes and the teacher facilitator missed the opportunity of feeding back to her colleagues.

The difficulties for both teachers and children occurred when the roles were misunderstood and moved more towards behaviour management; something the teachers felt was their territory as the professional.

6.8 Taxonomy of development of pupil voice

The developing of the role of School Council was moving the school upwards on the
conceptual model a taxonomy of development of pupil voice (figure 14) from controlling to
elements of developing of 'pupil voice' because the children were beginning to offer their
views about life at school and solutions for changes to the teacher facilitator and
Headteacher.

PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	**3**.Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	**2**.Students as Active Respondents	**5**. Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	
CONTROL *Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.*	**2.** children are supported in expressing their view **1.** Children are listened to	**1.** Students as Data Source	**3.** Tokenism **2.** Decoration **1.** Manipulation	

Figure 14 A taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice' showing the role of School Council

There was an attempt to move beyond 'tokenism' (Level 3 Hart 1994) towards informing the
elected children and offering actions for change in which they could be engaged. I had
provided a structure to a limited number of voices which was being viewed as elitism by
those not on the School Council, either as child representatives or as teachers.

The teachers held firmly onto the control of the learning spaces within their classrooms and there was little influence of the School Council within the classrooms. The responses of some of the teachers were showing resentment to the way the School Council body had been introduced and the direction in which it was leading. The consideration of the voice of the teacher would need to be addressed before developing School Council any further. The resentment of the teachers was two fold, firstly linked to the lack of consultation prior to the implementation of the School Council and secondly the transference of power to the children and the teacher facilitator. We would need to return to the voice of the teachers to ascertain the nature of the unrest and devise *'more modern and inclusive ways'* (Lewars 2007:1) of involving children in 'pupil voice' work.

The idea that children should have a structured body through which they could offer their views was supported by those children with the power but resented by those who had not been mandated. The lack of consultation of the teachers in the development of the role had led to both resentment and support for the School Council with us clearly failing in *'getting the techniques right'* (Cleaver, 2001:36).

6.9 Circles of Influence on my claim to knowledge

My reflection on the evidence base that supports my claim to knowledge is underpinned by the circles of influence within all of the cycles of action. During this cycle, however, I focused on the methods I would use to gain the information that I thought would support positively the introduction of School Council. From reflections on the previous cycle I was drawn to a more structured approach to 'pupil voice'. I was troubled by the previous arrangements I had made for focus groups and wanted to try out the method adhering to gender and group composition for the children. Elliot's (1991) action research model was used to follow the cycle of change but more emphasis was applied to the underlying

assumptions for the actions for change. This was provided by Zuber Skerritt and Perry's model (2002) in which the actions for change within each step were underpinned by reflections related to *content, process* and *premise.*

The *methods* of gathering the data became more important (see figure 6 p 47). I had chosen to listen to the voices of the elected body of School Council and the teachers in order to include the views of the children as well as their teachers. The introduction of School Council as a decision making body, that would be trialled and evaluated within six months, led to a direct action for change. The groups chosen to evaluate the process would be the children selected for School Council and, for the first time, the teachers as part of the research. The teacher facilitator followed the training programme she had previously received to introduce the new decision making body.

The *methods* of introducing School Council became more prominent as the *literature* persuaded me that this was to be straightforward. I did not expect the outcomes I received in terms of the negativity towards raising the voice of a minority of children in this way; *self* was firmly hidden as I watched from a distance the formulation of the structure of School Council. I had not considered the teacher's voice in the decision to introduce School Council because I believed that they would be supportive of the chance for the children to have their say in areas of the school in which they had knowledge, and that the transferring of the power to the children would lead to them, supported by the teacher facilitator, to expand the brief beyond the original areas of fund raising and playground issues.

6.10 How I show that the conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate

It was during this cycle of actions for change that I relied on the externally defined structure of School Council UK to dominate the research approach. I ensured that the cycles for actions were followed, and selected appropriate methods for gathering the views of different

groups, but I did not explore my own thoughts and values thereby failing to notice that School Council was reshaping into a role that extended beyond the original brief. Although I had empowered the children on the School Council, I had inadvertently disempowered the teachers. This brought into question my personal validity because I had used my power as Headteacher to introduce a decision making body for the children that was not owned by the teachers.

From my direct interactions with the children and teachers I devised key questions for the next cycle of action which were:

- *How can I focus on actions for change that allows all to have a voice?*

- *Was I wrong to attempt to move the approach to pupil voice forward before considering teachers voice and what was the nature of their disempowerment?*

- *Was the focus on taking an approach from outside the school such as that recommended by School Councils UK too narrow and restrictive?*

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how a desire to raise the voice and power in decision making of the children can dis-empower the teachers. I have come to know more about tokenistic 'pupil voice' in the exploration of voice, in terms of who is heard, and agency in terms of capacity to make own free choice. The voices of the children and those of the teachers were showing that a structure which is imposed to support 'pupil voice' does not always foster the developments it is intended for and that interpretations are different according to the role an individual has. The links to the way of working and the culture of the school were showing that the voices of both the adults and children were being raised through their evaluations, although they uncovered objections that were unexpected and not fully highlighted in the literature from School Councils UK. It would be vital to return to the voices of the teachers in

the next cycle of action in order to discover the nature of the unrest. I was left with key questions that I would need to pursue.

The teacher's views of the children were limited to those on the School Council with a limited idea of the representation of the voices of others that their mandate had given them. There was an attempt to move beyond 'tokenism' (Level 3 Hart 1994) towards informing the elected children and offering actions for change in which they could be engaged.

The teachers remained in full control of the learning spaces within their classrooms and there was little influence of the School Council within the classrooms. Some of the teachers were showing resentment of the way the School Council body had been introduced and the direction in which it was leading. The consideration of the voice of the teacher would need to be addressed before developing School Council further. The resentment of the teachers was two fold: firstly linked to the lack of consultation prior to the implementation of the School Council, and secondly regarding the transference of power to the children and the teacher facilitator. We would need to return to the voice of the teachers to ascertain the nature of the unrest and devise *'more modern and inclusive ways'* (Lewars 2007:1) of involving children in 'pupil voice' work.

CHAPTER 7 Forgotten Voices of Teachers

> *This chapter explores further the voice of the teachers, in which they show that they should be part of the process of introducing 'pupil voice' into school, based not on a externally imposed initiative, but beginning with the work in the classrooms and moving outwards. It was a time when I discovered the effect of researching inside ones own organisation with the pitfalls that can unfold.*

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the second cycle of action research, in which I turned to

the voice of the teachers in order to understand the reasons why School Council had caused

underlying tensions in the further development of 'pupil voice'. It examines the effect of

introducing an externally developed initiative without consultation and the use of the teachers

voice to frame change through the structure of continuous professional development. It will

explore the themes of *'defining roles'* and *'power'* through surveys of evaluative documents

and interviews with teachers.

It became imperative to focus on the voice of both the teachers and myself as Headteacher

and internal researcher in this cycle of action. I show the importance of actively listening to

the voices of teachers in the early stages of involving the children as active participants in

decision making in school.

7.2 My concern about the voice of the teachers

Chapter 6 has shown how I explored the effectiveness of a structure that gave a voice to a

small minority of children providing opportunities and roles in which to display decision

making. The nationally led initiative by the school inspectorate OFSTED to establish the

views of children through a body such as a School Council had persuaded me that this was a

worthwhile avenue for the raising of the voice of the children. However as the lack of role

clarity developed in the children, they began in meetings to discuss the behaviour of a

minority of the children, which unsettled the teachers as they protected the children in their care from this treatment.

7.3 Why I was concerned

My main area of concern, at this point in the research, was what I have termed the "forgotten teachers". In my enthusiasm to offer opportunities for the children, I had not focused on seeking the support of, and establishing ownership with, the teachers. I assumed that the teachers were aligned to the principles of raising the voices of the children in decision making since they appeared to foster the views of children in their everyday practices. I had not accounted for the ways that the children would choose to develop what in retrospect was an ill defined role. In the group feedback in Chapter 6, I had heard the viewpoints of some of the teachers regarding their concern about children's involvement in disciplining their peers, and the criticism of the way I established the role of School Council, but I needed to gain more information. I chose to use an end of year evaluation document, which was part of school procedures, for reflecting on the year. This document had been agreed for use in my research by the teachers. Following my analysis of the text I selected five teachers whose reflections more focused on opportunities for voicing opinions, roles and power struggles for engagement in semi structured interviews.

7.3.1 Critical questions in order to explore the themes

The previous cycle had raised three critical questions:

- *How can I focus on actions for change that allows all to have a voice?*

- *Who holds roles that link to 'pupil voice'?*

- *What is the nature and extent of the power?*

I began to hear the voices of the children, about their roles in school council, and started to divert my attention to teachers' voices. These questions would further explore the themes of

roles, in terms of understanding what to do when representing others, responsibility and understanding power. The emphasis I had previously placed on the exploration of an enabling culture for 'pupil voice' had been diverted to a consideration of whose voice was important in school. As a starting point with the children, and with an emphasis on hearing their voices, I had only briefly included the teachers. On reflection and returning to the literature, it seems that I was inadvertently *"injecting strong pupil voice into a classroom teaching system that has evolved over two centuries without listening to such voice"* (Arnot et al, 2004:3) without preparing the teachers for the change of power I was to bestow on the children.

7.3.2 Discovering teacher's voice

The teachers had developed views about the role of School Council but had not been given the opportunity to share these. This cycle of action was prompted by the significant comments of two of the teachers highlighted in Chapter 6:

> *"I am beginning to wonder whose voice is the most important in the school"* Teacher A.

> *"The children have more time with the Headteacher to tell their point of view than she offers to the staff. That should change as we need to all work together as a whole team"* Teacher C

I had not expected such disclosures, as I believed I encouraged the voices of all. Suddenly I had been presented with comments which had arisen out of the feelings of a group, the teachers that I had apparently inadvertently disempowered. I had also given key responsibilities to the teacher facilitator, which other teachers resented due the post holders lack of communication with them about the plans for School Council.

7.3.3 Looking inward to my role

I had strictly followed a cycle of action research which introduced rights of participation to a minority of children without explicitly stating my belief in creating a democratic system for

children to make decisions, assuming participants were aware of this and analysing the process through which I selected the roles of teacher facilitator and children. My enthusiasm for developing authentic 'pupil voice', that is directly related to the spoken words and opinions of the children taken from first hand experiences, was interpreted by *teacher C* as using my research as a vehicle to raise points of view of School Council representatives above all others, which I as researcher cloaked in the pretence of consultation.

My original justification for raising the voice of the children in school remained but the voice of the nine teachers, in this cycle, would be explored as an attempt to rethink and frame my methodology differently to avoid alienation from the adults in my research. Hellawell (2006:1) refers to such a situation as *'conscious revelation'* in which I as the researcher will be more explicit about processes and share it with the participants. Although I am an insider in the school community, and therefore have a right to be part of the development of voice, I am also an outsider as I take on the role as researcher. I sought to work with the tensions of what Hammersley (1993) describes as *'involvement'* and *'estrangement'* when viewing the data. Such tensions that arose for me at this point about unearthing aspects of voice, made me reflect more about my role as the researcher and I therefore turned more to my journal to deepen my reflexive stance.

7.4 What have others written about my concern?

To make sense of the reaction of the teachers I returned to the literature to discover how other teachers had engaged in 'pupil voice' activity to raise the voice of children in a non threatening way for teachers. Much of the practice based research experienced by the teachers, in other research studies, had been in the area of what I have categorised 'controlling pupil voice' in which adults led and children had a defined role to play.

The evidence presented in studies of children being consulted about their views about classroom life and relationships showed ideas not always apparent to adults (Rafferty 1997,

Arnot et Al 2004, Johnson 2004). Through 'pupil voice' actions, teachers were using children to find out about what is happening in classrooms, but not involving them in the formulation of actions. This was a tokenistic approach where the adults asked the children for their viewpoint but not for solutions thereby showing they remained in control of relationships in the classroom setting and in a position to take the lead for change.

McIntyre and Pedder (2004) explored the impact of pupil consultation in classrooms in which the emphasis shifted to gathering viewpoints from children, and then teachers devising action points and evaluating the outcomes asserting increase in ownership by the children. However teachers, when presented with the opinions of the children, were generally receptive to those suggestions - which linked to their view of pedagogy and roles and responsibilities, but when opposite viewpoints emerged they were critical of the *"validity of pupils' accounts of classroom reality"* (McIntyre and Pedder 2004: 22).

Through the reflection on the outcomes of these research studies (McIntyre and Pedder 2004, Arnot et Al 2004) I realised that teachers in our school had not been given the choice about considering the voice of the child, it had been imposed on them at a time when School Council members were gaining in confidence and misusing their newly discovered power.

I had become increasingly uncomfortable that I had chosen to begin my research with the voice of the children and not in partnerships including both children and teachers. I had been influenced by the research studies (Arnot 2004 et al) in which teachers were portrayed as active agents in the selection of views of children that connected with their own. I therefore implemented a system which I believed would focus on 'pupil voice' directly but that actually bypassed the voices and opinions of the teachers.
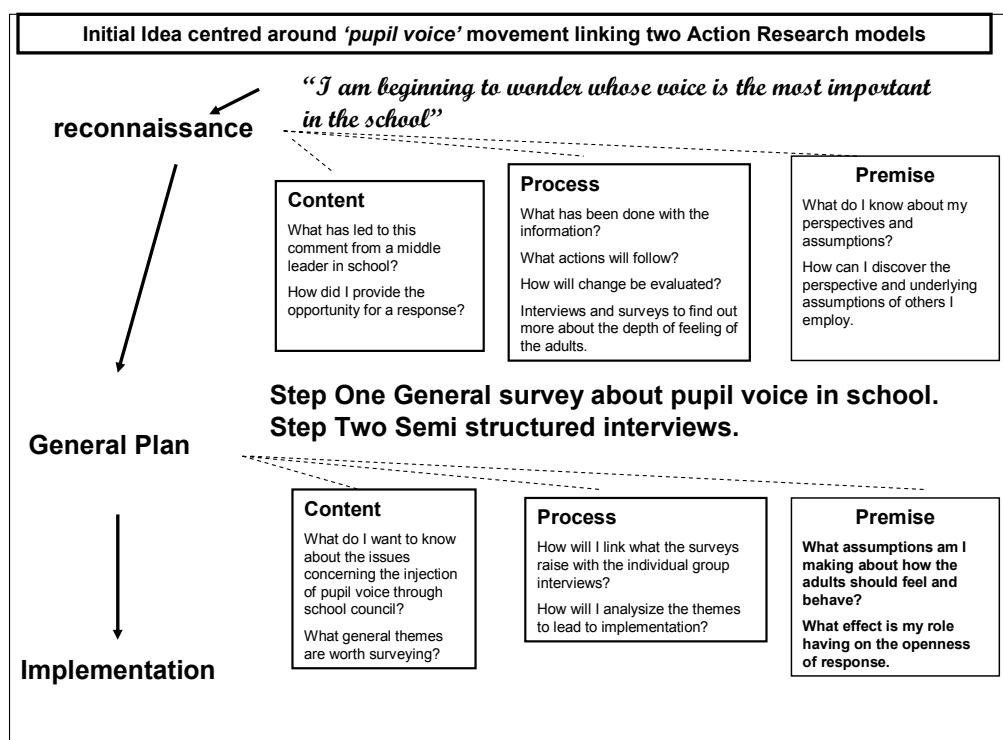
I returned to the literature on action research to deepen the way I was approaching this cycle of action. I linked Elliott's model of Action Research with that of Zuber Skerritt and Perry

(2002). For each step in the spiral of actions I framed my reflections on *'content'*, *'process'* and *'premise'* in a return to a much more prominent *self* circle of influence in my work (see figure 7 p48).

The reconnaissance step now involved an exploration, referred to as *content* in terms of what are the issues in our school and what are the participants saying or showing. Questions such as "What does that tell me about…….? And "How do I know?" became vitally important. A much more in depth *process* was required during each action that involved the action planning at each stage following the diagnosis. The connection between the planning, actions and evaluation was made much more explicit. Finally *premise* would involve more emphasis on me as an insider researcher and the underlying assumptions and perspectives of those engaged in the research at each stage.

I reflected in my journal about the actions for change centring on 'pupil voice' using the Zuber Skerritt and Perry model (2002) as I suddenly felt the impact of my actions or inaction.

Initial Idea centred around *'pupil voice'* movement linking two Action Research models

"I am beginning to wonder whose voice is the most important in the school"

reconnaissance

Content	**Process**	**Premise**
What has led to this comment from a middle leader in school?	What has been done with the information?	What do I know about my perspectives and assumptions?
How did I provide the opportunity for a response?	What actions will follow?	How can I discover the perspective and underlying assumptions of others I employ.
	How will change be evaluated?	
	Interviews and surveys to find out more about the depth of feeling of the adults.	

Step One General survey about pupil voice in school.
Step Two Semi structured interviews.

General Plan

Content	**Process**	**Premise**
What do I want to know about the issues concerning the injection of pupil voice through school council?	How will I link what the surveys raise with the individual group interviews?	**What assumptions am I making about how the adults should feel and behave?**
What general themes are worth surveying?	How will I analysize the themes to lead to implementation?	**What effect is my role having on the openness of response.**

Implementation

131

7.5 Current practices that added to my concern.

I remained concerned that School Council UK encouraged schools to see the introduction of representative groups of children as a way of involving all pupils in voicing their opinions. My observations of generic pupil questionnaires distributed by schools at the onset of an OFSTED inspection as a method of gaining the views of children as stakeholders only added to the tokenistic nature of consulting children about life in school.

I had discovered that although the children on School Council were confident in voicing their viewpoints in meetings they did not know how to represent the voices of those whom they were elected by. This called into question the validity of a body such as School Council in raising 'pupil voice' actions and being able to move beyond tokenism to more meaningful ways of raising the voice of the children in decision making.

I was also disturbed about the feedback from teachers about the perceived elitism of School Council and its members, a factor also of concern to parents of the children who had applied for the role but were not selected. I recorded my reflections in my journal to make more explicit my state of confusion.

Journal Entry August 2006 Reflections on adults roles and responsibilities

I am now fully confused. I started out with what I felt was a human approach to developing the voice of the child and succeeded in upsetting the adults with whom I worked closely. I did not open up enough as to the expectations of even my 'feelings' to those I lead. Why had a missed the idea of the powerbase I held.

In my attempt to pull back from the emphasis on the voice of the child to finding out what the adults felt I read some significant works that I hope will shape the methodology as I move through the process. At this stage I have no awareness of how they will interconnect. They just float around as quotes satisfying my internal desires to show I am working by reading lots and lots but avoiding writing about it.

Elliott's **Action Research Model** (still works as a base)

Zuber Skerritt and Perry **Thesis Action Research Model** (sounds more academic may be useful)

Dadds and Hart **Methodological Inventiveness** (at last perhaps I can talk about theory as I live it in practice. They put together what I believe about research in school and how to share it more widely. Of course I know you cannot take what I am doing and inject it into another school. The lesson I have learned is that telling adults what to do does not take them with you on a journey)

Stenhouse Teachers doing research in classrooms (maybe his work will help me frame the way forward)

Where am I in this? The reflexivity assignment feels like a way forward as I go through this crisis I was so clear at the beginning of my journey and now I am feeling the full effects of ambiguity.

7.6 Data gathering processes and methods.

In order to gather data that directly involved the voices of the teachers I engaged in two methods; surveying end of year school self evaluative documents and interviewing teachers.

7.6.1 Surveying documents

Each year the teachers completed a document, evaluating the outcomes of developments in school, which was readily available in the public domain as an evaluation of school improvement actions that had occurred. I used this survey, with all the teacher's consent, to discover both information about the emerging themes related to 'pupil voice' and other factors which were causing unrest with the new role of School Council (figure 15).

Teacher's views about aspects of teaching and learning in school
Reflecting on the academic year 2005 / 2006

The questions in **bold** were used to formulate the survey.

What information have you gained from the children during the year? What action have you taken from their views?

How well have children you have taught performed at the end of the year?

To what extent do learners adopt healthy lifestyles whilst in your care?

To what extent do learners feel safe and adopt safe practices whilst in your care?

How much do learners enjoy their education in your classes?

How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community from what you have taught them?

How well do learners you teach prepare for their future economic well being?

How good is the personal, social and emotional development and well being of learners in your class?

How good is the quality of teaching and learning in your classroom?

How well does the curriculum and other activities ,meet the range of needs and interests of learners?

How well are learners guided and supported by you and your classroom support?

What are your key priorities for the development in the quality of the provision in your classroom?

What do the children tell you about life in your classroom?

What is the role of school council?

What support do you need to action the development you seek to deploy?

Figure 15 Whole school evaluation documents.

The teachers used their own reflective notes to complete the documents. I saw these as a primary source of evidence as they were written as reflective statements by those having engaged in the activity. Such evidence contained within our school's evaluative structure is

known to the teachers as a way of deepening their evaluations of activities during the school year and an agreed way of voicing opinions on which to shape the school improvement plan for the next year. These documents provided evidence of the teachers' thoughts about aspects of 'pupil voice' changes in school and in particular the change in importance of the voice of the child. When interpreting the documented responses I focused on the questions: *"What does that tell me about……..?"* to link the voice of the teacher with the emerging themes of defining roles and power, and *"How do I know?"* to reflect on my reasons for selecting certain comments. I presented the sentences I had selected from the text back to the teachers to share my interpretations of what I assumed the message was.

Those questions highlighted in bold in Figure 15, were selected in order to discover viewpoints about roles and relationships in classrooms as well as suggestions for areas that could be developed further. The basis for these specific questions was as follows:

- *What information have you gained from the children during the year?*

This question offered the teachers the opportunity to reflect on the things which were significant for them in the interactions that had taken place in terms of the informal discussions with their children.

- *What action have you taken from their views?*

This question linked to the previous one as it allowed opportunities to link what has been heard with actions for change.

- *How much do learners enjoy their education in your classes?*

This question offered the opportunity for the teachers to give opinions about the aspects of the education in their care that is most enjoyed by the children.

- *What do the children tell you about life in your classroom?*

This question was formulated from the 'pupil voice' literature (Arnot et Al 2004) which supports the work on children being consulted about classroom conditions.

- *How well are learners guided and supported by you and your classroom support?*

This question sought to encourage teachers in defining their role in the classroom with their children.

- *What is the role of school council?*

This question was devised to directly gain information from the teachers about School Council in terms of the role, feedback opportunities and the behaviours of those children given the responsibilities.

7.6.2 Interviewing teachers

The method chosen to further develop the voice of the teachers was to conduct interviews designed to explore the viewpoints about consulting children in practice in the classroom. Interviews seemed like a simple way of collecting data when likened to conversations, however, when conducting the interviews I discovered the importance of addressing my assumptions and understandings about the situation (Denscombe 2003: 163) thereby avoiding an *'illusion of simplicity'* (ibid: 164). I framed the interview questions from the evaluation document in order to focus the interviews in three broader areas:

- How do you develop the relationships with the children in respect to decision making?

- What opportunities are provided for talk within the classroom?

- What are the roles in your classroom and school that represent 'pupil voice'?

I aimed to explore general classroom opportunities for sharing views, ways in which the roles were established and specifically about the role of School Council. I kept the questions open ended in order to offer opportunities for the teachers to expand their views in each of the three areas. This addressed what Denscombe (2003:164) refers to as *'the interviewer effect'*

in which the response to the questions may be affected by the perceptions of the person asking the questions.

The teachers had previously shared views about the way School Council had been introduced so I was confident that they would not be unduly inhibited by my position as Headteacher. During the interviews I adopted a passive and neutral stance, which was designed specifically not to antagonise or upset. Using such a passive, neutral approach, in which *'self'* is kept firmly hidden beneath a *"cloak of cordiality and receptiveness"* (ibid: 164), allowed the input from the teachers to flow and not be interrupted by any prompts or non verbal gestures that I may display.

The interviews were also conducted in the classroom space in which the teachers worked, in order to fulfil my desire to remain passive in this process and to place them in a position of comfort. I endeavoured to test what Elliott describes as *'the vision of a school as participatory democracies'* (Elliott 1991) in order to discover a deeper understanding of the teachers voice in the research on 'pupil voice'.

The interviews showed that the development of the voice of the child was important but generally only within the confinements of the classroom in which the teacher remained in control and held the power. The responses that related to School Council in the evaluation document had shown that a school that imposed a system for decision making would be of limited value if centred only on the voice of the child thereby alienating the teachers.

7.7 Evidence base that supports my claim to knowledge

The responses showed that teachers were especially open to hearing those views of the children around literacy, numeracy and behavioural problems. The nine documents provided by each of the teachers showed that strong relationships existed between the teachers and the

children and this was supported both in the teachers' feedback in their evaluations and from the children in focus groups (see Chapter 6).

7.7.1 Evaluative document evidence base

In response to the questions: "*What information have you gained from the children during the year?*" and "*What action have you taken from their views?*" there was an overwhelming desire by the teachers to make sure that the children felt secure and supported, through comments such as:

> "*The children turned to me when they felt they could not sort out relationship problems*"
> Teacher E

> "*I respond naturally to show I value their comments*" Teacher A

> "*I have listened to the children's views based on their learning in school and what they have enjoyed or not enjoyed so much and why*"   Teacher B

In response to "*How much do learners enjoy their education in your classes?*" a seemingly high degree of enjoyment of school life was identified through comments such as:

> "*Every child comes into my class happy, cheerful and eager to be there*" Teacher A

> "*The aspects they enjoy most are those that are memorable such as dressing up as a Rabbi*"
> Teacher E

> "*I hope they enjoy it, I can only tell by their reaction and enthusiasm when I teach them. I feel very guilty when children struggle when they don't get on particularly well with someone else teaching my class. They have told me they enjoy their time we have together and the work they do outside the class environment shows their enjoyment*" Teacher B

These comments demonstrated the teacher's commitment to forming positive relationships with their children, in which they were actively seeking their views as they made the environment for learning enjoyable. There was no recorded evidence that the teachers enhanced relationships with the pupils inhibited the opportunities for sharing viewpoints.

The question "*How are learners guided and supported by you and your classroom support?*" was designed to explore the roles of the teacher and teaching assistant in designing learning

opportunities within the classrooms. When describing how roles were defined in the classroom there was a degree of control evidenced in the responses by the teachers but some desire to allow the children to plan some of the experiences:

> " I take full control of the education of children in my care I plan, differentiate, evaluate, discuss and listen to the children to do the best I can"   Teacher D

> "I work hard to plan carefully for differentiated groups and use and select resources appropriately to engage the interests of the children" Teacher B

> The children like to ask what they have to do and come back to check" Teacher A

> "The children enjoy changing roles and being the teacher. It is through watching them you can analyse the effectiveness of your role". Teacher B

It was "*what is the role of school council?"* which, in the evaluations, produced more negative responses, thus raising questions about the whole school's readiness for 'pupil voice':

> "I don't really take much notice, to be honest about what the School Council are doing" Teacher C

> "My children are too young to remember what happened in meetings and I have not got the time to go and find out" Teacher D

> "I know they organise charity events as they are fed back to the whole staff in the form of parents newsletters" Teacher A

> 'I don't really blame my children for lack of feedback I think there could be more information from the facilitator". Teacher D

> "I am troubled lately about the children walking around telling others how to behave. One of my children got upset because a member of school council told them their name would be put of the naughty boys list" Teacher B.

The teachers were providing evidence that the role of School Council was upsetting the balance of power with regard to external decision making in the meetings impinging on their everyday classroom work with the children *'teachers can feel uneasy about talking with pupils in a way that changes the traditional power relationships'* Ruddock and Flutter (2004:20). The teachers also felt that they had no ownership of a process that unintentionally, offered a role to the children that compromised their professionalism.

The evaluation of the key questions, taken from the school documents, showed the following:

1. Teachers freely and regularly discussed classroom activities and behavioural issues with their classes;

2. Teachers felt a degree of autonomy in the way they explored relationships with children in their classes through showing how they discussed issues of concern with the children;

3. Roles and responsibilities were stronger when developed from the relationships;

4. Teachers were receptive to ideas given to them by the children and willing to reflect on them:

5. Externally imposed roles such as School Council upset the status quo and were interpreted as a pressure in everyday classroom life.

I reflected on the words from the teachers in these evaluations and then compared them with my interpretation in terms of the role of the children in the development of sharing responsibility for decision making through *"a much more flexible, dialogic form of democratic practice"* Rudduck and Flutter (2004:20).

It became clear that teachers desired to shape their relationships in the classroom through providing a caring and enjoyable environment in which they could discuss issues. The roles formed differed in each of the classrooms based on the nature of the relationships teachers had with their children.

The role of School Council clearly impacted on both the relationships and roles in the classrooms that the teachers felt were so important. In the early stages of confusion I expected that I would discover a hypothesis about 'pupil voice' which would provide me with straight forward steps for transferring power. Such an approach had been undermined by the discovery of the unexpected views of the teachers during this cycle of action research. The interview questions had generated the emerging themes of *relationships*, *roles* and *nature of talk.*

7.7.2 Open ended interviews.

The three interview questions, designed to offer open ended discussion, were:

1. How do you develop the relationships with the children in respect to decision making?

2. What opportunities are provided for talk within the classroom?

3. What are the roles in your classroom and school that represent 'pupil voice'?

The themes evidenced in previous cycles, *hearing*, *agency* and *whose voice?* remained significant but the teachers had raised other important factors such as relationships in terms of interactions in classrooms, and the way roles are developed. Dialogue underpinned the way the teachers saw children offering their ideas in the classroom. The exploration in this Chapter of the voice of the teachers, and in Chapter 6 of the voice of the children, showed me the importance of identifying actions for change which the teachers felt were better developed within their classrooms. There was further exploration in the interviews of *relationships*, *development of classroom talk* and *social conditions in the classroom* which had formed the themes on which I based the interview questions.

When focusing on the question relating to effective relationships in the classrooms the teachers again showed that they had a strong commitment to the principle of including the children in the decision making process and valuing what they had to say. There was an emphasis on the effectiveness of 'pupil voice, particularly in gaining the children's views about aspects of their learning.

> *"I think the best changes that are normally made to a learning environment come from the pupils because the place is our place of work but it is their place of learning"* Teacher A
>
> *"People in this school learn in several ways firstly through learning from others and listening to the advice from others and through practical observation of others".* Teacher G
>
> *"The children talk about their work and how they can improve during the plenary and I even like it when they tell me how I could improve my teaching".* Teacher A

> *"My lessons always have opportunities for the children to say what they think about how things as going or how they are feeling. It brings us closer together"*. Teacher E

The open ended question that centred on the opinions of the teachers about 'pupil voice' activities led to wider range of viewpoints and suggestions for developments devised from the teachers around the issue of power relations with regard to structures imposed from external parties, including me as Headteacher. Views were shared about the need to embed 'pupil voice' into a school culture. The links to national initiatives showed that disempowerment could occur when whole school structures reduce the voice of the individuals in classrooms. The Every Child Matters (ECM) and School Council agendas were seen by the teachers as outsider viewpoints being imposed on the school:

> *"I do think though that many schools including ours just scratch the surface of pupil voice, e.g. School Council is just a talking shop, pupils interviewing staff can been seen just as a token gesture. Children may have no real say in how the school is run. For a school to see the full benefits of pupil's voice and leadership it needs to be embedded in the culture. To do that I think adults need to have staff voice"*. Teacher A

> *"Also, truly good participation structures, (which can take years to build up and become part of the school culture), will fulfil much of the ECM Agenda and Healthy Schools. So in the long-run, as long as it's done effectively, these structures are good for all. But we need to address them in our classrooms first and then add to the mix of the whole school"*.
> Teacher B

Such responses show that consideration of the views of both the teachers and children are important if 'pupil voice' activities are to become more than tokenistic, leading to partnerships in the development of a school approach to 'pupil voice', and not merely responding to the implementation of national initiatives.

Other teachers shared views about the idea of the rise of the voice of the children in decision making, and the perceived promotion of one teacher to the role of teacher facilitator before they were ready for such a shift in power those roles had instigated:

> *"The children are not in my opinion really understanding why they go to School Council meetings. They like the idea of wearing the badge but the lunchtime meetings are not well supported because sometimes they just want to play.*

They have enjoyed arranging the charity days but I do feel it is the views of XX teacher facilitator that are stronger in these decisions.
I heard the other day that my children were using their power to try to curb the behaviour of others. When they came in and told me what had happened I had to explain that was not what their role is and make a link to bullying.
I found out that one of the agenda items was to discuss the behaviour of naughty boys which I felt cross about. I did at this point give my feedback to XX teacher facilitator who I feel does not really understand how the older children have taken on the role." Teacher D

"I didn't give the time to feedback because I had not been informed about what was being discussed. I can understand why we should show children about how democracy works but I do think they are too young to make decisions on behalf of others.
I think children at this age are still rather selfish and don't really understand how to fully support others. I think we should try and look at 'pupil voice' wider than just this group and give others a chance". Teacher C

It was the emphasis on the voice of the child within the School Council structure that led again, in this cycle, to some unrest about whose voice was being listened to. The unequal power differential noted with regard to the teacher facilitator was evident in the teachers' responses above.

Two teachers voiced their views about how both I as Headteacher and the teacher facilitator had failed to listen to the voices of them as both adults and teachers:

"Voices are listened to if they follow the party line" Teacher E.

"There is a clear difference between having your say and leading the changes. My voice is listened to only if it is part of the schools agenda" Teacher D

It was at this point that it became evident that it was not the School Council body as such that was creating the negativity amongst the teachers but the way it was developed by myself as Headteacher in partnership with the teacher facilitator. It was the teacher's lack of involvement in shaping the role for the children that appeared contentious together with the notion of being told what to do in the classrooms by a minority of children which had received power from 'leaders' in the school.

One teacher suggested that the way to develop the teachers' voice was to allow opportunities for them to independently develop the 'pupil voice' in their classroom, with their children, and share the ideas in staff meetings with all the other teachers:

"Us adults can learn through research in practicing something on our own and developing it to suit our children and through talking in staff meetings could improve it or to make it in a different form. We have been doing that recently and it works well for us to share what we know with each other and there are lots of things happening in other classes we don't find out about. The children are encouraged to learn in three different ways through listening to others, through speaking about their experiences, through practical experience and through reading". Teacher G

Another teacher expressed a wish to develop, collaboratively with colleagues, an approach that could begin in the classroom and then be shared across the school in discussions about practice.

I am always seeking to find out from the children what they are actually thinking and how I can help them develop further. I think if we could try out some new ideas in our classrooms and share them together that would help raise the voice of the children as well as the teachers. We would all have the same aims but perhaps different ways of doing it or looking at the outcomes" Teacher E

When asked during the interviews about 'pupil voice', teachers responded positively about the work that they achieved in the area in their control, i.e. within clearly defined roles in their classroom:

"Adults are very interested in what they do best and sometimes children can point out the things that are the obvious that we miss but also the things that we don't like hearing or the things that we don't see quite as clearly as they do. We miss in schools some things they can do better or could be done in a different way. I have very much learned in the last two years that the best way is to listen to the pupils and try and digest and help them clarify their ideas so perhaps you understand what they are really trying to say without actually feeling as though they have got to say what they want or what the teacher is expecting them to say and if you have somebody who is independent and passing on their views in fact it often helps children say what they really want to say rather than what they think the teacher wants to hear. If their quality of learning experiences they get here is helpful to them. They are going to like learning during the time they have had in the school". Teacher A

The teacher's suggestions to share their ideas with colleagues as they developed what works for them in 'pupil voice' became a compelling argument to seek an approach that could be shaped by teachers collectively and then tried out in the classrooms. In this way the voices of the children and teachers could be combined to develop the actions for change.

The interviews were showing that the development of the voice of the child was important but more so within the confinements of the classroom in which the teacher remained in

control and held the power. The responses related to School Council had shown that a school imposed system for decision making had its limitations if centred only on the voice of the child as it resulted in the alienation of the teachers.

It was becoming clear that the teachers relationships with their children was the development of a partnership that centred on the work in their classrooms, and in this aspect of school life they felt empowered to transfer some responsibilities for decisions that were being made. They actively listened to the voices of their children both formally, as part of the lesson structure, and informally at lesson transition times such as breaks. The development of the social conditions in classrooms was something on which they valued the views of children and it offered them, in their view, a purpose behind the reasons for talking about changes to be made. The desire to discover what others were doing in their classrooms was raised and the suggestion of an approach that encompassed professional development germinated.

7.8 Taxonomy for development of pupil voice

I returned to the taxonomy of development of 'pupil voice' in which I discovered that the response of the teachers had placed the actions firmly back within the control level, in which, *"Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made"* (see figure 16). The children were asked for their opinions but were not involved in the decision making process. I had introduced a democratic body which had been interpreted as tokenistic. There was however a desire on behalf of the teachers to take an approach to 'pupil voice' that began in the classroom and then led to the sharing of ideas more widely with colleagues teaching in other classrooms.

PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	The Ladder of Student Involvement in School (Adapted by Adam Fletcher from the work of Roger Hart)
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	**3.** Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	8. Student-initiated, shared decision-making with adults (Student-Adult Partnerships) / 7. Student-initiated and directed action / 6. Adult-initiated, shared decision making with students
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	**2.** Students as Active Respondents	**5.** Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	5. Students informed and consulted about action / 4. Students informed about and then assigned action
CONTROL Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.	2. Children are supported in expressing their view 1. Children are listened to	1. Students as Data Source	3. Tokenism 2. Decoration 1. Manipulation	3. Tokenism / 2. Decoration / 1. Manipulation

Figure 16 A taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice' showing a return from developing to controlling

7.9 How I show that the conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate

My more frequent journal entries offered an avenue to develop an understanding of the complex nature of the responses I was getting. The teachers had shown that they had good relationships with the children but found the School Council voice difficult to comprehend in terms of the usefulness in developing 'pupil voice' as a whole school approach.

7.9.1 Personal Validity

I was at a critical point on my journey as I attempted to understand what was happening to the development of 'pupil voice' for the children in School Council, those outside of the elected body and the teachers. I was confused about the messages the teachers were offering, often interpreting them as a denial of the child's voice, but I discovered through further

investigation in this cycle that this was not the case. I offered a channel for such a voice through focus groups but tended to seek out their views about predefined themes rather than open ended questioning. I thought that I was addressing *content* in Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) model (Appendix 2) by asking critical questions of the data, but there were things that went unnoticed such as the teacher's lack of support for the feedback sessions. I thought about *process* in terms of the two ways I had selected to gain evidence from the teachers, namely selecting six evaluative questions from a prewritten text and semi structured interviews.

I had not considered starting with the voice of the teachers because I relied on the evidence of effective relationships that I had previously observed across the school prior to beginning my research, and I had assumed that they would support the raising of opportunities for the children to engage in 'pupil voice'. These relationships remained strong when the teachers were empowered within their territory of the classroom.

My narrow interpretation of the role of the School Council was one of involvement in fund raising which, through the open ended nature of the introduction of the elected body, had given the children and teacher facilitator the power to extend the brief into the classrooms, thereby leading to criticism of the behaviours of children. This led to deeper thoughts about the purpose of raising the voice of the children and where teachers would feature in that. It was at this point that I felt that the research work had now taken me right back to the beginning of the journey and self doubt surfaced again. I considered what teachers were saying in terms of their control and the linking of this research to their world in the classroom and their continuous professional development. I returned to examine my research methodology, which was now being strongly focused by the *self* circle of influence as I struggled to define my role and understand why issues had arisen.

7.9.2 Social Validity

In order to establish social validity I focused on Habermas 'comprehensibility' and 'truthfulness' that seeks to check the validity of the evidence base when analysing the data that formed the evidence base of my concerns for the forgotten voice of the teachers. The questions in the evaluation document offered an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on their school year with a focus on six questions linked to 'pupil voice' activity.

The vocabulary used was known and shared by all teachers who could respond offering their reflections. I had arranged the semi structured interviews based on the developing themes of relationships, roles and responsibilities, and the enjoyment that had occurred within the evaluation document feedback. The purpose of both of the processes was clear to the teachers and they had previously been given the opportunity to express their concerns. I considered that their responses would be accurate reflections of the situation as they saw it and shared representative quotes taken from the evaluative documents and the interviews with the teachers to support my interpretations. This linked them to the themes of relationships and roles, social conditions and purpose of talk.

7.9.3 Institutional validity.

The introduction of School Council was shared with other practitioners, through the development of the case study by the teacher facilitator, with visitors from a number of schools who were interested in following the same paths we had advocated. I did widely share the view that the teachers needed to feel they were influential in the success of 'pupil voice' work (Guardian Article Appendix 4). It was at this point that my view of the work significantly widened to listening to the views of all children and teachers. I shared my reflexive study with students at a BERA Sig Conference 2007 opening for critique the way I was seeing myself within the research (Appendix 5).

7.10 Conclusion

This chapter has begun to redress the balance between the voices of the teachers and those of the children. It has provided an opportunity for them to write about life in their classrooms, generally and around the 'pupil voice' activity as well as voicing the opinions of the role of School Council. It has shown that teachers have positive relationships with their children and these can form a basis on which to build the way voices are heard alongside the roles and responsibilities. It has shown that the power struggle I perceived between the teachers and children in School Council was not centred on the notion of 'pupil voice' in general but that of the more structured and defined model of School Council which had ultimately been seen as a tokenistic approach to allowing children the opportunity to make decisions.

CHAPTER 8 Introducing 'Children as Philosophers'

> *This chapter explores the development of 'children as philosophers' approach in which the teachers' professional development is linked directly to exploring the possibilities of 'pupil voice' within each of the classrooms but sharing the outcomes across the school. It begins with the teachers framing the research focus with their children and then commenting on the outcomes for the children as they saw it. The voices of the children were part of the evaluation processes and served to show to teachers the depth of thinking that is possible for such young children. It is also a time when the School Council body became more aware of the need to feedback and listen to more children.*

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will seek to bridge the actions of developing the voice of the child through a School Council in Chapter 6 and the outcome of the discoveries from the voice of the teachers in Chapter 7. Throughout this chapter I will chart a professional development process in which the teachers engaged in learning about the ''children as philosophers'' approach (Haynes 2002), prior to implementing it in their classrooms with their children. Teachers had identified continuous professional development linked to 'pupil voice' as a way forward with evidence showing developing themes of *purpose of talk, social conditions in the classroom, relationships and partnerships.* They had shown that they wanted to take the lead in discovering the possibilities through engaging in talk activities based in the classroom.

8.2 My concern about developing teacher and child owned 'pupil voice'

My concern in this cycle of action was the lack of clarity about the purpose of 'pupil voice' activity in school and the reaction of the teachers to the development of a minority voice structure for engaging children. The role of School Council would continue at this stage, informed by the requirements for feedback to the teachers, and a more refined role definition for the children. The evidence has shown the importance of teachers guiding developments that connect the variety of voices in the classrooms to create partnerships in decision making.

It came at a time when the teachers were reflecting on the development of thinking skills of the children and sought an approach that would widen the opportunities for discussion. In the light of the negativity associated with externally imposed structures for voicing opinions I decided to be guided by the voice of the teachers as to how this should be approached. As part of the interview evidence in Chapter 7 two teachers mentioned the notion of thinking skills as a future development as follows:

> *"How do we get the children to tell us what they think?* Teacher A
> *"I have read about Philosophy for Children which seemed to make children more confident to say what they think could we use that as a starting point?"* Teacher D.

The idea of enriching the thinking skills in classrooms and a willingness to discover, with the children what was possible, would form the basis of the actions for change in this cycle informed by evaluations feeding into the School Improvement Plan. The idea of using an action enquiry approach to school improvement was gaining momentum as a preferred style of training in our staff meetings. The teachers favoured offering their practice and then building on this knowledge. I was concerned that this approach to date was underused in school and could enhance professional development which I believed showed that I had taken the previous concerns about lack of voice of the teachers seriously. I recorded my reflections in my journal (see figure 17 p151) about my failure to notice the voice of the teachers and an approach that would open up the opportunities for them to engage directly in the action research.

> *Journal entry Sept 2006*
> *I have now listened to what the teachers have told me and want to find a way of showing that their voice is important in the development of pupil voice. I am now troubled by School Council as I can see for the first time I have allowed some children to appear to have more privileges than others and perhaps children as young as 7 do not know about representing the voice of others. How could I have overlooked the naturally selfish nature of this age group? I am now struggling to know a way of finding out what children tell us about school (to meet the Governments targets) and really wishing them to have a chance to make some real decisions. The teachers show me that they do not really have opportunities with the children for them to share ideas and want to know more about how children think. One teacher has been reading about philosophy with young children and seems to want to try that out. If we work in this way will I be returning to the same situation as when one teacher developed School Council? Could we somehow work together on how to do things together with the children and talk about the processes more? I think the teachers are ready to do their own forms of action research now.*

Figure 17 Journal entry following self reflection from cycle 2.

8.3 Why am I concerned?

I was still troubled by the pressure to discover what children thought about school but wanted to find a way that could allow them to offer ideas that reflected the reality of their lives in the classroom and the wider context of school. I remained committed at this point to the newly formed School Council but would seek to collaborate more closely with the teacher facilitator to develop feedback mechanisms. This later became irrelevant, as the departure of the teacher facilitator led to new possibilities in terms of shaping the role of School Council in a way that was evident as a representative voice was evident but challenged the previous pitfalls encountered. However, at this point in time, I had to accept that School Council was underdeveloped as a decision making body and therefore remained tokenistic in terms of 'pupil voice' and served only to begin as a process of consulting with a small group of children.

The teachers had shown a level of commitment to involving the children in sharing their viewpoints but did not support School Council decisions that impinged on their classroom power or their role of protecting children. I considered that they were rightly placed to

enquire for themselves aspects of 'pupil voice' that were more supportive to the principles of children making decisions. The notion of developing thinking skills through the 'children as philosophers' approach led to the development of a role for the children in the research. The discovery of a text based on a case study, outlining 'children as philosophers' (Haynes 2002) opened up an avenue for classroom practice, that could be developed with the teachers and children in collaboration, and begin to centre on the discussion about processes that were being followed.

Three critical questions formed the basis of this cycle:

1. What is the nature and *purpose of talk* within the classroom?

2. How do we enhance the positive *relationships* in classrooms between teachers and the children to develop partnerships in 'pupil voice'?

3. How do we provide time and space for teachers and children to listen to each other?

The objectives identified in this cycle of action were:

- To empower the teaching staff in developing a research approach they owned;

- To structure an approach to ''children as philosophers'' to foster the development of critical thinking skills in the children.

I revisited the original research question *"What is the culture of a school which aids or inhibits pupil voice?"* because it had raised areas of concern as my focus centred on inhibiting factors. The actions to introduce 'pupil voice' had not only forgotten the teachers' voice but had raised unrest especially around the question of "What do adults do in this school?" (see p99) as I began to explore directly what the children were saying about the roles of the teachers. This I now see was unhelpful in my quest to formulating partnerships between teachers and the children in developing a sense of ownership of 'pupil voice'

activities. The teachers had interpreted the phrase 'inhibiting factors' as a criticism of their relationship in classrooms with children. They were confident in the learning partnerships during lesson times but were not sure about the purpose of expanding decision making across the school as a whole. They feared the elitist approach of developing School Council in an organisation where children, in their view, were not fully conversant about representing the viewpoints of others as they remained egocentric due to their level of cognitive development.

My research question would need to be wider and more inclusive of the views of children and adults in school which led to *"Whose voice is important in developing 'pupil voice' in a primary school"*. This question was pertinent during the collection of evidence for the voices of both the children and teachers and allowed my reflections to centre on the information I was being given from different stakeholders. This led to a further shift in the question to *"Is everyone's voice welcome in this school?"* offering an entry point for the broadening of the work into exploring the voices of teachers and all children in partnership.

8.4 What have others said about my area of concern?

The emphasis of listening to the voices of others outside the school at this time was captured through one significant text that guided and supported a school owned approach built on the teachers desire to examine thinking skills as a vehicle to develop 'pupil voice'. *''Children as Philosophers': Learning Through Enquiry and Dialogue in the Primary Classroom'* Haynes (2002) formulated a basis on which our school approach to raising the voice of the children alongside the more traditional School Council could be structured, but did not give a guide as to how it is implemented. This was crucial at this time as the teachers were seeking the power to shape 'pupil voice' starting from within what they saw as their own territory, the classroom.

Through this approach, the teachers would be able to experience directly in their enquiries the action research approach involving the children in three action steps:

1. Planning with colleagues collaboratively for the introduction of 'children as philosophers' ideas;

2. Engage in sessions using the approach in the classroom, asking the children about the process;

3. Feedback to colleagues regarding the outcomes and future planning.

This approach of linking whole school development change to the voice of the teachers through their professional development sessions was a change of emphasis which addressed a way of exploring classroom practice through the eyes of the teachers and their children. Developing opportunities for children to think and voice opinions through the 'children as philosophers' approach introduced *'critical thinking, an underused skill in primary classrooms'* Haynes (2002:12) which would seek to discover if there was connectivity between critical thinking and representation of the voice of others on a School Council body. The teachers would be in a position of trying out a new idea that fostered their own development as they tried out some of the processes involved.

Haynes (2002:2) sees *"democracy as the right to education"* in which *"teachers seek to empower the student through open deconstruction of the educational process itself"*. This notion placed the role of developing the 'pupil voice' work back into the hands of the teachers allowing them to guide the speed of change, *"when children are thoughtfully vocal, their thinking and talking can help to change the classroom from a place of instruction into a place where education is possible"* (Haynes 2002:14).

The teachers would be involved in the formation of a process which linked reflection with learning centred practice that unlocked the potential of:

- learning partnerships in the classroom;

- engagement of all in reflections in and on actions;

- supporting the children in self reflection on action.

In order for the children to be involved in decision making in the school it is important that they partake in actions that build towards participatory communities (Wenger 2002) in partnership with their teachers. Within a classroom community it is desirable for children to begin to develop *"problem solving and citizenship" (*Dewey 1916) thereby underpinning the 'pupil voice' activities with critical questioning. The children could then explore with their teachers the notion of a *"fertile learning place in order to gather a sense of how to use their mind, how to deal with authority and how to treat others"* (Bruner 1960:17). The 'children as philosophers' approach would offer opportunities to practice discussing ideas with no right or wrong answer to which the teachers could apply their skilled reflections on action and begin to question the governing principles of what they were seeing in the practice, applying what Argyris and Schön (1974) termed 'double loop learning', a similar approach to the Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) model that explores *content, process* and *premise.*

Teachers in collaboration with their children would be engaging in activities that enhanced thinking skills, reflecting on the processes and feeding back to colleagues. Rather than being told what to do and given a structure to follow, as occurred with the implementation of School Council, the teachers would construct an approach which they researched with their children and engage in joint reflection which would *"build new understandings"* (Schön 1983: 68) to inform the actions. The teacher could then test the theories, developing further responses or moves which could not be necessarily drawn from established ideas or techniques, thereby adding to the methodological messiness and ambiguity in the action research process. The 'reflection on action' occurred after the encounter by writing up

plenary responses. This allowed time for the teachers and the children to explore why they acted as they did and what was happening during the experience for the whole group, thereby developing questions and ideas. Such ideas would build a repertoire of ways of looking at the approach which was key to this way of working. The outcomes reflected on by the children and the teachers could be used to feedback to the other teachers, thus building a collection of images, ideas, examples and actions which they can draw upon about the ways children voice their opinions.

One teacher summed up their thoughts of designing CPD in this way:

> *"I want to do something with my children that help them understand the world and develop their own thoughts. They spend so much time being given 'learning objectives' and not having to think. 'Children as philosophers' approach is liberating for me to do. No right or wrong answers and my broad plans can go in previously unknown directions. That has to be good for education"* Teacher G

Another commented about the power of discussing classroom practice with each other:

> *"I learn so much about life in other classrooms from the feedback sessions we have when we share what we have been doing in exploring emotions and ideas".* Teacher C

The teachers signifying they wanted to develop their practice in involving the children in a dialogue in addition to the sharing of ideas about their research supported the aims of the cycle well.

8.5 Data gathering methods

This was the first time the teachers and children would become active participants in the action research, as the process was being directed into the hands of those who felt they had previously been passive participants in the previous research cycles. Such an approach required the teachers to study the ideas presented as ''children as philosophers'' (Haynes 2002) and then try out ideas in the classrooms.

Nine out of the schools nine class teachers with their class of thirty children were engaged in this part of the research. The action research was formulated in the following way:

1. Teachers studied the 'children as philosophers' approach;

2. Teachers devised three sessions to try with their children modelling the open ended nature of the practice;

3. Teachers asked the children to reflect and feedback on the process in immediately after the session was completed;

4. Teachers shared their outcomes with colleagues.

An action research approach would be followed as the ideas were practiced by the teachers in their meetings, introduced to their children and reflected upon, and outcomes were disseminated in staff meetings each half term. Three action steps were designed by the teachers and then a period of reflection in and on action took place in partnership with the children and their colleagues.

The development of the voice of the child in a way which offered ownership for both children and teachers required a new way of working. I gathered data from the following sources:

1. observation of staff meetings when devising the plans;

2. teachers reflections of each session with children's input;

3. Two teacher accounts of the 'children as philosophers' process.

I was aware that during this process my role was to watch and listen as the teachers explored the 'children as philosophers' approach in developing 'pupil voice'. I was careful not to impose my reflections as the process developed.

I used my journal to reflect on the development of the action steps framing my thoughts using Zuber Skerritt and Perry's thesis action research (2002) *content*, *process* and *premise*

(see figure 18). During the feedback sessions I wrote up my thoughts on the developments of the actions for change.

Journal Entry November 2006

All nine teachers tried out two philosophy sessions with their children and shared what happened in todays staff meeting. The room was buzzing with enthusiasm. Each teacher decided to to use a nursery rhyme or story as a stimulus for discussion and the children devised the questions they wanted to ask of the author. The voting system to decide what question would be chosen was a hit with the children and those whose questions gained the most votes felt valued accounting to the feedback from the teachers. There was an overwhelming view that having the pressure of detailed planning removed and a dedicated 30 minute slot added to the success. Two of KS2 teachers said their children wanted to carry on with the discussion even though they had to go for lunch. A mid day supervisor fed back that a group of six children had continued the discussion about jealousy whilst sitting on the benches outside. I listened and reflected on the messages I was receiving which had backup quotes from the children as well as the viewpoints of the teachers.

CONTENT	PROCESS	PREMISE
The plans to use a stimulus such as story or nursery rhyme gave the structure that the teachers needed and the children ideas to make up questions. Teachers made notes immediately after the sessions and teaching assistant scribbed the quotes from the children.	Evaluation of the process of actions took place within the staff meetings as questions were asked by colleagues to understand more about what had happened.	The teachers fed back ways in which the children had discussed the key questions with differences of opinion occurring amongst the older children but recognition of points of view.

Figure 18 Journal entry as a researcher looking and listening

The methods for researching the actions for change were those used within the schools way of working for feedback. The three staff meeting sessions were organised with opportunities to feedback the actions taken in the classroom with viewpoints added from the children at each session completion. I made notes during the feedback and then used my journal (figure 19) to reflect on the outcomes.

Journal Entry 6/11/06

We have now completed three sessions at staffing meetings based on Joanna Haynes work. The staff have all taken to the approach positively, I wondered if it was the way the book is written or the lack of how to do it? Ot maybe we could relate to the classrooms described. It doesn't seem too theoretical maybe we can create our own theory about this work. There is however a set way of doing things that we find useful. Some of the teachers (5) are positive in terms of just throwing away the idea of planning with objectives and go for it. Others (4) ask to use the story ideas books to stimulate the children into thinking about the questions they could ask. No one approach is better than another as it is the way we talk together that I feel is important.

The room was really buzzing with the discussions as one of the leaders modelled the approach as if we were the children. Through doing the process together we could raise questions and deepen thoughts. Much more laughter was seen in this meeting than we usually have when discussing some change.

Is this one different as we are not being told we have to do it?

Figure 19 Journal entry talking to myself

At the end of each lesson the children had a plenary in which they reflected on the process rather than the content of the lesson. This process, known to the children, was used for gathering their views about the philosophy sessions. At the end of the first term teachers submitted an account of the ''children as philosophers'' approach as they saw it.

I used my observation notes, the teacher's session feedbacks and the written accounts to explore the four critical questions that had emerged from cycle 2:

1. *What is the nature and purpose of talk within the classroom?*
2. *What do the children and adults tell us about social conditions in the classrooms?*
3. *What can be developed to build on the trusting relationships in classrooms and rebuild the confidence of teachers?*
4. *How can we develop the role of the child in the classroom and school in partnership with the teachers?*

The development of the 'pupil voice' work would hinge on the collaboration of the teachers and the children in finding a voice. Teachers had previously exhibited openness in exploring their practice through the trialling of new ideas and evaluating outcomes.

8.6 Evaluating the evidence

The evidence was generated from the data from the three action steps:

8.6.1 Action step 1

Each teacher studied *'children as philosophers'* Haynes (2002) as a think piece on which to base their actions in session one and then planned two sessions together to trial with their own class of children. Through the professional discussions, the structure of the philosophy session was planned in order to allow children to share the decision making using a democratic system (see figure 20).

> **A structure through which to introduce *'children as philosophers'* approach.**
>
> **This was devised through discussion with the teachers after they had all read,
> ''Children as Philosophers': Learning Through Enquiry and Dialogue in the Primary
> Classroom' Haynes (2002)**
>
> 1. Teachers provided a story as a stimulus for framing discussions;
> 2. The children were then asked to suggest some questions they would like to ask the
>   author;
> 3. The questions were recorded on a chart and read back to the children;
> 4. The children then voted on the questions they wanted to discuss;
> 5. Each child agreed that they would listen to the person speaking;
> 6. They gave their opinion;
> 7. They commented on each others opinions either agreeing or disagreeing with the
>   understanding that there was no right or wrong answers so all opinions were valid;
> 8. Each child was shown how to respect the views of voters even if they disagreed and
>   how to present such disagreement;
> 9. The discussion would end with a chance to continue next time or to seek further
>   information;
> 10. The final part gathered what the children said about the process.

Figure 20 The schools approach to a 'children as philosophers session.

The teachers were highly positive about the development of the approach for themselves

rather than implementing a national agenda (see figure 19 p158) leading to lively discussions

during the planning sessions. They decided that they wanted to be open with the children as

to the purpose of the sessions and the partnership they wanted to develop in examining what

was happening. After three planning sessions the teachers were ready to implement the ideas

within the classrooms.

8.6.2 Action step 2

Action step 2 began with a timetable adjustment requested by the teachers to include the new

topic of 'children as philosophers' within the frame of the week that would usually have

Personal, Social, Health Education sessions. The children were encouraged to assist the

teacher in finding out about this approach and offering suggestions for a way forward. At the

end of each session, teachers and the children recorded their views about the process. The

thirty minute sessions had within them a period of *'reflection in action'* with the talk

recorded and transcribed. The teachers and the children then discussed what the reflections were saying about the process of 'children as philosophers' in developing ideas for 'pupil voice'.

From the words of two of the children the theme strongly present in cycle 2, that of relationships, was reconfirmed and strengthened with emerging understanding of respective roles:

> *"Our teachers are learning too we want to help them"* 6 year old girl*;*

> *"We are the ones in the classroom learning through talking about things we enjoyed and know with our teacher and friends helping and listening"* 8 year old boy.

> *"Teachers help us with a little smile or nod when we talk"* 7 year old boy

The children made comments about how much they valued the way the conditions for learning were established within the classrooms:

> *"The teachers try to make it as fun as possible so we enjoy our talking"* 9 yr old boy

> *"It makes us feel we can all do it*, (children as philosophers approach) *as there isn't a right or wrong answer"* 6 yr old girl.

The development of talk was beginning to link to listening in order to find out more about what was being shared:

> *"It doesn't make us sad if we have different ideas from others. We are made to feel OK to say something different"* 7 yr old girl

> *"By listening to others it helps us understand our own ideas more"* 9 year old boy.

The combination of talking and listening were significant in developing further the partnerships of the teachers and the children. 'children as philosophers' had not only supported the development of thinking skills in terms of giving time and space but had emphasized the importance of listening to each other talking as seen in the comments made by children in a plenary and teachers staff meeting feedback:

161

"We are the ones in the classroom learning through talking about things we enjoyed and those we didn't" 7 year old girl

"We get to discuss the differences between things and whether things are true or false" 6 year old boy

"Children have shared ideas and opinions I would have not considered they knew" Teacher G

The open ended nature of the discussions within the three planned 'children as philosophers' sessions had shown that the social conditions in the classroom supported the effective way that ideas were shared as identified in the following comments:

"The teachers try to make it as fun as possible so we enjoy our learning" 8 year old boy.

"I now realise the importance of learning through play and doing things helps children learn in a more concrete way" Teacher C

"The children's views have helped me adapt the environment" Teacher B

Such comments show not only the developments of the social conditions for learning but how the roles are further developed through the partnerships:

"Our teachers are learning too we want to help them" 9 year old girl

"It makes us feel we can all do it, as there isn't a right or wrong answer" 8 year old girl

"By listening to others it helps us understand our own ideas more" 8 year old boy.

"Watching the children feedback quite strong views have shown me they are ready for more responsibility" Teacher F.

The teachers, although at the beginning were taking the lead of the classroom approach, were later including what the children were saying in their reflections and evaluations.

"Through this approach I have found that I have listened to widespread opinions and ideas regarding the way the children think and have incorporated it into my teaching" Teacher H

"The feedback from the children has shown me how to adapt my lessons" Teacher D.

Through engaging together in this cycle of action the teachers and children were discovering a meaningful 'pupil voice' approach moving away from the tokenistic approach which was seen as the School Council role.

8.6.3 Action step 3

The third action step was the formulation of the written accounts of the 'children as philosophers' approach by all nine of the teachers after the development of the process for one term.

I received accounts from all the teachers involved in the initiative outlining the process they had followed when introducing the 'children as philosophers' approach in their classrooms and reflected on the links to the emerging themes. I decided to include the accounts of teachers A and E because they had been the most explicit in their criticism of 'pupil voice' actions previously. I focused on the changes, if any, of the way of working with children when centred on the classrooms. The feedback from their accounts was evidence of the development of partnership in engaging different voices in the classroom. This approach was raising the levels of participation for the children and the ownership of the process for the teachers.

I left the format of the account open ended in order that they could show, in their own way, how the thinking had developed. This I saw as a way of raising the voice of the teachers in terms of exploring the nature of talk through a new approach.

The account below came from the teacher whose opinions in the interviews in Chapter 7 had stated *"Voices are listened to if they follow the party line"* Teacher E. The decision to develop ownership with the classroom practitioner was particularly important in this teacher's view because the age of the children could be more fully considered:

> *"First, we considered the age and stage of development of the children in the class. As the children were young, it was felt the philosophy sessions had to have direct relevance and meaning for them, i.e. the topic to be discussed would have a subject matter which they could understand. When we first trailed philosophy the topic was decided initially by the adult – e.g. Birthdays. This led to one child seeking to discover "what do woodlice eat?" following a session in the garden following the path of the insect". In order to extend the sessions, and to give the children some autonomy in their learning, it was decided to trial*

open and planned sessions. Once a week, the topic is open to the children, they can choose the area for discussion and then another session is planned. The planned ideas were initially discussions on nursery rhymes and recently using big pictures as a visual stimulus and focusing in on a certain aspect of the picture which has no definite answer thus encouraging more thought." Teacher E.

The confidence of this teacher grew alongside that of the very youngest (3 and 4 year old) children in the school The idea of having two types of sessions, one which was teacher directed and one which was child initiated, showed the value of developing the partnership and ongoing relationships during this trial process.

> *"The more sessions we have, we find it very interesting to note that the children are not influenced by anyone's statements. If a child has a view, then that view stands and though they listen to differing views, opinions are not altered. Very occasionally, a discussion takes place between their peers. This may be a developing skill and further exposure to philosophy may help these discussions to 'flow'.*
> *At four years of age, the children have naturally inquisitive minds and 'why' is a frequently asked question. I think this accounts for some of the success of the sessions (along with feeling comfortable and valued in the group). From an adult's viewpoint, it has been interesting to see how strongly the children feel about their own opinion and how that opinion will not change. I have noticed the children 'opening up' more when we have visitors to Nursery. They have become more confident and ask many questions – before philosophy, we would have to encourage this questioning. There are certain children who are asking direct questions now, e.g. M…. asked what do woodlice eat? I admitted I did not know the answer but together we could find out, and he was directed to find a book in the library which told us the answer and he took it home to share his learning with his parents. I would find it fascinating to see what effects the philosophy sessions will have on nursery children's future cognitive development".* Teacher E

The views about the development of the children showed that this teacher had engaged in shared talk readily but did not consider young children can begin take into account of the opinions of others. Through the whole school development of 'children as philosophers' approach this teacher was able to compare the views of their age group with that of their colleagues who taught different ages of children. This teacher's view showed a strong sense of ownership of this change and an open mind to future work involving children sharing their views, quite a different attitude to that shown after the imposition of the School Council.

Teacher E was not alone. At one of the interviews Teacher A shared a viewpoint about School Council considering it to be tokenistic and not deep enough to embed 'pupil voice' into the whole school:

> *"I do think though that many schools including ours just scratch the surface of pupil voice, e.g. school council is just a talking shop, pupils interviewing staff as a token gesture but have no real say in how the school is run, for a school to see the full benefits of pupil's voice and leadership it needs to be embedded in the culture. To do that I think adults need to have staff voice".* Teacher A

Following the research into the introduction of 'children as philosophers' approach this teacher was beginning to reflect on her practice and relate back to her purpose for being in education. The purpose of talk built on a partnership within the classroom was becoming clear. The teacher was expressing the views that dialogue was important and that it enriched relationships when considering the work of 'pupil voice'.

> *"The more I involved children, the more honest they became and I was able to adjust my teaching accordingly to enable them to be taught as effectively as I could. I started teaching critical thinking skills through the philosophy approach, providing the children with an understanding of how we learn. This in turn allowed a more informed response when reflecting on lessons, a response which I have come to greatly value. Due to the success of these projects and teachers enthusiasm for involving children, encouraging children to be a voice to be listened to now provides the overlying ethos of the school. Dialogue between teacher and child dominate school life, with a mutual respect between the two allowing honesty from both parties".* Teacher A.

The 'children as philosophers' approach was seen as a positive way of developing the social conditions in the classroom in a partnership of teachers and the children. This teacher expressed a surprise that the approach could develop the voice of the child and the way that children were being listened to:

> *"Philosophy is encouraging my children to use their voice to discuss issues that have previously been closed to such young ears. Topics such as `what is love? `, `Do aliens exist? `, `What are dreams and wishes? ` I openly considered with children acknowledging there may not be a right or wrong answer. It is this open-ended notion, which provides children with a safety blanket that they cannot be reprimanded for not understanding or for being incorrect. I have found Philosophy to be far more successful than I could have imagined this year. Children's enthusiasm for the subject is something to behold and the dynamism for which topics are discussed is inspirational. I continually have found myself to be surprised by the depth of thinking and maturity of thought that has ensued. Children who have overtly lacked confidence when speaking in front of others are becoming animated in their discussions, due to the openness of what is covered. They have been polite to one*

another, although they may be saying something, which has contradicted their friend's opinions, but the way they have phrased it fails to cause offence. The impact of Philosophy is already far-reaching. Children appear more able to discuss topics in lessons. They question what they are being told, rather than merely accepting it. They put themselves into other situations with a growing ease, questioning and taking on the role of historical figures for example has aided an understanding of a historical period". Teacher A

Both teacher A and E in their accounts described how this approach to thinking skills could be developed into the way teaching and learning is evaluated after hearing the views of the children, especially the views about freedom and roles:

"The teachers try to make it as fun as possible so we enjoy our learning" 8 yr boy.

"Teachers help us with a little smile or nod when we talk" 7 yr girl.

"It makes us feel we can all do it, (children as philosophers approach) *as there isn't a right or wrong answer"* 6 yr girl.

Both the teachers and the children were showing the conditions in the classroom for opportunities for talk were widening the discussion into the ways that learning happens.

8.7 Taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice'

The developments of the teachers in partnership with their children had led to the strengthening of their relationships and showed that within the domain of the classroom the children were able frame changes through discussing the processes that were occurring through the 'children as philosophers' approach. Although throughout this period the School Council remained an elected body their role was limited back to discovering ideas about the events the children wanted to be involved in and how the playground equipment was to be used. The meetings did not return to the discipline agenda, with the children using more positive methods of consultation with peers relating specifically to changes that they could recommend and see happen. The Chairperson suggested in one meeting following receipt of information about anti bullying week from School Council UK that: *"anti bullying week is*

not what we should be doing because isn't everyday anti bullying in the school?" and another child said; *"we don't have to wear badges or make posters do we to show we care for each other".* These comments became highly significant in leading change within the next cycle of actions. The teachers framing the 'children as philosophers' approach not only engaged children in direct discussion, but also reflected on the way the process felt which led to more importance being centred on voices of the children in classrooms. The reflections on what was happening was also changing the way School Council members saw their roles as representing others voices. The children were now having their viewpoints taken into account by their teachers especially, during the plenary sessions in which not only feedback about what was discussed became evident but process ideas were raised; as one child responded: *"Why don't we say what we see, hear and feel about things in school"* 6 yr old girl. This approach had begun to raise the levels on the taxonomy into "empowering pupil voice" (see figure 21) in which the children were taking a more active part in the discussions that led to each class of children making decisions in partnership with their teachers.

The purpose of talk had been transformed into talking and listening in order that the opinions of the children and their teachers could be shared openly with *"no right or wrong answers"* 6 yr old. The relationships and social conditions in the classroom were shifting with more focus on partnerships in a research process as each participant reflected in and on the actions for change. The children were also displaying the skills of thinking about their learning in discussion with their teachers. This led to an exploration of talking and listening partnerships for the development of change in the next cycle for actions.

PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	**3**.Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	**2**.Students as Active Respondents	**5.** Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	
CONTROL *Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.*	**2.** children are supported in expressing their view **1.** Children are listened to	**1.** Students as Data Source	**3.** Tokenism **2.** Decoration **1.** Manipulation	

Figure 21 A taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice' from developing to empowering.

8.8 How I show that the conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate

Within this cycle of actions I decided to place the development of the research into the domain

of the participants and then observed the process. In order to show that I was listening to the

voices of the teachers I had to seek a position that was not one of leading. The voices of the

children and their teachers, following the 'children as philosophers' approach, formed the

evidence base on which I concluded that relationships remained strong in the classrooms and

that the opportunities to share opinions between children and their teachers were developing

into partners listening to each other.

8.8.1 Personal Validity

It was now becoming a moral imperative to develop 'pupil voice' from within the classroom and throughout the school. In order to begin to discard the externally imposed ideas I discovered that I had to reflect back to how the purpose of seeking to give children a voice, and the effect that my drive and passion for such a situation, had led to teachers' voices being briefly overlooked. The 'children as philosophers' approach had shown that all participants in the research reflected on actions that they were taking as a community of practice (Wenger 2002) within each classroom.

I decided that I would observe what was happening during this cycle by standing back and watching the changes made by the participants themselves without leading the 'pupil voice' agenda myself. My "personal identity" (Whitehead and McNiff 2006:103) in the field of 'pupil voice' was developing as I presented my work for peer review within BERA (Attard 2007) and ESRC support groups (Attard 2005), in which research peers engaged with the taxonomy of development of 'pupil voice' and the engagement with reflexive practice. Feedback showed others were struggling with offering a voice to children in decision making whilst addressing the concerns of the teachers as the following comments show:

> *" I can see what you are saying about your four levels of pupil voice participation but I wonder how we will get to empower the children when schools and teachers do not have the power themselves?"* Student studying thinking skills BERA Sig 2007.

> *"Until we really empower the teachers we cannot have real participation of the kids as everyone needs to work together"* Teacher mentor for Student Council BERA Sig 2007.

This critical feedback ensured that I explored further in this and the next cycle of actions the teachers and children's voices working in collaboration. I shared my work widely with regard to developing what I was finding out about the stages that lead to more authentic pupil voice that is accepted by teachers. This cycle became a significant catalyst for whole school 'pupil voice' change (Attard, 2008) and attendees at national conferences showed that they connected

and supported the linkage between the 'children as philosophers' approach and the raising of all voices, including the adults, in decision making through collaboration:

> *"I do philosophy for children in my school but we don't share amongst all the staff what the children are saying and how that can make changes across the board. I am up for that"*
> NTRP 2008 delegate.

My work was also widely shared with practitioners in online environments (See APPENDIX 8 NCSL talk2learn highlights) focusing on pupil leadership in which I became an advocate of 'pupil voice' within school leadership blogs following a conversation about a playground incident with one of my children:

> *"You don't really understand what it is like in our playground at lunchtime because you are not 6 and when you come outside everyone behaves themselves".* 6 yr old boy.

8.8.2 Social Validity

Peer evaluation at external conferences enabled my personal confidence to increase but it was the EdD group of students and tutors through which I received the most significant comments that deepened my critical reflections as I struggled with shaping each stage of my methodology and claims to knowledge. The initial confidence through which I saw my work gradually dissipated as I lived through the 'methodological messiness' and attempted through my data collection stages to explain in ever increasing depth my rationale, data analysis and evidence base over a period of four years. The challenge centred on my findings presented orally and in written forms, and my EdD supervisors encouraged 'methodological inventiveness' (Dadds and Hart 2005) through supporting my understanding of the importance of practitioner research in the realms of the academic world. Both peer discussion and supervisor challenges aided the assessment of *"the quality of the claim to knowledge in relation to the evidence I produced"* (Whitehead and McNiff 2006:103), which led to a deeper level of *'epistemological reflexivity'* (Alvesson &Skoldberg 2000) in which I began to frame the knowledge base of 'pupil voice'.

I also used the participants within my school in the role of critical friend role as I returned to them with the transcripts or written accounts of their input to seek validation that their spoken words and my assumptions and assertions were accurately reflecting their original purpose. The children in particular liked to hear their taped voices and further elaborate on what had been recorded.

8.8.3 Institutional Validity

I have shown, through the description of the action research cycles in which data evidenced the developing themes, that an insider researcher can be engaged, or disengaged, according to the circles of influence that are prevalent at the time within the research process. During this cycle I found that the circles of influence of *literature* and *methods* became significant as we all focused on engaging in the new approach of 'children as philosophers'. The methods of reflecting on the direct actions taken across the three steps within the cycle of development of 'children as philosophers' connected with the literature, which emphasized to all participants that there was no right or wrong answers. The connectivity between *literature* and *methods* showed the circles of influence to overlap and affect each other as shown in the development of this stage of the methodology (see p50).

8.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored an approach in which the voices of both the teachers and those of the children joined collaboratively in the development of 'pupil voice'. The evidence has shown that the teachers are now ready to raise further the voices of the children in developments within their classroom that is centred on learning. The voices of the children had begun to show that they were ready for giving their opinions to their teachers about a wider variety of subjects.

This chapter has shown the desire by the teachers to develop ideas within their classrooms and involve children in the reflections of the process. The core of the approach to the development of 'pupil voice' in school remained around 'talking and listening' through children and adults in dialogue. The effective classroom relationships evidenced in previous cycles were able to develop as the focus turned to children's opinions about what they were learning:

> *"I didn't know that x… found it hard to get to work as I do, talking about how we learn has helped me today, we didn't want to stop sharing our ideas so we carried on the talking as we went for our dinner"* 8 yr old boy.

The 'children as philosophers' approach had offered the teachers an opportunity to develop with their children a process in which they could talk about classroom life and share in the decision making. The next cycle builds on the partnership to use the approach to focus on learning in literacy and numeracy.

CHAPTER 9 Research Partnerships in the Classroom

This chapter begins the process of placing the research into the hands of the participants. It offers the chance to develop ways of finding out within each of the classes by sharing, listening and acting on what has been said. It describes the messiness of the action cycles in which the children and the teachers explore firstly the social conditions for learning and then more traditional school subjects. It contains more evidence of the voices of the participants than my voice as the researcher in order to show how the lived experiences are valued and acted upon. It explores the current role of School Council as a body that represents voices of others for its relevance.

9.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the success of the 'children as philosophers' approach, developed in Cycle 3, and explores a fundamental shift of in the emphasis of 'pupil voice' focus, returning to the classroom but combining the viewpoints of the children and the teachers to facilitate change. The growth of the partnership in the classroom between teachers and children had highlighted the benefits of enhancing the dialogue established in earlier cycles which led to exploration of conditions for learning and ways that pedagogy could be enriched. The research at this stage was planned and executed by the participants as they enquired about learning in their classrooms. The teachers considered that such an approach for them would be more meaningful and would support their evaluations of learning that had taken place:

> *"I have pondered about the children saying there is no right or wrong answer in philosophy and what that means. I tend to plan the lessons in terms of what groups are going to do and know the learning objectives from the literacy or numeracy strategy. I had not considered asking the children how they did things or what they felt about the lesson. This has opened up opportunities for me to hand over some of the planning perhaps and even try out grouping the children in a way they suggest"* Teacher A

Alongside the professional development work on 'children as philosophers' the teachers had been exploring the implications of what Bruner (1960:58) termed '*intuitive thinking*' and '*learning by discovery and problem solving*'. In this way the teachers linked their actions with building on an understanding of the children's prior knowledge in order to transfer thinking processes from one situation to another. This approach had occurred in philosophy

sessions and the question that remained was could it be transferred to the more formal curriculum areas such as reading, writing and numeracy? This chapter begins with the further exploration of social conditions for learning in the classroom and then expands to the curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy. Such an approach encouraged the participants to research their own classroom processes with regard to decision making processes, and reflect on the outcomes of any changes introduced.

Cycle 3 had shown that the collaborative voices of teachers and children, when listened to, can elicit ideas that observation alone cannot. The viewpoints of both the teacher and the child of a similar occurrence can sometimes reveal misunderstandings which, once talked about, can change perspectives, as the following quotes show:

> *"I was listening to xx read the other day and it was painful how hesitant he was. I thought I was displaying all the supportive behaviours needed and we sounded out each word. I think this book is too difficult"* Teacher C

> *"I read my book to my teacher it was hard to read because xx kept looking at me and I lost my place on the page. If I could do my reading away from my table that would help me a lot".* 6 year old boy.

The teacher had written reflections about this reading episode and had a conversation with the child afterwards, scribing the feedback. As a direct response the teacher changed the way this child shared a reading book with them. The outcomes for the teacher and child after two weeks showed that the change in learning space from the table to carpet area had been highly positive.

> *"Not only did I ask xx to come to a quieter space in the classroom to read but I now do that for all the children. They seem more relaxed sitting on the cushions away from the table. Xx has been able to focus on the whole sentence now and doesn't seem distracted any more. Why didn't I think of that?"* Teacher C

> *"The carpet with the cushions is so cosy I like to read there and xx cannot see me doing my reading now. I think I am getting good with my reading"* 6 year old boy.

This emphasis on a shared dialogue, that collaboratively explores ideas, and the expressing of opinions of the children alongside what the teacher thought, had also been mentioned by other teachers. They had been surprised at the depth of empathy and understanding that the children had of their learning and their attitudes to feeding back views to them:

> *"I would not have believed just how much the children notice about life in school and the depth of the solutions they have to offer in philosophy sessions"* Teacher B.

> *"One of my sessions in philosophy was about someone who struggled with reading it was amazing just how much the discussion led to ways we teach as well as showing strategies used by the children themselves. The levels of empathy each child showed as another fed back what they did to overcome difficulties was amazing".* Teacher G.

The children expressed the desire to talk more about how they discovered what others did to help with their learning, as was shown in a feedback session that followed a story about someone finding reading difficult:

> *"When xx… told us about watching the fluff with the light shining on it on the table and loosing the place on the page being read I thought about that again because I think I do that as well. I asked xx… what to do and we got this purple like ruler with a gap for the words and that does really help me as well"* 6 year old boy.

> *"I didn't know that xx.. found reading difficult maybe I could offer to help sometimes"*
> 6 year old girl.

We had not expected that open ended discussions, such as those taking place in 'children as philosophers' sessions, would assist collaboration between children and their teachers in discussing learning processes, or that opening up an opportunity for decisions to be made would directly affect the lives of children in the classrooms.

During one class plenary session, in which a teacher had asked about the difficulty of thinking about the message being articulated by an author in a passage, the children in the class, led by teacher D (see page 162 about feedback), adapted a 'children as philosophers' feedback approach to in order to deepen their understanding of the session. In their evaluations the children made the following in comments:

> *"Why don't we ask each other how we learn to do things and what we find hard"*
> 8 year old girl.

> *"We can tell you* (directed at teacher) *what we are thinking"* 8 year old boy.

> *"Is there something we do before we think I don't know a word for it could it be prethought"*
> 8 year old girl.

The children in their familiar class groupings were ready to discuss everyday life, from their own experiences in the classroom, and to reflect deeply on the process of what was happening to aid improvements. The 'Children as philosophers' approach had begun to extend discussions occurring in other curriculum to areas such as literacy and numeracy, thereby enriching the quality of the plenary as one teacher commented:

> *"I used to plan the plenary as a feedback session in literacy; now the children use it as a time to explain to me how the lesson went and how the activities could have been improved. I now don't plan this session I leave it to them".* Teacher B

Other viewpoints shared by three teachers in their accounts suggested that the 'children as philosophers' approach could be trialled within other subject areas as they were noticing a change in the way the children reflected on their studies:

> *"Girls voice their point of view in a more conformist way as they like to see what others are doing first. I think boys just say what pops into their heads maybe they are more honest? I would like to explore classroom practice in which the girls begin to develop their own opinion".* Teacher B

> *"I have seen a greater awareness of the voice of all my children and the effect it has had on their self esteem. Self esteem seems to be higher when discussing the philosophy topics more then seen in usual subject discussions. I think relationships are better with children getting along with each other more now. I would like to see if this work can be translated into my literacy or numeracy lessons.* Teacher C.

> *"The philosophy approach helped me get to know the new children in terms of their interests and views. In some respects it helped to see where we should go next in the more formal learning opportunities. It almost offered more understanding about the boys I feel I almost got into their minds. I want to expand this idea into the rest of the curriculum as I am curious to see if the children will open up more when given the chance to voice what they see, hear and feel".* Teacher E

The openness through which the teachers were beginning to work with their children, and the way the children responded, was leading to the possibility of embedding the opinions of the children into more traditional subject areas such as English or Mathematics. Teachers were

reflecting on some of the changes in the way they were beginning to plan for the learning experience and were now in a position to look at learning as well as their teaching.

9.2 My concern about developing research approaches in the classroom

Due to the continual pressure to conduct what I now consider to be tokenistic 'pupil voice' from outside sources, my concern grew further towards the development of 'pupil voice' within the whole school setting. I was drawn towards the creation of feedback systems that were owned by the participants, children and teachers, rather than narrow questionnaires emanating from Government led initiatives (DCSF, 2008) . I was unsure if the children would be able to apply the research approaches, practiced in Cycle 3 during the evaluation of processes to subjects such as literacy or numeracy. The previous cycle had shown willingness on behalf of the teachers to listen to the views of the children and be guided by them. The 'children as philosophers' approach had shown that the children were beginning to think in more depth about processes and to ask questions, but such an emphasis on independent thinking was still largely contained within the thirty minute philosophy session.

The School Council body continued to meet fortnightly with the agenda designed by the children. The discussions became feedback opportunities of what had been decided by each of the classes in 'children as philosophers' sessions. The representatives offered their point of view of the changes that were occurring in their classes and ideas for whole school events. I noticed that attendance rates were diminishing as the stronger voice of change surfaced from the other children. The power of classroom decision making was transferring to each child thereby making a structured body now seem irrelevant.

9.3 Why am I still concerned?

I had concentrated firstly on imposing a system of giving children a voice. I then realized that I needed to listen to the voice of teachers in order to frame changes that would be owned by the participants, in this case all the teachers and children in the school. I compared what the teachers were saying previously about 'pupil voice' opportunities with the viewpoints of the children. It was now time to offer the participants an opportunity to plan a research cycle in which they could discover what was happening in school and make any changes they felt were necessary. The social condition for learning was an area about which the children offered imaginative ideas for change. Some were also extending their ideas into the more formal subjects of literacy and numeracy. I wondered if we could extend the collaborative voices of children and teachers into the realms of classroom practices to discover more about teaching and learning including all voices rather than a body of represented opinions. Three critical questions formed the basis of this cycle:

1. How can the developing research partnerships in the classroom build on the discoveries about the social conditions for learning that derived from the 'children as philosophers' approach?

2. In what ways can children and teachers listen and learn together about literacy and numeracy?

3. Is School Council as a representative voice still relevant?

The objectives identified in this cycle of action were:

- To widen the consultative opportunities beyond School Council to aid change in social conditions for learning;

- To empower children and their teachers in planning for change in learning and teaching of the core subjects of literacy and numeracy;

- To further enhance the critical thinking skills of the children;

- To link the changes to the taxonomy of development of 'pupil voice';

- To define the research process further through mapping the circles of influence.

This cycle led to the emphasis of the research work being devolved from me as the researcher into the classrooms, allowing the teachers and children to devise ideas for the improvement of conditions for learning, and literacy and numeracy learning and teaching.

The 'children as philosophers' approach offered opportunities for discussing open ended situations within the partnerships of the children and teachers. The sharing of the ideas began to extend the variety of 'pupil voice' actions taking place, and returned the emphasis of decision making to life in the classrooms. The group feedback sessions from the children in the plenary, and from the teachers during staff meetings, were encouraging a wider interest in what the voices of other stakeholders were saying. It was important not only to hear the voices of children and teachers but to deepen the desire to listen to each other and act on the information.

I returned to the developing research question formulated in Cycle 3 *"Is everyone's voice welcome in this school?"* which seemed too simplistic as the relationships developed and the subject material became more complex. The importance of the *'partnership'* in learning experiences and the development from *'hearing'* to *'listening'* informed the final question which became: *"How do we listen to voices of children and learn with them?"*. The final cycle of action presented in this dissertation, and my future development of this work, as well as recommendations to others, centre on the two way process of actively listening to the voices of both the teachers and their children when seeking to introduce 'pupil voice' into a primary school environment.

The children had shown that they wanted to offer ideas about their life in the classroom and how they felt about their work. The opportunity was now right for the development of action

research partnerships in the classrooms in order to explore further ideas for actively engaging the voices of those who share the same classroom space. In addition to the individual classroom research, the teachers had expressed a willingness to share ideas with each other in order to increase a whole school awareness of involvement of children in decisions making.

9.4 What have others said about my area of concern?

The world beyond the boundaries of a school, through the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child (1989), has been seeking to offer children a voice in deciding how they can gain a greater sense of entitlement to education that suits their needs. Schools are charged with finding opportunities through statute (Children Act 2004) to capture voices of young children about their lives in school which links with young people's increasing *"economic power, social maturity"* and a knowledge base gained from a *"rich leisure media culture"*(Fielding and Bragg 2003:3). However 'pupil voice' research suggests that schools continue to provide disappointingly few opportunities for children to contribute meaningfully to shaping school life (Fielding and Bragg 2003, Anderson and Arnold 1999, Wyse 2001).

Kirby (1999) suggests there are different ways in which children can be involved in sharing their views and gathering data that offers what may be a different viewpoint to adults and seeks to develop democratic participation which is owned by the children. Through using such approaches, children can work alongside their teachers to share their unique knowledge of how their school works, becoming 'change agents' of its culture. When working in this way a shared responsibility for decisions about learning opportunities, between children and teachers, can develop not only within classrooms but generally within the school as a learning community of practice (Fielding and Bragg 2003). Actively involving the children in shaping a research project not only involves them in actions but creates a significant voice in

resourcing and producing the knowledge base. In this way the children are not contained as passive receivers of a change process but develop into change agents.

Children working alongside adults, in discovering ideas about learning, can aid the development of 'pupil voice' because it offers a dialogue in which issues are explored and similar views are deconstructed to understand their meaning (Fielding and Bragg 2003:5). Through listening to the voices of the children, and sharing ideas for change, the teachers can throughout their research compare what they think with what the children say in order to understand that what is important to adults may be less important to children and begin to open up further opportunities to make decisions. Children and adults often have different views of and hopes for learning:

> *"I thought sharing the number of spellings we got correct with each other would lower self esteem. But my boys told me they like to compare what they got with others and interpreted it as a competition".* Teacher G

The discovery by the teachers that the viewpoints of the children could support them in making changes to their teaching practices builds on the important traditions of teacher enquiry through linking the action research work of Elliott (1991), Schön's reflective practice and Stenhouse's teacher research (1975) with new ways of working in classrooms to contribute to self evaluation and development (Fielding 2001, MacBeath et al, Rudduck and Flutter 2000). The teachers commented that they found it more meaningful to ask children to feedback about their lessons prior to completing their evaluations in order to gain a richer picture of what had been learnt.

I compared my findings with previous research which suggested that in order for teachers to support the further development of 'pupil voice' it is imperative that they are continuing learners too, calling on *'professional discretion'* (Hargreaves et al 2001) in which collaboration with their peers assists the formulation of searching questions of educational

practice. Building a whole school commitment to 'pupil voice' requires finding inventive ways to engage in dialogue not exerting control but listening and learning together. The sharing of the classroom practice with colleagues shapes a transformative process to listen to the voices of all in a school constructing an education system which is designed to question *'traditional roles and relations'* (Fielding and Bragg 2003:55)

9.5 Data gathering methods

Within this cycle of action all nine teachers began with an exploration of conditions for learning with their own classes of around thirty children. The teachers asked the children what ideas they wanted to try out and framed the research questions together. Emphasis was placed on either suggested changes to the physical environment or specific behaviours that aided learning. The research method was left to the teachers and children and they were required to feedback after six weeks of enquiry using the following frame:

1. Teacher and child discussion about the classroom;

2. Plan a question they wanted to find out about;

3. Discuss and decide what was to be changed;

4. Tell each other what they think about the changes;

5. Compare what it was like before and what happens now;

6. Teachers to write an account to share with colleagues.

The first stage involved exploration of conditions for learning and the outcomes led to research explorations of either literacy or numeracy, with a focus on exploring the voices of what the children were saying about the curriculum in order to devise the changes that could be made.

9.5.1 Action Step 1 - Developing voice through partnership in exploring social conditions in the classroom

All nine teachers and their children embarked on plans for the children to suggest both changes within their classrooms and the actions to be taken to implement the ideas. The brief was deliberately very broad and the focus was relevant to the particular age group of the children:

- *Do we find our own equipment and tidy up?* (4 and 5 year olds)

- *How do we take responsibility for our own actions? Developing a card system for behaviour* (6 and 7 year olds)

- *How do we take responsibility for our own actions? Understanding why we say 'please' and 'thank you'* (6 and 7 year olds)

- *How do we take responsibility for our own actions? Looking after each other and being helpful.* (6 and 7 year olds)

- *How does our behaviour affect our learning in class and if so how can we change it to become more effective learners?*(8 and 9 year olds)

- *How can we raise our levels of motivation in all curriculum subjects?* (8 and 9 year olds)

- *How can* we *in our class become independent and collaborative? (8 and 9 year olds)*

The overarching themes being explored were independence and learning behaviours. The children knew that they were to be part of the research project in which their views would be asked for and discussed as the changes were put in place.

The action step for each class was planned by each teacher with their children following the six stages identified on page 182. The broad areas involved:

- discussing the issues leading to investigation;

- making changes; and

- reflecting on the outcomes and sharing results.

In all classrooms the views of the children and teachers were gathered through discussion, with evidence gained either by scribing the words directly or through transcribed tape

recordings. I did not, as a researcher, dictate the methods chosen and I requested feedback of not only the changes but the ways in which the data was gathered.

My role at this point was to provide an opportunity for teachers to meet in order to feed back their projects development each month and share the next steps. From the outset the teachers shared the purpose of the research with the children, along with what their roles would be in planning, initiating change and reflecting on the outcomes:

> *"We need to be honest with each other about your behaviours and what will help you learn better, I can only guide and support you, its up to you to make changes"* Teacher A

> *"You have said the way the group tables are placed distracts you how can we change that?"* Teacher D

> *"If it is a problem for you we can all help to solve it. Maybe then everyone will be helped with the same problem"* Teacher C

> *"It is good for me to know which subjects you don't like and why. That way we can plan together to make those you say are 'boring' more exciting"* Teacher B

The teachers discovered that if they valued the voices of the children they should not predict what the actions to be taken would be, or how to solve a given issue. A different way of engaging in the dialogue was developed in which the decision making was being passed back to the children. The teachers at the end of a three month period shared the outcomes of their actions with colleagues. The focus of the final feedback offered the collective points of view of both the teachers and children about the social conditions in the classroom. In this way, through the partnerships, the children were beginning to voice opinions and thoughts more openly in what they saw as a research (they called it finding out) context:

> *"When we talk about life in the classroom you get to relax when you think, it isn't about yes or no or right or wrong, it just about thinking what you think"* (6 year old)

> *"You can think what you think and it doesn't matter if someone thinks differently"* (8 year old)

> *"If you are in a real classroom it makes you feel like you are in the mood for learning"* (5 year old)

It became clear that the openness that the teachers were showing in the language they were using with the children led them to offer points of view about life in the classrooms and about

what should be changed. One significant quote led to the development of a focus on literacy and numeracy in order to try out how the voices of the teachers and children could change the approach in a more formal context.

> *"We are learning more so they have to give us harder work so we have to, so that we are smarter"* (8 year old).

The next action step was for the teachers to select either literacy or numeracy as their focus for change in the classrooms building on the way the children had shared openly their thoughts about classroom life and processes.

9.5.2 Action Step 2 - Developing voice through partnership in literacy

The literacy action step was developed by four teachers using similar ideas to explore conditions for learning and centred on the lessons that the children were engaged in. For this action step there was no specified approach or way of recording. This enabled the teachers and the children to have a stronger voice in the way they wanted to present the outcomes and findings. The method of collecting the data remained around the whole class or group interview which was scribed or tape recorded. The results were reflected on by the teachers and then fed back orally in staff meetings using their narrative account, with direct quotes taken from the children. The feedback on the process of engaging children's voices, alongside the voice of their teachers and them reflecting on the research approach highlighted the learning partnership that developed in this action step. *Teacher A* taught a lowest ability literacy group and aimed to *"unravel the way that children respond to teaching and learning"*. The planning stages involved the children fully in guiding the teacher towards gaining a deeper understanding of the activities that they respond to when focused on their learning in literacy.

The view of the teacher about 'pupil voice' was:

> *"listening to my class in this way enables all children at all stages of development to voice their opinion and have a valid input into their learning and school life. It allows the children to feel and have control of their learning which is a motivating tool, and without self*

The children were able to reflect on their learning directly, suggesting that the first change the teacher could make was to the start of the lesson:

> *"We should start with a few hand exercises because when I write with cold hands it hurts"* (6 year old).

The teacher shared a real problem that this child had with coming straight into a literacy lesson following outdoor play, which was cold, and then being expected to write in lessons. The teacher agreed that this was an issue and changed the first part of the lesson to accommodate the request. Following that feedback every session had a period of preparation for the type of learning activity to follow. Having offered ideas for the start of the lesson the teacher opened up the dialogue for developing the main literacy activity through changes in the way things were organised:

> *"I love playing snakes and ladders so we could play that but put letters on the board instead of numbers, when you land on a letter you have to say the letter name and sound"*
> (7 year old boy).

> *"We should have a prize for the best sentence written but remind them about capital letters and all that because it is easy to forget"* (6 year old boy).

This depth of understanding of the factors which affected their learning was surprising to the teacher who now recommended that colleagues should *"be open and flexible to new ideas"* (Teacher A). This led to the passing of the power of organising a literacy lesson to two children each day over a period of two weeks, to discover which aspects of the actions for change would be implemented in their lesson plans. The teacher spent time with each of the pairs of children discussing the lessons before they engaged their peers and then after the session asked for the children's feedback. The children's views expressed their liking of games, and they were critical of the teaching of their peers because the *"noise level was too high"* or the spellings were "too easy" (group of 6 year olds). The actions by Teacher A had shown that by beginning with conversations with children, in which they plan and deliver

186

lessons, the focus on what the children need is enriched. This group largely contained boys who were in the early stages of developing skills of or enjoyment for reading and writing. The review of the actions by the teacher confirmed that watching the children design and develop activities for each other developed their own ideas on which they could design future lessons. One child showed empathy for the teacher in terms of organising the children:

> *"I found it really hard when the children would not listen to me. Being a teacher is fun but I am now very tired"* (7 year old boy)

For Teacher A the changes of approach to developing knowledge and understanding of the curriculum had been transformed by asking the children to assist in literacy planning and evaluation. She recommended working in this way as it enhanced the relationships and strengthened the partnership:

> *"Be prepared to have your own time interrupted, allowing the children the time to discuss, plan and prepare resources for ideas or lessons given. Have the realisation that 'pupil voice' is an on going process of learning for both the children and the adult involved"* Teacher A

9.5.3 Action Step 3 - Developing voice through partnership in numeracy

Five teachers took a numeracy focus for their action for change in the development of the 'pupil voice' centring on the processes required to complete a question presented in oral or written forms. One teacher was drawn to her focus through the words of one child who when asked why she found numeracy tricky had replied;

> *"I can read well and when given the numeracy questions know what it is saying to me but I don't know what to do. When we talk about the sums on the carpet it is ok but in assessments I don't understand"* (9 year old girl)

At this stage the conversations in classrooms about numeracy teaching and learning were centred on right or wrong answers. In discussions, and as part of the 'children as philosophers' approach, the children had shown that they could share opinions about how they did things, but they were not able to transfer this way of working to numeracy. The notion of no right or wrong answer did not apply in numeracy according to one child:

> *"When I look at my assessments and see the answer was wrong I get upset because I can see I am nearly right I just went wrong counting"* (7 year old boy).

Even though the teachers encouraged children to try out the different strategies they knew that in numeracy the right answer is required. The teachers wanted to try ideas that would involve children sharing their ways of working orally and then comparing results.

The children selected from their peers a group that they felt comfortable working with and they explored written questions together through an open ended discussion, which they taped and played back to each other. They then shared with their teachers the different ways that they had found the correct answer whilst listening to the tape recordings. The children were asked about the process of talking about numeracy:

> *"It was funny that we all said the answer a different way"* (6 year old)

> *"My teacher laughed when I said that I understand when a child explained it in their words and that made more sense than when the teacher explained it"* (9 year old)

> *"My friend told me a good way"* (5 year old)

> *"I really liked listening to other people say their ways and liked having my own way to explain"* (7 year old)

> *"I didn't really like talking about how I do it when we first did it. Now I know that it doesn't matter if people do it different as I can learn from their way or choose mine"* (8 year old)

> *"Listening to the voices on the tape was funny. I didn't know I talk like that and I sounded like I did not know the answer"* (6 year old)

The children discovered that talking to each other before they share an answer with their teachers was helpful as not only did they support each other in sharing the way they worked it out but they could also check an answer.

The teachers' feedback suggested that this way of working was highly successful in developing pedagogy, as the tapping of children's responses allowed them to understand how children made their calculations and various misconceptions surfaced:

> *"I found out more about misconceptions and misunderstandings by listening to their discussions than I ever had in lessons before, even when I was working with a group or one-to-one".* Teacher E

> *"After the sessions I was able to realise that discussion is good but too much control by the teacher is counter productive and letting the children explain is good if you have pace in the lesson"* Teacher F

"I felt a bit guilty that some children didn't know some words, so I explained them and will use them more frequently in my lessons and not just presume they are too difficult to use or teach" Teacher C

"I certainly do more vocabulary development in the mental/oral session and encourage children to help others through discussion and direct teaching of the strategies than I did before this research" Teacher A

The teachers were showing a willingness to listen to the voices of the children and to then reflect on their lessons, thereby creating a partnership approach not only in the way of working in the lesson but within the research.

They also found positive developments in the learning behaviours of the children as they reflected on the chances to voice opinions about how they work:

"I watched the children develop in self confidence when working together in small groups explaining strategies so they could tell the whole class" Teacher F

"I had noticed that in one group of five children they grew in confidence when others shared a similar strategy for the calculation. Teacher E

In lessons the children were now approaching written questions in mathematics with more confidence because, as one child explained:

"I talk about what to do in my head as if I am in a group as on the tape" (9 year old).

They were more confident in showing and explaining their work, as well as demonstrating better understanding of applying different concepts to solve a problem.

The teachers were in agreement that including tape recording of dialogue and focus groups in their practice strengthened speaking, listening and reasoning opportunities. They were keen to plan these 'pupil voice' activities into all numeracy lessons.

9.6 Evaluating the evidence

The evidence was generated from the data supplied from the teachers and the children during the two action research steps. The primary methods for collecting the data were individual or group interviews and reflection notes taken by the teachers. Each teacher adapted the methods according to the ages of their children and the types of data they wished to generate. Following the initial discussions about the desire to change, the next steps were centred on trying things out and then recording what had happened. My role as internal researcher was to construct a model of 'pupil voice' actions in partnership with the participants.

9.6.1 Action Step 1 Evaluation

Each class had key questions to address about the social conditions for learning in the classroom. From these key questions, the teacher and the children developed actions for change:

> *"We should have a tidy up sticker and adults can watch us and give us one if we put things away"* (4 year old girl).

> *"I don't know where to put the box in the cupboard can we have a picture to show us"*
> (5 year old girl).

The teachers listened to the suggestions offered by the children for ways of helping their independence. They reflected on the powerful nature of the discussion the depth of thinking surprised them.

> *"I was surprised to watch more children putting things away I certainly gave out more stickers but I don't think they did things just for the reward. The picture on the cupboard where a box has been taken from has made everyone's life easier we had not considered that at all"* Teacher B.

The focus of the 6 and 7 year olds was on behaviour modification, in particular how they can begin to take responsibility for their own actions. The discussions led to the children sharing ideas of where the evidence could be gained from:

> *"I think at lunchtime people are not saying thank you when they get their dinner could the teachers ask the cook to tell them how we are doing"* (6 year old boy)

190

> *"If we had a card for good behaviour it could be taken away if we were not kind and we would know what we needed to improve"* (7 year old girl)

The teachers of the 6 and 7 years olds felt that working on a project in this way increased the levels of responsibility amongst the children since the discussions were linked to situations they were involved in.

> *"I have found the weekly discussions about manners and how to show others how we feel fruitful. Taking the lead from the children makes it real for them and gives me much more understanding of what they see hear and feel. We are told to do personal and social education through set plans but this is how life is. Through our research into 'How do we take responsibility for our own actions' I have found the children can write the objectives for me"* Teacher C

The focus of the 8 and 9 years olds was designed around motivation for learning and collaboration. The children offered ways of working that they preferred in order to trial changes to discover if motivation and engagement increased. They reflected on the outcomes with their teachers in focus group discussions. The teachers were open to try out the changes suggested:

> *"Why do we have our tables in groups when we don't do much group work? I find having someone opposite me distracts me. Why don't we move the furniture and have rows of tables to work on our own and group tables for guided reading and other group work".*
> 9 year old boy

> *"I think we should have a completion each week for the best drawing, writing and thinking. We could put the winners work in a special book and earn house points. That would really make me want to try my best"* 8 year old girl.

> *"We should be able to sit where we want to or even do our writing on the carpet as long as it is tidy. Can we sit with our friends sometimes but not all the time because that might stop us working. Each lesson we could ask each other what we though of the groups today and see if they worked"* (9 year old boy).

The teachers discussed with the children the ideas they had presented in a 'children as philosophers' session. They debated the changes that they felt should be applied to their classrooms and the ones that they did not want to follow up at this time. The teachers noticed, as the actions were implemented, that the children refined the ideas based on the discussion and feedback:

"I wasn't sure about choosing anywhere to work I like to be in control to be honest so I thought this would not work. I did offer one day each week to work like this and then I could give tasks that could be completed anywhere. After three of four weeks I thought about the different groups and had to come to the conclusion that on the days they could choose where to sit they seemed to get more done. I then went back to the children and told them we would try different grouping more often" Teacher B.

"I don't know whether they are working harder because they want to or whether it is the house points but I have seen standards of the work rise rapidly in four weeks especially amongst the boys. I would hope it is the joy of seeing a well written piece of work. But I am not sure. The children are really motivated working in this way". Teacher D

The teachers and children had shown that they could listen to each others voices and make changes based on what was being discussed. The 'children as philosophers' approach allowed all voices to be heard, but prompted debate, through which, a collaborative action was devised. The teachers had moved from hearing the voices of the children, to listening to them and engaging in researching the outcomes of the ideas. The partnership in devising actions for change strengthened as the focus shifted onto what the children wanted to change. The conditions for learning discussions had been largely confined to the physical spaces or learning behaviours. The next step explored literacy and numeracy learning and teaching.

9.6.2 Action step 2 Evaluation

The evidence base generated from the data collated from literacy and numeracy teaching was showing that the children had ideas to offer regarding the way that the subjects were taught. Within literacy teaching the children presented ways of working that involved more active learning, through physical movements and competition ideas, which the teachers could add to elements of their planning. The account of Teacher A highlighted the transformational way that children in a 6 and 7 year olds class were deployed in the planning of sessions for their peers and changing both the activities and groupings. Other teachers decided to change elements of the lesson, such as the plenary, by for example having open discussion feedback about learning or by changing the way spellings were tested.

The evidence showed that most of the children saw the structure of the lesson, as deployed by the teacher, as informative and did not seek to change this. It was the types of activities and the groupings that they saw as areas requiring attention.

The numeracy research centred on the children's articulation of the steps they had taken to solve a problem. The children had more control over the method of data collection in this aspect of the research, because they taped their conversations and played them back to each other. Some children commented on the different ways that they worked things out and showed that they wanted to talk more about numeracy in groups rather than working alone. Teachers devised ways of changing their sessions to involve more dialogue in their numeracy lessons in order to facilitate the suggestions from the children.

9.7 Taxonomy for development of pupil voice

This cycle of action had been centred on the partnership of the teachers and children in developing negotiated changes within the classroom. The role of School Council had remained static during this period due to the rise in opportunities in the classroom to make changes that arose outside of School Council. The Chair person commented at one of the meetings:

> *"In the classes we talk about how we learn and changes we want to make to the school I think everyone in school is much happier doing that. Sometimes it is hard to get the group to come to meetings because they want to play outside. If all the children are talking about changes in things like behaviour do we need School Council anymore?"*

Another member, at the end of the year evaluation of the School Council, said:

> *"I think we should let the children in the classes do the charities in turn because they can share more ideas and get more people working"* 7 year old boy.

The gradual growth of the voices of the children in the school showed that a single body that represents the voices of others had served its purpose and should not continue. The classroom research projects that were developing provided the basis on which the school could

transform 'pupil voice' (see figure 22). The collective knowledge of teachers and children framed a way of working, in which decisions about learning could be made in classrooms. The sharing more widely between colleagues enriched the community of practice.

The evidence within this cycle had shown the potential for the children to develop as active school citizens in a manner through which they could explore conditions for learning and curriculum input that directly affected their lives. Through shaping the changes within their own classrooms the teachers had been able to construct an approach that matched the cognitive development of the learners more closely. The actions during this cycle had shown evidence that transformative 'pupil voice' (see figure 22) can occur with children ages 4 to 9 years within an environment that has the following features:

- Mutual respect for listening to the voices of all participants;

- Defining more clearly roles and responsibilities;

- Developing partnerships based on trusting relationships;

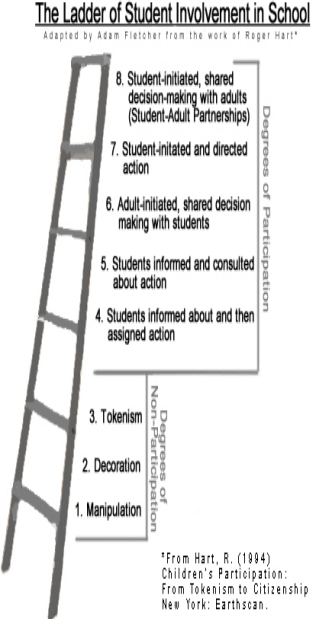- Risk taking teachers prepared to deal with the unknown.

PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	**3.** Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	**2.** Students as Active Respondents	**5.** Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	
CONTROL *Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.*	**2.** children are supported in expressing their view **1.** Children are listened to	**1.** Students as Data Source	**3.** Tokenism **2.** Decoration **1.** Manipulation	

Figure 22 A taxonomy for development of 'pupil voice' from empowering to transforming

9.8 How I show that the conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate

This cycle has placed the action research methodology firmly in the hands of the teachers and children as they gathered the data and shared their findings. I considered this to be appropriate because in order to develop 'pupil voice' that is owned by the participants in school, they should lead on some of the developments. I have tape recording of the discussions of numeracy research, scribed notes of the literacy actions and the teacher's accounts of the processes.

9.8.1 Personal Validity

I had passed the research over to the participants but found that much interest remained in the stages of involving teachers and children in educational change from outside agencies. I had to stand back and observe a process unfolding that I had been previously directly involved in and which I had a passion for. Trusting the teachers and children to discover issues, plan changes

and evaluate their new ideas was a vital part of the transformation process and certainly required the transference of power. The participants engaged in the action research cycle according to the methods developed by Elliott (1991) and my role was to underpin their findings within the Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) model of exploring *content, process* and *premise.*

Content involved the participants following the framework (discussed on page 182) in which each teacher, with their children, thought about issues and following a period of diagnosis, planned a change, took action and then evaluated the outcomes. I asked questions of the participants such as *"Describe what is happening?"* and *"How do you know?"* and relied on the written accounts of the teachers of their actions and outcomes. The feedback on the changes became part of regular conversations as I worked within the school.

Process, although embedded in the way the children and teachers gave feedback as they generally shared their rationale for change, was to be enacted through the retaining of the thirty minute 'children as philosophers' session that led to the openness in discussing what was happening in the classrooms. The children remained comfortable in seeing the philosophy session as having no right or wrong answers, so they were able to share what they felt about regrouping, or talk about numeracy, and it was in these regular weekly sessions that the ideas formed for developing further ways of working.

Premise involved exploring with the teachers the underlying assumptions as they began to take more control over their role in the action research. The feedback sessions were showing different levels of commitment to 'pupil voice' development. I compared Teacher A who had explored learning and teaching in literacy and Teacher G who had planned limited numeracy problem solving opportunities. I ensured, in the staff meeting feedback, that I gave equal time to each teacher to not only share what they had been doing but to try and unearth assumptions.

196

I reflected in my journal the difficulties of supporting the emotional state of the teachers whilst empowering the children in decision making (see figure 23).

<div style="border:1px solid">

Journal entry on letting go of the research process
I find that Zuber Skerritt and Perry's three pillars of deeper reflection useful. Content and process is fairly straight forward but it is premise that I have most difficulty with now I have passed the research cycles to the teachers. How do I guide them in discovering their own self in order to see more deeply into the way they do things?

Do I need to look at how we now support the emotional state of the research participants as all reflect on what we are doing to share the decision making with the children? I returned to Fullan (2003:95) 'a fundamental truth of educational effectiveness – that the learning and emotional lives of pupils are profoundly dependent on the learning and emotional lives of teachers'. I knew that I would need to ensure that the partnerships developed in school and strengthen the teams but also maintain the thrust which is based on high quality educational experiences for all. The more I consider the emotional climate the more deskilled I feel linking to Claxton (2000) 'Learning starts from the joint acknowledgement of inadequacy and ignorance'… The desire for every adult to feel comfortable and valued became the next stage of the development of 'pupil voice'.

The realisation that at times 'pupil voice' developments would be painful is something that has driven my relentless desire to lead a school that has powerful voices and reflection on the processes leading to Metacognition (defined by DfES as 'The process of planning, assessing, and monitoring one's own thinking. Thinking about thinking in order to develop understanding or SELF-REGULATION')

</div>

Figure 23 Journal reflection on supporting teachers to surface underlying assumptions.

9.8.2 Social Validity

The sharing of my research to date, involving the account from Teacher A, formed the basis of a workshop at an ESRC seminar in which I presented a paper discussing how "hard to reach pupils" (Attard 2006) can shape their learning experience through engaging in dialogue with their teacher. The developments of changing classroom practices stemming from listening to the voices of the children raised much interest at the conference as linking 'pupil voice' with pedagogical change was unusual in practice, especially in children of such a young age. Although I am aware that the work I am doing is not generalisable I consider it to be vital to engage children in making decisions about the way they learn, constructing new methodologies that may not have been fully appreciated by the adults. Opening avenues for children to take the lead has been recognised widely in my work with the National College for School Leaders,

culminating in my appointment as a National Leader in Education. Such a role in supporting schools in difficulties is centred on consulting meaningfully with the children and teachers and then engaging them in partnerships in the development of their schools.

9.8.3 Institutional Validity

Finally I entered into a period of 'methodological inventiveness' (Dadds and Hart 1995) in which the three circles of influence *self, literature* and *methods* intertwined in order to develop the role of the participants in framing and living with change.

The focus on the *self* circle of influence assisted *my* understanding of my underlying assumptions and reasons for developing 'pupil voice' which were embedded in the creation of everyday opportunities for self reflection and adaptation of practices. I discovered that I had a wider and richer appreciation of the combination of the social conditions for learning, and the voices of the teachers and children, especially when describing the same incident. I had become a Headteacher researcher in which I developed an approach to gather richer data that involved the participants as subjects of the research. I could now answer more confidently the key questions presented at external inspections *"How well are you doing?* and *How do your know?* (OFSTED 2009). At the conclusion of this cycle of action I had discovered a way forward to school self evaluation that would enable the children to offer their lived experiences in a reliable format that authenticates 'pupil voice'.

The focus on the *literature* circle of influence linked the work of *'students as researchers'* (Fielding and Bragg 2003) to the development of the action research within the hands of the participants. Although work in this field has shown that school children can be part of research I feel that my work has allowed the classroom teachers and children to define ways of knowing together without the constraints of what they may have seen as a formalized research method of collecting data. The richer data set was devised from a collection of different and more

inventive ways that had only just begun to form and grows in dominance after 2007 with the rise in new technologies and data storage.

The *methods* circle of influence is now totally embedded within the research project that the specific tools for gathering the collaborative voices are developed by the participants themselves as stated above. The revisiting of the points of view of the participants for clarification as to the context and meaning validates the choice to remove my voice as a strong element from the research.

9.9 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the voices of the participants took over the research and led to changes in emphasis of 'pupil voice'. The desire of the teachers to listen to the voices of the children and also share their voices with each other had shown how school improvement generates from within. The role boundaries were becoming blurred between the teachers and the children as teaching and learning conversations expanded. The teachers felt more secure in offering opportunities for their power to be transferred and in the case of 'teacher A' openly shared the teaching role to clarify the children's understanding of how they learn.

Chapter 10 The End is Just the Beginning

> *In this final Chapter I return to the questions on which I based this long journey in order to show how I have developed my understanding of 'pupil voice' in a Primary School with children as young as 3 years old. I have struggled not only to understand what "transforming" the 'pupil voice' looks like but also to connect with teachers who may not see the full extent of the opportunities. The development of the methodology in which I checked my assumptions as I engaged with the participants allowed my voice as a researcher to travel a similar path as that followed by the participants, namely teachers and the children. My original contribution is to leave a focus point for other researchers that makes explicit the circles of influence on their actions as they conduct their research.*
> *The development of the 'pupil voice' conceptual framework offers a tool for measuring what is happening in school in terms of 'pupil voice' which can be multifaceted or simplistic according to the interpretation of the reader. The struggle for schools to listen to the voices of the children to seek their views remains, but the big question is to what extent are the actions taken meaningful and worthwhile.*
> *I have shown many examples of collaborative 'pupil voice' episodes with still many to be spoken with my fellow practitioners. My greatest desire is to be accepted into "the academy" in order that I can assist other practitioners to find their voice in a similar way to that which I am doing for the sake of children.*

10.1 Introduction

As I reach the conclusion of this dissertation, and the thesis contained within it, I return to the key questions with which I began:

> *"How can I understand 'pupil voice'?*

> *"What actions can I, we and they take to understand the implications of young children having their say?*

I considered the target audience for my work and returned to a quotation which was significant at the beginning, and remains influential, as a basis on which to frame my conclusions about my professional learning and contribution to practice:

> *"All good research is for me, for us and for them: it speaks to three audiences, and contributes to each of these three areas of knowing:*
>
> - *It is for me to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher's being-in –the –world, and so elicits the response, 'That's exciting!' – taking exciting back to its root meaning, to set in action.*
> - *It is for us to the extent that it responds to concerns of our praxis, is relevant and timely, and so produces the response "that works!" from those who are struggling with problems in their field of action.*

- *It is for them to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes which elicit the response 'That's interesting!' from those who are concerned to understand a similar field.*

<div align="right">(Reason and Marshall (1987: 112-113)</div>

10.2 Research for me is *"exciting"*

Throughout this dissertation I have done my very best to show openness to engage in a way of finding out that is transparent both to the participants and to the reader. The basis on which I selected 'pupil voice' was to uncover the rhetoric that I felt underpinned the political messages from Central Government to consult with children. The method of choice offered by the OFSTED Inspectorate (2004) of surveying children about their lives in school was in my view inadequate for supporting children in school decision making. I therefore constructed a way of working that involved children in the formation of a process to frame the taxonomy of 'pupil voice' developments. My passion for the developments of 'pupil voice' has remained strong throughout the research process, only to be enhanced by the involvement of the participants in deepening the action research methodology. My journey had begun with high levels of self confidence in my ability to formulate action cycles. I viewed data, in its simplistic form, as indicators of whether a predetermined action was successful or not. This in turn would inform the next steps in a continuous process that once recorded would show others how to be successful in implementing 'pupil voice'. The period of clarity and now simplicity, clouded the way as I approached the early stages of 'pupil voice', offering what I can now see as many pitfalls, not yet uncovered until my discovery stage in Chapter 5 *"Discovering pupil voice"*. My decision to impose a structured body to offer a voice continued to map my confidence that the way to increase the voice of children was to offer some kind of democratic structure. Chapter 6 *"Implementing a School Council"* followed the inexperienced view I initially had of action research.

The clarity I appeared to have was then clouded and confused by the discovery of the previously unknown viewpoints of the teachers in Chapter 7 *"Forgotten voice of the teachers"*. This led to living with the participant 'methodological messiness' that formed the emphasis of the approach taken for the Chapter 8 *"Children as Philosophers Approach"* and Chapter 9 *"Research partnerships in the classroom"*.

Although the timeline of 'pupil voice' cycles (see Appendix 7) appears sequential the cycles were underpinned by the unfolding of a research methodology that engaged with change as it happened, almost mirroring the structure of the 'pupil voice' cycles. I had to engage with a reflexive process in which my thoughts and actions were made explicit through my epistemological, ontological, methodological and social beliefs (see chapter 1).

The action cycles of change in the school were underpinned by critical questioning, which I formulated from the model presented by Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002), taking account of what I now term my three pillars of reflexive engagement *content, process* and *premise.*

I asked critical questions of ask myself and others, through which I could collect my thoughts as follows:

- *Content:* *"What is the issue and why does it concern me?*

  "What have others said about this issue?

- *Process:* *"How have we developed action for change about the issue?*

  "How is data captured as the emerging issue unfolds?

  "How will the evidence I collect make a claim to knowledge about the issue?

- *Premise:* *"Why have I drawn these conclusions?*

  "Why would others listen and how would I modify the ideas?

Throughout the research journey I have added another layer of discovering, what I termed my living methodology (see Chapter 1), locating with what was influencing me within each of the cycles. These I termed as the three circles of influence *self, literature* and *methods. * Each of the action cycles was developed on the way that particular circles of influence located my thinking. On reflection, my circles of influence could have been in any number of different areas but the ones I chose were particularly pertinent to the development of 'pupil voice' for me at this time.

The *Self* circle of influence ensured that I not only reflected in and on action (Schön 1983) independently, but also engaged with others to examine *'personal'* and *'epistemological'* reflexivity (Nightingale and Cromby 1999:228).

The *Literature* circle of influence diverted my attention outward to two categories that of the developing methodology and the relatively recent body of knowledge about 'pupil voice'. A significant part of my research was to discover, for each of the cycles, the contribution of others in addition to the application of critical questioning of myself structured through the ideas developed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006).

The *Methods* circle of influence informed my focus on the different ways that the data was collected and how the evidence base formed. It offered the opportunity to engage the participants in sharing the responsibility for gathering and interpreting the data to formulate actions for change.

My role as Headteacher and insider researcher embedded me in the centre of the research and I was enthused by the possibility of involving children in decisions that affected their school lives and linked to school improvement policy. I espoused my values, about listening to the voices of the children, which were grounded by feedback such as: *"you are not 6 in our*

playground so how can you know what it is like for me when people say I cannot play the game" 6 year old girl. Coping with the honesty through which the children, and later the teachers, approached the 'pupil voice' work required embarking on a journey, into a state of confusion and messiness, in which reality would be judged against the perceptions of those engaged in the dialogue.

The engagement with the methodological model that I had developed ensured that I refocused on the critical questions each time I interpreted data to offer as my evidence base. The cycles of action described are only the beginning of a significant number of changes that have occurred since the data collection period, some of which I will describe later in section 10.4 contribution to transformational practice.

10.3 Research for us 'that works'

In order to engage the whole school community in 'pupil voice' action it was important to have a shared vocabulary through which the changes could be measured. The relationships and readiness for change in the individual classrooms meant that when using the taxonomy the teachers could plot their progress and discover the stages that they could consider next. The higher levels of the taxonomy required the teachers to be reflexive about their practice.

The conceptual frame for the development of 'pupil voice' was formulated from the works of eminent writers Hart (1994), Shier (2001) and Fielding (2001). Research within the education field in schools with children had shown that participation in decision making varied. I designed a taxonomy of 'pupil voice' developments (see figure 24) combining the three hierarchical models informed by the thoughts of those writers. I established four classifications on the taxonomy arranged in a hierarchical structure according to the levels of children's participation in voicing opinions that informed decision making.
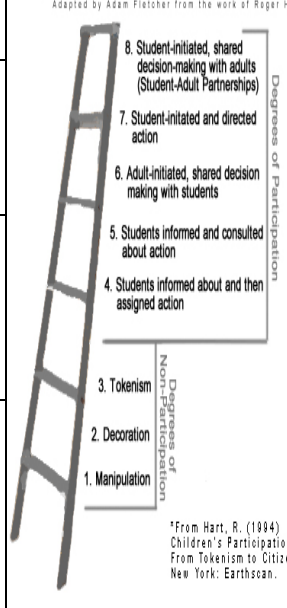
PUPIL VOICE Ascending stages of child development of 'pupil voice' conceptual model	Shier (2001) *"Pathways to participation".*	Fielding (2001) *"Students as radical agents of change".*	Hart (1994) *"Children's Participation from tokenism to citizenship"*	
TRANSFORMING *Adults and children in partnership with decisions that directly affect their lives in school.*	**5.** Children share power and responsibility for decision making	**4.** Students as Researchers	**8.** Student initiated shared decision making with adults (student adult partnerships)	The Ladder of Student Involvement in School Adapted by Adam Fletcher from the work of Roger Hart*
EMPOWERING *Adults engage children in the process of decision making.*	**4.** Children are involved in decision making	**3.** Students as Co Researchers	**7.** Student initiated and directed action. **6.** Adult initiated shared decision making with students	8. Student-initiated, shared decision-making with adults (Student-Adult Partnerships) 7. Student-initiated and directed action 6. Adult-initiated, shared decision making with students
DEVELOPING *Adults involve children in the process of decision making.*	**3.** Children's views are taken into account	**2.** Students as Active Respondents	**5.** Students informed and consulted about action **4.** Students informed about and then assigned action.	5. Students informed and consulted about action 4. Students informed about and then assigned action 3. Tokenism
CONTROL *Adults adhere to principles of asking children about decisions they have made.*	**2.** children are supported in expressing their view **1.** Children are listened to	**1.** Students as Data Source	**3.** Tokenism **2.** Decoration **1.** Manipulation	2. Decoration 1. Manipulation *From Hart, R. (1994) Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship. New York: Earthscan.

Figure 24 The conceptual model I offer as part of my contribution to practice in the field of 'pupil voice'.

The classifications are: 'controlling', 'developing', 'empowering' and 'transforming':

Controlling 'pupil voice' involves adults **hearing** the views of the children about actions for change but have already made the decisions based on their perception of the child's world or using them to support a data collection process. The role taken by adults as gatekeepers can often keep 'pupil voice' at the controlling classification for fear that an out of control situation may occur. Article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of a Child (1989) recommends 12 as a viable age for children to have the maturity to express an opinion. The power base remains firmly in the hands of the adults and therefore can only represent a tokenistic approach.

Developing 'pupil voice' builds on the **relationships** between the children and their adults in which an interest in locating the views of the children is displayed by adults who invite views and opinions as part of their practice. **Role** boundaries are freer and communications allow for opinions to surface in areas that are seen to be within the perceived knowledge base of the children. The adults are able to pass decision making powers to children in areas that they construct within the overall school structures. It is within this level that school and class councils thrive.

Empowering 'pupil voice' involves a **partnership** in which the **social conditions** are established through which the voices and opinions of the children are **listened** to and acted upon. It is at this level that change takes place after consultation with the children and opportunities arise through which they can initiate change. Children are seen to engage in research projects with their teachers as *subjects* rather than *objects* of research (Green & Hogan 2005). The power base is shared between the adults and the children with instances of research projects in which the children themselves design inventive ways in which they will gather information to inform school policy.

Transforming 'pupil voice' requires sharing of the decision making process between the children and the adults. The power base is negotiated with decisions that directly affect the lives of the children made in consultation. At this level children are encouraged to determine not only their rights but the associated responsibilities. The teachers use the voices of the children to evaluate the effectiveness of learning in their classroom and co-construction of the curriculum is a feature of the way of working.

The conceptual framework is used as a way of recording the readiness of classes in the school to engage in 'pupil voice' actions for change. The themes of hearing, roles and relationships, social conditions for learning and partnerships underpin the structure of these classifications.

10.4 Research for them 'that's interesting'

I offer an original contribution to practice in three ways:

1. A methodological structure;

2. A conceptual framework for 'pupil voice';

3. A living example of 'transforming pupil voice' activity.

10.4.1 A methodological structure

Through taking an action research approach and adding layers of reflexive engagement I believe I offer a methodological structure that places 'emancipatory' action research (Carr and Kemmis 1986; McTaggart, 1991) into the hands of its participants seeking to change the 'status quo'. I encourage practitioners to add a voice to research through the articulation of their practices on which Government policy may form. From within the basic action research cycle of discover, plan, do and then evaluate, critical questions such as what, how and why emerge at each stage that frames *content, process* and *premise.* I firmly believe if practice based researchers can establish a way of locating their work alongside the participants a new paradigm shift can occur from critical theorist to participatory (Denzil and Lincoln 2005). The shift in paradigm towards participatory methodologies will require researchers to underpin critically the judgements they are making about the data gathered. For this reason I decided to present the cycles of actions as responses to questions raised by Whitehead and McNiff (2006) in creating living theory which I connected with the three pillars of reflexive engagement of *content, process* and *premise* I constructed from the Zuber Skerritt and Perry (2002) model Appendix 2.

10.4.2 A conceptual framework for 'pupil voice'

I offer the creation of the conceptual framework of 'pupil voice' as a structure through which schools can understand where they are in the development of listening to the voices of the children in order to consult about school improvement. The Children Act (2004) and OFSTED framework (2009) emphasizes *"Every Child Matters"* in which schools must show evidence of the five outcomes; 'be healthy', 'stay safe', 'enjoy and achieve', 'make a positive contribution' and 'achieve economic well-being'. The emphasis on gathering the views of stakeholders in areas that traditionally schools have found difficult to measure has created tension. The hard measures of examination levels of achievement does not apply in this situation and in the rush to comply schools may resort to more simplistic surveys or questionnaires which can be tokenistic or even as Hart (1994) found 'manipulative'. I suggest that when schools strengthen the opportunities to engage children in more imaginative 'pupil voice' processes they will not only use them as 'data sources' (Fielding 2001) but engage them in co-constructing a rich evidence base on which the children themselves can offer input into Government policy making.

The combination of the voices of the practitioners through an inventive methodology and the children working within the taxonomy classifications of "empowering" and "transforming" (Attard; 2009) will begin to formulate meaningful 'pupil voice' situations.

10.4.3 A living example of 'transforming pupil voice' activity.

The data collection period on which I have based the cycles of action in this dissertation ended in early 2007 at which point the teachers and children had begun to explore decision making processes as co-researchers. The emphasis on listening to the voices of the children in order to learn about life in school continued to locate the school within the "empowering" and "transforming" (Attard 2009) 'pupil voice' classifications. The rise in the use of new

technologies in the hands of small children has led to photographic and video evidence on which the children and teachers can make their judgements. I share three accounts as examples of transformational practice which have developed since the end of the period of time noted in this dissertation as a consequence of listening to the voices of the children and learning with them to make change.

10.5 Photographic evidence to show safe and unsafe places

The teachers continued during the 'children as philosophers' sessions to explore the viewpoints of the children with respect to the social conditions for learning both within their classrooms and across the school as a whole. The co-researchers approach was seen as a way of linking the voices of the teachers and the children to enrich the dialogue. During a session with two classes of 8 to 9 year olds photographic evidence of places in school they felt safe and unsafe were recorded. On return to complete the feedback they categorised the photographs and discussed the results. The outcomes led to the removal of two different spaces in school that the children had identified as unsafe. The freedom to explore widely the school environment unearthed results in two areas that were profound and led to whole school environmental change.

Firstly a toilet block leading to the playground was featured as a place where at lunchtime some of the boys were worried due to their perceived lack of supervision. A discussion ensued in which the children suggested closing down this block and converting it into a chill out space for resting at lunchtime. The argument for a place of safety was compelling and the children's unsafe place was removed.

Secondly during a period of uncertainty centring on an individual child, which culminated in their permanent exclusion, the class had been completing the task of safe and unsafe places. One of the photographs that they had taken was of the Headteacher's office. Following the

session several children came to share the evidence with me. I decided to explore further as I was shocked at such a revelation. It transpired that the last place the children had seen the individual concerned was in the Headteacher's office and somehow they were making the connection with the place feeling unsafe. I explored what I should do and the children said that it would be good if I didn't have to use an office so I could be around school with them. I made the fundamental decision to be led by the voices of the children and have not continued to have an office. This has implications for my Headteacher's role in school because it locates me nearer to the classrooms, therefore closer particularly to the teaching and learning process. I can now hear, listen and act on the everyday voices of the children and their teachers in a much more informal way.

Both examples show that when children are given the opportunity to engage in research projects they are sensitive to the feelings of others in the feedback and offer reasons for change that would not have been possible to ascertain if left within the adults domain.

10.6 Everyone has a POWWOW voice

During the period of uncertainty about the purpose of School Council the children had expressed a desire to have all voices heard in a way that showed every child's voice mattered. Two teachers had returned from an international experience and in the feedback to the whole school they shared an idea they had observed where children formally made decisions about life in school and changes were made as appropriate. A whole school 'children as philosophers' session one week led to discussion about the possibility of developing an approach in which the collective voice of the whole school could join in decision making. The POWWOW session was designed to offer weekly discussion forums in which children and their teachers explored events to be planned and classroom environment changes. The deep and rich dialogue has now expanded into the design of the curriculum and regular

sessions are held in which the teachers and children plan changes to develop teaching and learning. The teachers show that they value the voices of the children in assisting them to make the lessons more fun. The open dialogue has been effective because the children know that they are listened to. In this way they are able to take risks with their suggestions thereby increasing the chances of gaining an authentic voice.

10.7 We can all learn to lead

Following on from the issues several years earlier in which the elected School Council misused power to engage in playground behaviour modification the teachers explored with the children how everyone could be responsible for leading the outdoor play. Several ideas were tried out such as a friendship bench, playground buddies or mentors but discussions amongst the children in POWWOW sessions again returned to the notion of elitism from those who had been given a role. One of the younger classes suggested the idea of playground leaders in which one class each week looked after the other children. In this way everyone would have a turn and fairness prevailed. The children following their weekly session would share their views with the teacher about actions taken, skills training required and changes to be fed back to the whole school. The change to lead the whole school and have support with the process from the teacher was highly successful and ensures that children practice their right to be able to play coupled with the responsibility that places on each other.

The three examples have shown that 'empowering' and 'transforming' 'pupil voice' (Attard 2009) leads to a variety of opportunities to live the authentic voice of the participants in which relationships are based on trust, roles are clearly defined and partnerships are welcomed.

10.8 Conclusion

I finally returned to the questions with which I began my long journey *"How can I understand 'pupil voice'?* and *"What actions can I, we and they take to understand the implications of young children having their say*? I have discovered that imposing 'pupil voice' on a school system that overlooked the voice of the teachers is doomed to fail. 'Pupil voice' is well beyond the utterances shared peer to peer or with adults only; it enters into the realms of partnerships in which open dialogue is acceptable, with all the responsibility and consequences that reside with the power to have a voice. Young children have shown that they can share a viewpoint that enlightens adults as long as they are prepared to push the boundaries and suspend disbelief. Through listening to the voices of children we can all learn with them.

I present this thesis as an example of good practitioner action research that links classroom practice with original theory creation. My contribution to the educational world identifies new standards of judgement, that of *courage* and *risk taking* in order to show developments of methodology, reflexivity and change occurring. I offer a significant contribution supporting the *"generative potential of action research to transform theory"* (Whitehead and McNiff 2006:155). It takes examples of practice and theorizes in a way that leads to human beings trying out extraordinary actions. My journey into the deep unknown continues.

Bibliography

Alvesson**,** M. and Sköldberg**,** K**. (**2000**)** *Reflexive Methodology**: New Vistas for Qualitative Research**.* London**:** Sage**.**

Anderson, P. (1995) *Listening to Children: Children, Ethics and Social Research.* Barkingside: Barnardo's.

Alderson, P. (2000) *School pupils' views on school councils and daily life at school,* Children and Society Journal, vol. 14, pp. 121-134.

Argyris, C. and Schön, D. (1974) *Theory and Practice Increasing Professional Effectiveness.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Arnot, M., McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Reay, D. (2004) *Consultation in the Classroom: Developing Dialogue about teaching and Learning.* Cambridge: Pearson.

Attard, S. (2006) *What is pupil voice and how can research lead to a framework of understanding from control to transformation?* EdD Programme Assignment unpublished: University of Hertfordshire.

Attard, S. (2006) Taking the 'hard to reach voice' of pupils from passive receiver of knowledge to planning and evaluating the learning experience in a primary classroom *Conference workshop at ESRC Seminar Series RES-451-26-0165: Engaging Critically with Pupil Voice Conference*, May 22nd-23rd 2006, University of Nottingham.

Attard, S. (2008) *Whose voice is important in decision making in the primary school?* NTRP DCSF Gender Agenda Available at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp

Barnes, D. (1992) The role of talk in learning. In K. Norman *(Ed.) Thinking Voices: The work of the National Oracy Project.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Beck, U. (1998) *Democracy Without Enemies.* Cambridge: Policy Press.

Bernstein, B. (1996) *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Bridges, D. (2003) A Philosopher in the Classroom Educational. *Action Research,* 11(2).

Bruner, J. (1960) *The Process of Education.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1986) *Actual Minds: Possible Worlds.* Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S. K. (1992) *Qualitative Research For Education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. London: Falmer Press.

Chomsky, N. (1986) *Knowledge of language, Its nature, Origin and Use*. Westport, Connecticut London: Praeger

Christensen, P. (1994) Children as the Cultural Other. *KEA Kinderwellten*, 6, 1-16.

Christensen, P. and James, A. (2000) *Research with children Perspectives and practices.* London: Falmer Press.

Claxton, G. (1997) *Hare Brain Tortoise Mind: Why intelligence Increases When You Think Less.* London: Fourth Estate.

Claxton, G. (2000) *The Intuitive practitioner: The value of Not Always Knowing What One Is Doing.* Buckingham: Open University.

Claxton, G. (2004) *Learning Is Learnable (And We Ought To Teach It)* In the National Commission for Education report Ten Years On, edited by Sir John Cassell. UK. Corson, D. (2002) Teaching and learning for ... In John Hartley (Ed.), Creative Industries (pp. 282-298). Malden, MA: Blackwell. Florida, R. (2002)

Cook-Sather, A, (2002) Authorising students'perspectives: toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(4), 3–14.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education* London: Routledge Falmer.

Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2005) *Doing Action Research in your own organisation* (2nd Edn) London: Sage Publications.

Committee on the Rights of the Child (2002) Session 31 *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 44 of the convention.* Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child : Japan. 26/02/2004. CRC/C/15/Add.231.

Corsaro, W. and Molinari, L. (2000) Entering and observing in children's worlds: A reflection on a longitudinal ethnography of early education in Italy. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: Perspectives and practices.* London: Falmer Press. 179–200.

Corsaro, W. (2005) *The Sociology of Childhood.* Thousand Oaks CA Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications.

Craig, G. (2003) *Children's participation through community development: assessing the lessons through inter- national experience.* In: Hallett C, Prout A (eds). Hearing the Voices of Children: Social Policy for a New. Century. . London: RoutledgeFalmer

Creasy, J. and Patterson, F. (2005) *Leading Coaching in Schools.* Leading Practice Seminar Series: NCSL Nottingham.

Dadds, M. and Hart, S. (2001) *Doing Practitioner Research Differently.* London: Routledge Falmer.

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide (2nd Edn) for small scale research projects.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) (2005) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd Edn). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Dewey, John (1897) My pedagogic creed. *The School Journal,* LIV(3), 77-80.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2001) *Listening to Learn Core principles for the involvement of children and young people.* Crown copyright.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2003). *Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say.* Crown Copyright.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills (2004) *The Children Act (2004).* Crown Copyright.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2004a) *The Children Act Report.* Crown copyright.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2004b) *Every Child Matters Next Steps.* Crown Copyright.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2004c) *Children Act 2004 Chapter 31.* Crown Copyright.

Edwards, J. and Hattam, R, (2000) *Using students as researchers in educational research: beyond silenced voices.* Unpublished discussion paper for the Students Completing Schooling Project, US.

Elliott, J. (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Fielding, M. (2001) Students as radical agents of change. *Journal of Educational Change,* 2(2), 123-141.

Fielding, M. (2002) Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *Paper given at the BERA Annual Conference, 12-14 September 2002* University of Exeter.

Fielding, M. and Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference.*
Cambridge:
Pearson.

Fielding, M. and McGregor, J. (2005) *Deconstructing Student Voice New Spaces for Dialogue or new opportunities for surveillance?* Montreal: AERA.

Flutter, J. and Ruddock, R. (Eds.) (2004) *Consulting Pupils: What's in it for schools?* London: Routledge Falmer.

Franklin, H. (Ed) (2001) *The New Handbook for Children's Rights: Comparative policy and practice.* London: Routledge.

Friere, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder.

Friere, P. (1978) *Education for critical consciousness.* New York: Seabury.

Fullan, M. G. (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change.* London: Cassell.

Fullan M. (2001) *Leading in a Culture of Change.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Fullan, M. (2003) *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership.* Thousand Oaks: Sage..

Greany, T. and Rodd, J. (2003) *Creating a learning to learn school research and practice for raising standards, motivation and morale.* London: Network Educational Press.

Greene, S. and Hogan, D. (2005) *Researching children's experience: Approaches and Methods.* London: Sage.

Greig, A. and Taylor, J. (1999) *Doing Research with Children.* London: Sage.

Gruber, T. (1993) Toward Principles for the Design of Ontologies Used for Knowledge Sharing. *International Journal Human-Computer Studies.* 43(5-6), 907-928.

Guba, E. G and Lincoln, Y. (2005) *Fourth Generation Evaluation.* London: Sage.

Habermas, J. (1987) *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and System, A Critique of Functionalist Reason.* [trans. McCarthy, T.] Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

Hallett, C. and Prout, A. (2003) *Hearing the voices of children: Social Policy for a New Century.* New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Hart, R. (1994) *Children's Participation from Tokenism to citizenship.* New York: Earthscan.

Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. G. (1992) *Understanding Teacher Development.* London: Cassell.

Haynes, J. (2002) *Children as Philosophers: Learning Through Enquiry and Dialogue in the Primary Classroom.* London: Routledge Falmer.

Hill, M. (1998) Ethnical Issues in Qualitative Methods with Children. In Hogan, D. and Gilligan, R. (Eds) *Researching Children's Experiences: Qualitative Approaches.* Conference Proceedings, Dublin: The Children's Research Centre, Trinity College.

Holian, R. and Brooks, R. (2004) The Australian National Statement on Ethnical Conduct in Research: application and implementation for 'insider' applied research in business. *Action Research International Online Journal,* Southern Cross Institute of Action Research and Southern Cross University Press.

Howard, S. and Johnson, B. (2002) Beware the authentic pupil voice. *Paper presented at the 15th International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement,* Toronto, 4 – 6 January.

Horkheimer, M. (1972) *Critical theory.* New York: Seabury.

Hostetler, K. (2005) What is 'good' educational research? Research News and Comment. AERA Educational Researcher. Vol. 34, No. 6 August/September 2005

Huberman, M. (1992) *Teacher development and instructional mastery: Understanding Teacher Development.* London: Cassell.

Johnson, K. (1999) Reflections on collaborative research from the realms of practice. *Change: Transformations in Education*, 2(1), 12-24.

Kemmis, S. and Carr, W. (1986) *Becoming Critical.* Sussex : The Falmer Press.

Key, Ellen. (1900) The Century of the Child. New York; London, 1900, 1909. Translation The text was published in Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), XXIII(3-4). 825-837.

Kjorholt, A. (2002) Small is powerful: Discourses on "Children and Participation" in Norway. *Childhood*, 9(1), 63 – 82.

Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Leadbeater, C. (2005) *The Shape of things to come: Personalised learning through collaboration.* Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Lewin, K. (1948) *Resolving social conflicts; selected papers on group dynamics*. New York: Harper & Row.

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

Marshall, W. (1996) Professionals, children and power. In Blyth, E. and Milner, J (Eds) *Exclusion from School: Inter-professional issues for policy and practice.* London: Routledge.

McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Rudduck, J. (2005). Pupil voice: Comfortable and uncomfortable learnings for teachers. *Research Papers in Education,* 20 (2).

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2006) *All You Need to Know About Action Research*. London: Sage.

McTaggart R (1991) Principles for participatory action research. *Adult Education Quarterly,* 41(3), 168-187.

Miles, M. B., and Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis (2nd Edn).* London. : Sage.

Moore, B. (2007) Original sin and insider research. *Action Research,* 5(27).

Mortimore, P. (1999) *Understanding Pedagogy and its impact on learning.* London: Paul Chapman.

Nightingale, D. and Cromby, J. (Eds) (1999) *Social Constructionist Psychology.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

OFSTED (2009) *Self-Evaluation Framework.* DCFS.

O'Neill, J. (1994) *The Missing Child in Liberal Theory.* Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Polanyi, M. (1967) *The Tacit Dimension.* New York: Anchor Books.

Pring, R. (2000) *Philosophy of Educational Research.* London: Continuum.

Prout, A. (2001) Representing children: Reflections on the Children 5 – 16 Programme. *Children and Society.* 15(3), 193-201.

Pupavac, V. (1998) Misanthropy without Borders: the International Children's Rights Regime. *Disasters,* 25(2), 95-112.

Ravet, J. (2007) Enabling pupil participation in a study of perceptions of disengagement; methodological matters. *British Journal of Special Education,* 34(4), 234-241.

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2001) *Handbook for Action Research.* London: Sage.

Roberts, H. (2003) Children's participation in policy matters.   In: Hallett, C. and Prout, A. *Hearing the voices of children: Social Policy for a New Century.* Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer.

Rousseau, J. J. (1762) *Émile,* London: Dent (1911 edn.) Also available in edition translated and annotated by Allan Bloom (1991 edn), London: Penguin.

Rudduck, J. and McIntyre, D. (1998) *Challenges for Educational Research.* London: Paul Chapman.

Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2004) *How to Improve your School.* New York: Continuum.

Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action.* London. Temple Smith

Senge, P. (2000) *Schools That Learn: A fifth Discipline Resource.* London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Shier, H. (2001) Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations: a new model for enhancing children's participation in decision-making, in line with article 12.1 of

the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Children & Society,* 15(2), pp107-117.

Smith, L. T. (2005) On Tricky Ground: Researching the Native in the Age of Uncertainty. In Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd Edn)* London: Sage.

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann.

Stoll, L. Fink, D. and Earl, L. (2003) *It's about Learning (and It's About Time) What's in it for schools?* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Stringer, E. T. (1999) *Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners.* California: Sage Publications.

UNICEF (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child @* http://www.unicef.org. Accessed 14/1/06

Van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching Lived Experience.* New York: Albany State University of New York Press.

Watkins, C. (2001) Learning About learning Enhances Performance. *Learning Research Matters Journal. No.*13. pp1-8

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitehead, J. and McNiff, J. (2006) *Action Research Living Theory.* London: Sage.

Wilkinson, H. and Mulgan, G. (1995) *Freedom's Children.* London: Demos.

Winter, R. (1989) *Learning from Experience.* London: Falmer.

Winter, R. (1996) Some principles and procedures for the conduct of action research. In Zuber- Skerritt, O. (Ed) *New directions in action research.* London: Falmer.

Winter, R. (1998a) Finding a voice – Thinking with others: A conception of action research. *Educational Action Researcher,* 6(1), 53-68.

Winter, R. (1998b) Managers, spectators and citizens: where does "theory" come from in action research? *Educational Action Research,* 6(3), 361-376.
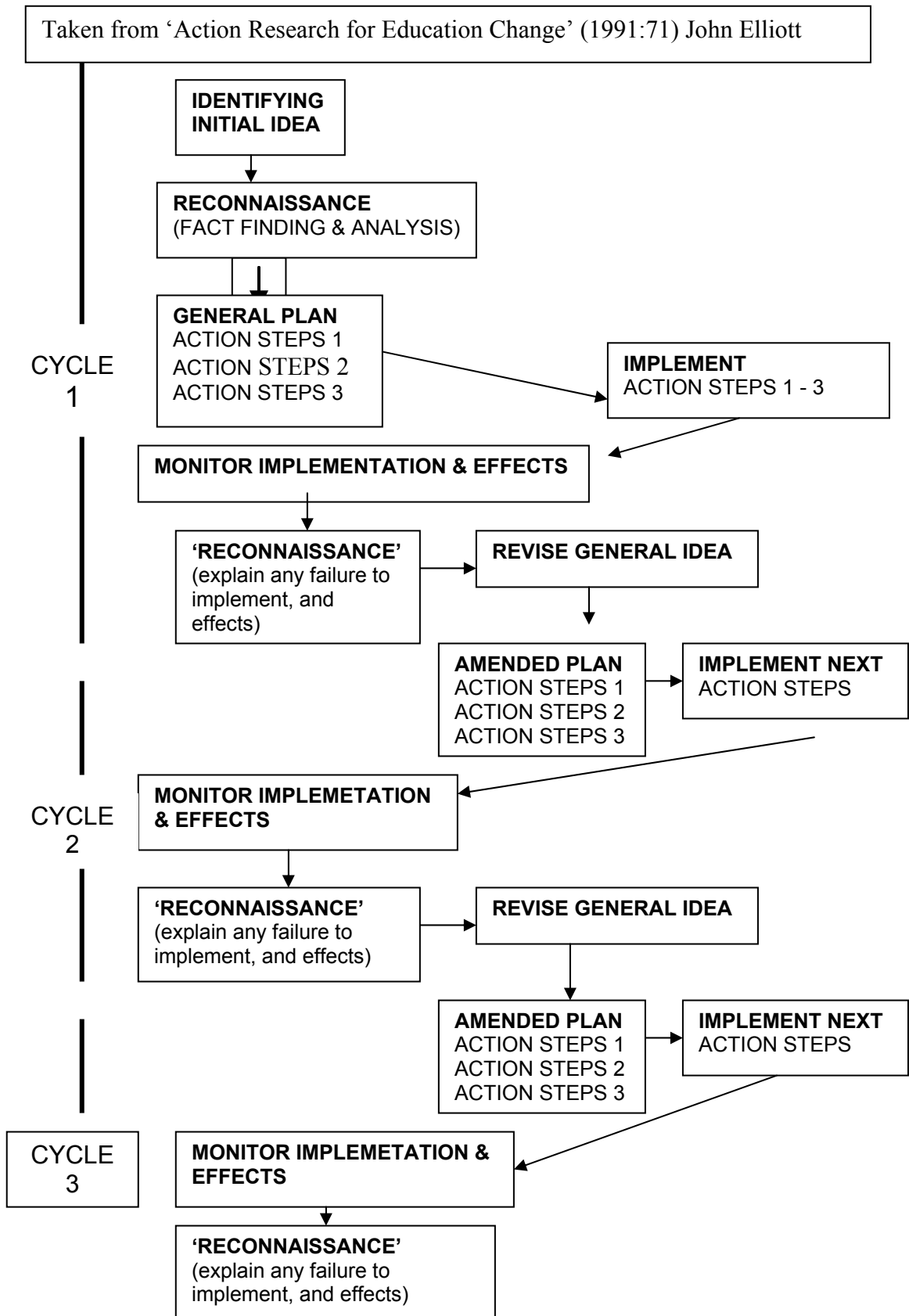
Zuber Skerritt, O. and Perry, C. (2002) Action Research within organisations and university thesis writing. *The Learning Organisation,* 9(4). 171-9.
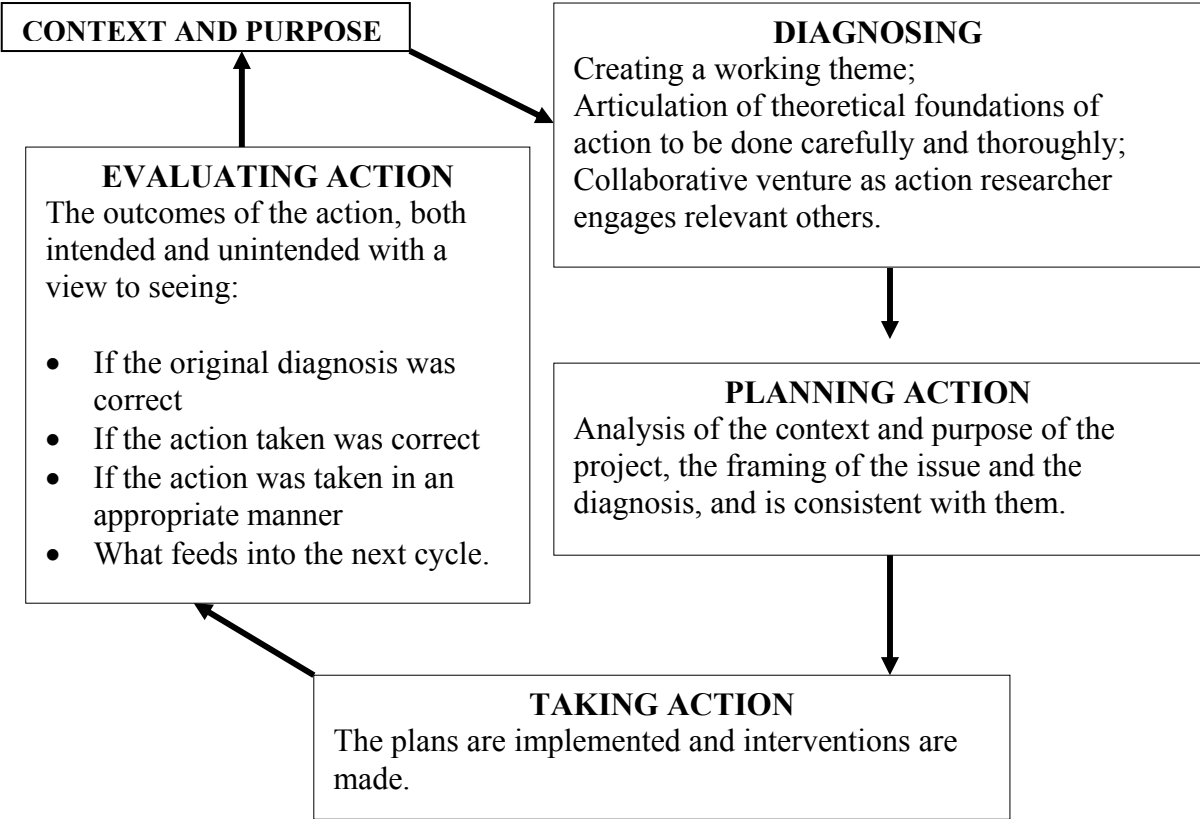
LIST OF FIGURES

Taken from 'Action Research for Education Change' (1991:71) John Elliott

IDENTIFYING INITIAL IDEA

RECONNAISSANCE
(FACT FINDING & ANALYSIS)

CYCLE 1

GENERAL PLAN
ACTION STEPS 1
ACTION STEPS 2
ACTION STEPS 3

IMPLEMENT
ACTION STEPS 1 - 3

MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION & EFFECTS

'RECONNAISSANCE'
(explain any failure to implement, and effects)

REVISE GENERAL IDEA

AMENDED PLAN
ACTION STEPS 1
ACTION STEPS 2
ACTION STEPS 3

IMPLEMENT NEXT
ACTION STEPS

CYCLE 2

MONITOR IMPLEMETATION & EFFECTS

'RECONNAISSANCE'
(explain any failure to implement, and effects)

REVISE GENERAL IDEA

AMENDED PLAN
ACTION STEPS 1
ACTION STEPS 2
ACTION STEPS 3

IMPLEMENT NEXT
ACTION STEPS

CYCLE 3

MONITOR IMPLEMETATION & EFFECTS

'RECONNAISSANCE'
(explain any failure to implement, and effects)

Zuber Skerritt O and Perry C (2002) *Action Research within organisations and university thesis writing* The learning Organisation 9 (4) 171 - 9

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

DIAGNOSING
Creating a working theme;
Articulation of theoretical foundations of action to be done carefully and thoroughly;
Collaborative venture as action researcher engages relevant others.

EVALUATING ACTION
The outcomes of the action, both intended and unintended with a view to seeing:

- If the original diagnosis was correct
- If the action taken was correct
- If the action was taken in an appropriate manner
- What feeds into the next cycle.

PLANNING ACTION
Analysis of the context and purpose of the project, the framing of the issue and the diagnosis, and is consistent with them.

TAKING ACTION
The plans are implemented and interventions are made.

CONTENT
Think about the issues. What is happening?

What is diagnosed, planned, acted on and evaluated is studied and evaluated.

PROCESS
Think about strategies, procedures and how things are done.

How diagnosis is undertaken, how action planning flows from that diagnosis and is conducted, how action follow and are an implementation of the stated plans and how evaluation is conducted are critical foci for inquiry

PREMISE
Critique underlying assumptions and perspectives.

Inquiry into the unstated, and often non conscious, underlying assumptions which govern attitudes and behaviour The culture or sub culture of a group working on the project has a powerful impact on how issues are viewed and discussed, without members being aware of them

Whitehead J. and McNiff J. (2006: 4-8) Action Research Living Theory Sage Publications London Thousand Oaks New Delhi

An account of current action research in process.

Development of key questions

1. What are our concerns?

2. Why are we concerned?

3. What experiences can we describe to show why we are concerned?

4. What kind of data will we gather to show the situation as it unfolds?

5. How to we explain our educational influences in learning?

6. How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate?

7. How do we show potential significance of our research?

8. How do we show the implications of our research?

9. How do we evaluate the evidence based account of our learning?

10. How do we modify out concerns, ideas and practices in the light of our evaluations?

Extract from article   guardian.co.uk

Every child has a view
Schools today are expected to give their students a real voice ... and those that do so are reaping the benefits

- Melissa Murphy
- The Guardian, Tuesday 28 November 2006
- Article history

Pros and cons

In 2006, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Carnegie UK Trust commissioned research into the impact of student participation. The research found students in more democratic schools were happier and felt more in control of their learning. Where students gave feedback on teaching, teachers' practice was improved and students gained awareness of the learning process, plus student behaviour improved.

Despite the benefits, not everyone is a fan. Some feel pupil power could undermine teachers' authority and escalate behaviour problems. "Teachers can feel very threatened at the thought of being evaluated by their own students," says Brown. "Websites are cropping up such as ratemyteachers.com, but students wouldn't post on these sites if they had a voice in their own learning."

"Some teachers are nervous when they know I'm going to observe them," says Pavandeep. "But as soon as we talk about it, everything's fine. It's important to explain that you're looking for good things as well as things they can improve."

Sue Attard, head at ███████████████ in ███████████████, thinks student voice is a cultural shift for teachers. "We have lost staff who cannot adjust to our culture of student voice ... Teachers are not going to be fully behind student voice if they feel they have no say in decisions. You have to start off by creating a culture where all staff feel they have a voice."

Attard says she has now achieved a culture shift. "Student voice is vital to making every child feel safe at our school. Students have undertaken research into what makes a happy classroom and who they would go to if they didn't have a friend in the playground."

Ingrid Cox, assistant head at Rivington and Blackrod high school in Bolton, agrees a culture shift is needed: "A lot of adults say, 'We don't have a voice so why should young people?' You have to start small, you can't change the culture overnight. It's about constantly asking, 'What can our young people do, how can they be involved in this?'"

Another government drive is to personalise learning and many believe this is impossible without listening to learners. Thinktank Futurelab has recently published a handbook on learner voice that outlines a number of benefits,such as improved thinking skills, highly engaged students, and better relationships between students and teachers.

Tim Rudd, senior researcher at Futurelab, says: "Students need to actively participate in setting their own learning agenda so that they become fully engaged in the learning process."

Student involvement in learning can mean more than evaluating lessons. "At Hastingsbury, our post-16 students provide academic mentoring to younger students. They also mentor students on alcohol, sex and drugs," says Kane. "It's more powerful for our students to learn how to stay sexually healthy from an older student rather than an external expert."

What do pupils think? Pavandeep is aware her school gives her more power than most. "Students have more power here. It's great to help create the best learning environment for every student." Shail Kalyan, a year 11 student, agrees: "I've interviewed teachers and it's good to have a say on who will be teaching you."

Gilbert Re-visited: Personalising Learning for Children alongside their Teachers

Sue Attard

Lark Rise Lower School, Dunstable, Beds, United Kingdom

The paper reports a pilot study of the culture in one school where there has been a conscious structured process spanning several years to raise levels of pupil participation.

In 2006, the Gilbert Report drew attention to a new phraseology in educational discourse that was to change the way in which teachers regarded their interactions with children. In place of education being any way a commodity imposed on the willing or not so willing Freine 1972) learning was recognised as evolving dynamic interaction between teaching and learning. Understanding of diverse learning styles and a multiplicity of intelligences
(Gardner, 1989) by not only the senior management of a school, but the pupils and their teachers form the basis upon which a school transforms the education of all within it.

This presentation examines the impact of encouraging children alongside their teachers in one lower school in Bedfordshire to approach their learning as a form of collaborative, Affirmative Enquiry (Cooperrider, 7). The notion of foregrounding pupil voice is not new (Ruddock, Fielding et) and there have been initiatives including those funded by the Arts council Creative Partnerships Scheme to increase the volume of student voice. Despite such initiatives questions remain unanswered about how far pupil voice has been represented in research studies and who decides how pupil voice should be interpreted.

The study is grounded in a reflexive investigation of the head teacher's own practice as she seeks to establish how structuring the means in which young children can voice their personal learning styles, preferences and needs can ferment a link between pupil voice and pupil participation in lessons. Intent that pupil voice will not be a bolt on extra that serves the rhetoric of accessing government funding this school has developed a distinct culture that nurtures the individual while providing an environment in which to develop high level citizenship skills in interaction with other members of the school community.

Growing attention is focusing on the lack of a casual link between substantial amounts of funding for teachers' professional development (e.g. PPD funding from the TDA) and evidence of impact on pupils learning (TDA 2007). Certainly it can be difficult to research approaches which are sufficiently sensitive to provide insights into what occurs when a pupil moves from one class to the next and one learning environment to another. In this school there is a community of enquiry where teachers, teaching assistants and all other personnel who come into contact with children participate in the research process. It is through such collaborative enquiry where each member of the school community engages in reflection with a specific view to enhance educational relationships that a situation has come about where learning has evidentially (OFSTED 2007) improved.

How does this school's culture evolve? What is the basis for claims that standards of teaching and learning are improving? The presentation includes video footage of some aspects of the school's daily routine that characteriser's structured learning is occurring.

Challenge for this school as a personalised and personalising learning community are

- to find ways to engage pupils' interest and impetus to voice their opinions and also
- to find methods of collecting and representing the children's views that genuinely illuminate the realities of their experiences.

The presenter will share elements and themes that are emerging from her pilot study: in particular how she is consciously moving from a focus on How do 'I' Improve learning to a more democratic How do 'we' improve our learning in educational community here? Moving from a model of self study action research (ref) towards a more democratic approach (ref) where pupils-in-school-as-community research not only the breadth but also the depth of understanding about how to learn better to live useful lives is learned.

The conceptual model that is emerging within this pilot study of personalising learning is

Moving from a model which resembles DISCUSS   >   ACT   <   RESPOND

As pupils engage in partnership in learning and teaching (exploring actions and processes to deepen understanding) through classroom-based action research projects. The model that is emerging reinforces learning by systematic reflection and taking responsibility looks more like this. DISCUSS > ACT > RESPOND > REFLECT

As pupils as researchers engage increasingly in self directed activity and reflection on the process of their learning, the model continues to evolve and learning transference occurs.

ACT > RESPONSE > REFLECT > DISCUSS > TRANSFER

How, pragmatically, does the model of learning that encompasses skill and knowledge transfer operate in the daily activity of a school with pupils aged from 5 to 9 years? In this presentation the head teacher will discus how social groupings such as the School council can take on an authentically and evidentially democratic purpose even with a school population of such young children. By fostering the growth of awareness by the children to understand and own their process of learning and to nurture their awareness of the importance for them and their teachers of voicing their preferences in a democratic way, this oversubscribed school is transforming the educational experience of the community.

What implications might this initiative have for other education communities? How far might educational mentoring and coaching assist teachers and their pupils to assist one another's learning? Implications of the findings of this pilot study will also be discussed during the presentation in pursuit of deepening understandings about pupil participation.

References:

Cooperider, D. L. Whitney, D. Stavros, J. M. (2008) *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change,* second edition *Brunswick,* OH Crown

Freine, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Harmondsworth: Penguin

Gardner, H., & Hatch T. (18989). *'Multiple Intelligences go to school: Educational implications of the theory of multiple intelligences.' Educational Researcher, 18(8), 4-9*

Gilbert, C. (2006) 2020 *Vision,* Report of the 2020 Teaching and Learning Review Group, London, DfES

OfSTED (2007) *Report on Lark Rise Lower School, Bedfordshire* accessed 23/01/07 at http://www.ofsted.gov.uk

Ruddock, J. *Pupil voice is here to stay!* Downloaded from http://www.qca.org.uk on 23/01/07

Sue Attard
Methodology Paper linking reflexive engagement in Action Research
BERA Conference 29 September 2007

TITLE
What is the culture of the school that aids or inhibits 'Pupil voice'

Background and context

Definition of key terms

Contribution to the field

Initial Research aim

methodology

Conclusion

Introduction

Key authors reflexivity

self

literature

Key authors double loop learning

Literature Voice to democracy shift

Future

Literature Conceptual framework

Key authors Action research

What is lacking within action research?

Methodology
Participatory Action Research

Early results

Practitioner knowledge

Method
Action research as an insider in school

Stage two

Reshaping the conceptual framework

Approach

Exploring Techniques for co researching

Reliability

Post pilot stage

Pilot stage

replicability

Preliminary investigation

Actions so far

Validity

Research credibility

SMALL SCALE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
EXPLORING PUPIL VOICE
AT ******** SCHOOL**
September 2005 – December 2007

'To what extent does the culture of a school aid or inhibit pupil voice?' EdD Research

Consent letter (Adults of a pupil participant)

Dear

Following our conversation and information sheet about the project, I am now formally asking for your consent for *(child's name)* to take part.

I have already explained the methods for gaining information for the Action Research and your child's role as participant in the project. I would like to stress further procedures now prior to gaining your signature:

1. your child will be able to withdraw from the work at any time, without having to give reasons, if they wish;
2. the information I will collect will be kept confidentially (as long as it does not breach Child Protection Policies) and will only be used in my research for the EdD and not used as part of the leadership role of the school;
3. your child will not be identifiable as an individual from the information in the project;
4. the project and the data will, in the first instance, be discussed with those involved and then the school staff in general terms. In the eventual publication, no individual will be identifiable from it.
5. when interviews are taped transcripts will be provided for agreement.

I would be grateful if you could sign the attached consent form and return it to me.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you would like any further information.

Yours sincerely

Sue Attard

SMALL SCALE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
EXPLORING PUPIL VOICE
AT ******** SCHOOL**
September 2005 – December 2007

'To what extent does the culture of a school aid or inhibit pupil voice?' EdD Research

Consent Form (Adults of a child Participant)

I / we   consent to my / our   *child name* taking part in the above research project that has been described to me under the confidentiality conditions stated.

Parent's Signature   Date

ALL SCALE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
EXPLORING PUPIL VOICE
AT *********** SCHOOL**
September 2005 – December 2007

The school has been involved in developing work with pupils to strengthen their understanding of learning by engaging them in talking about what they do and what is needed to improve further. It is from the basis of this work that the Action Research Project has been developed.

From May 2005 I have been involved in a period of study for a Doctorate in Education which seeks to explore pupil voice whilst recognising the features of the culture that is continually developing across the whole team. All of my work will be centred at the school where all pupils and adults will have an input.

The research question I aim to explore is:

'To what extent does the culture of a school aid or inhibit pupil voice?'

The work will require exploring my role as both Headteacher and Researcher in order to define what part of the culture is my responsibility and what is shaped by others who learn in the school.

I believe that pupils are partners in the social world of a school and should therefore be encouraged to co-construct with adults the learning opportunities. t is with the belief that childhood is precious and every moment is exciting that I work to raise the pupil voice in order to show that they are allowed to make some of their own decisions in their daily lives.

Through asking children and adults about learning at school I am hoping to define what school culture looks and feels like when it encourages pupil voice. I also want to discover when it is not working well and what the reasons behind that are.

Stage One Action Research Project
We will focus on the following key questions:

*What is it like to be part of ***************School?*
What is discussed as part of the daily routines at school?
What suggestions have you made about organisation or learning opportunities at school?
What could be improved at school?

The information will be gained in the following ways:

Focus groups in which the membership is up to 10 children and
the questions are broad allowing for their own ideas.

Individual Interviews with questions designed to get those
involved talking in more detail.

Observation of the adults and children working in or out of classrooms.

drawings about things that have been happening

All work that forms part of this project will be highlighted and not blended into
the general work on pupil voice already taking place. All participants will be
encouraged to make suggestions about the research methods and agree the
information gained from viewing the transcripts.

All participants' views will remain anonymous in the final reporting stage of the
thesis and data is protected at all times whether held in written notes or
electronic formats.

Through a cycle of Action Research we will seek to discover what we know and
ways to improve.

Permission for children to be directly involved will be gained from parents or
guardians and then from the children who have been chosen randomly.

Adults will be consulted prior to the involvement for their permission.

Any information gained from my general role as Headteacher will not be used
as part of this research project.

Opportunities to withdraw from the research at any time without giving reasons
will be respected.

Should you require any other information do not hesitate to contact me at
school.

Sue Attard

TIMELINE OF PRIMARY RESEARCH

Chapter 5   **January 2006 –March 2006**

| THEMES
whose voice?
hearing | Observing the children around the school to discover opportunities for voicing their opinions (Non participant observation 6 children)

Focus group asking 4 key questions:
1. *What helps you learn everyday in school?*
2. *What does your classroom look or feel like?*
3. *What would make the school a better place for you to learn in?*
4. *What do adults do in this school?*

Developing themes *hearing, agency* and *whose voice?*

The development of the themes led to the implementation of a role in which some of the children could be heard that of School Council.

Chapter 6   **March 2006 –July 2006**

| THEMES
whose voice?
hearing
agency | Introduction of the role of School Council, framing of the role in action by the teacher facilitator and the elected children, evaluation of the outcomes after six months.

Teacher focus groups following reflections and discussions with their children (9 teachers).
School Council member focus groups (10 children 2 single gender groups of 5) open ended question Can you tell me about School Council?
Teacher facilitator Account

This led to an outcome that required listening to the voices of the teachers

Chapter 7   **July 2006 –September 2006**

Reflections on the role of School Council by the teachers:
Survey of evaluative documents 9 teacher's responses
Key Questions:

| THEMES
whose voice?
relationships
defining roles
power |

What information have you gained from the children during the year?
What action have you taken from their views?
How much do learners enjoy their education in your classes?
What do the children tell you about life in your classroom?
How well are learners guided and supported by you and your classroom support?
What is the role of school council?

Interviews of teachers 5 teachers interviewed.
How do you develop the relationships with the children in respect to decision making?
What opportunities are provided for talk within the classroom?
What are the roles in your classroom and school that represent 'pupil voice'?

Chapter 8   **October 2006 – April 2007**
Action Research Cycle used to introduce 'children as philosophers'
approach within each of the nine classes.
Key Questions:
How can the children and teachers develop systems to research their
experiences together?
How can we develop a system for talking and listening to the voices of all
in the classroom?
Could children become critical thinkers about their learning?
What are the features of the teacher and learners relationships that
support pupil voice in school?

THEMES
Relationships
listening
purpose of
talk
social
conditions in
the classroom

Teacher's comments after CPD sessions 9 teachers
Class of children and teachers comments after the sessions
30 children in each class 9 teachers
Teachers evaluative accounts 9 teachers.

Chapter 9   **April 2007– December 2007**
Research Partnerships in each of the nine classes.

THEMES
Relationships
Partnerships
listening
social
conditions in
the classroom
Trust

How can the developing research partnerships in the classroom build on the
discoveries about the social conditions for learning that derived from the
'children as philosophers' approach?
In what ways can children and teachers listen and learn together about
and numeracy?
Is School Council as a representative voice still relevant?

Chapter 10   **December 2007 to the present day**

Twelve examples of action research projects that have built on the views of the
teachers to action change.

www.ncsl.org.uk

NCSL
National College for
School Leadership

talk2learn highlights

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Issue 2b

In case you missed it...

Recent highlights from NCSL in Dialogue, talk2learn's
online community for national education debate

Also available as a podcast

What does learning look like in my school?

"It is a bizarre phenomenon that what is, by common consent, the central purpose of education is so elusive and difficult to define"

...a sentiment shared by many school leaders taking part in this debate, who welcomed the opportunity to think and reflect on the nature of learning: what it looks like and how they can be sure it is taking place in their own schools.

A common theme was the need for effective lesson observations, both formal and informal. There was much agreement with one head's view that it is important to observe how well children are learning as opposed to how hard they are working: "I have had many upset teachers when I've told them a lesson is unsatisfactory due to a lack of learning. The usual response I get back is 'but they were all working!' I have introduced staff meetings looking at learning. We are looking at what kinaesthetic learners, auditory learners and visual learners are and have discussed strategies to aid these learners. I find the whole debate very interesting and key to my children's success."

One head of a fresh start school described how they handled the issue:

"Every lesson has clear learning objectives which are shared verbally and written down for children... the success criteria are also shared and displayed so they know what is expected of them"

Whilst there was some support for this approach, other school leaders did not agree. "Sometimes we need to let them lead us to where they want to go", one commented. "I love it when there is spontaneity in the classroom; when excitement takes over and teaching and learning goes in a different direction... children learn a great deal in these situations and one of the most important lessons is surely the clear message about the joy of learning."

Sue Attard, Head of Lark Rise Lower School in Bedfordshire said: "All we need to do is to offer young people the vocabulary to talk about their learning and they will help us to unlock the issues for them. Sounds simple but it can be very difficult when pressures from a top-down system insist on us tweeking percentages rather than working with individual human beings." Another head described his approach to empowering pupils: "I have introduced a Learning to Learn policy and spend time showing pupils how their brain works and how they can help to make it work better".

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities