

Gregory Kearns' story

The Students as Researchers programme - giving students the opportunity to make a difference to their school

My name is Gregory and I am a student researcher. I wanted to make a difference to the rules about eating in class. I tried to enable students to be able to eat in some classes. This was important to me because I'm a procrastinator, particularly when I'm hungry. I know I work better if I've eaten.

I think it is important that students are given the opportunity to improve the learning at their school because if students can shape learning in the way we want it, then the learning may suit us more.

Ways of working

The Students as Researchers group was led by Mr. Simms, one of our teachers, and Ms. Roberts, from the University of Cambridge. It involved 12 students from Years 7 - 11. We met once a week for an hour for eight weeks. We had a booklet to show us the step-by-step research process. We started by deciding what we wanted to make a difference to. Then we investigated different sorts of research tools and designed our own. I designed a questionnaire which I gave out to students in different year groups and to some teachers. I then analysed the results. We learned about being sceptical. That meant we had to question what we found out and really think about what it meant. We then wrote a report about what we had learned and produced a powerpoint. We then decided who were the best people to feed back to.

My project

I wanted to make a difference to the rules about eating in class. If I don't eat my brain feels like it is malfunctioning and doesn't work smoothly. I was not suggesting that we should be able to eat at all points of the day but sometimes in class when it is appropriate. I was suggesting that students should be allowed to eat something healthy like a yoghurt or a banana.

I designed a questionnaire to find out what students and teachers thought about this idea. I collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative data is data that is word based, whilst quantitative data is number based. I asked students and teachers questions such as:

"Should we be allowed to eat in lessons?"

"Will eating in class enable us to perform better?"

"What lessons shouldn't we be allowed to eat in?"

"Do you think we should get more bins?"

I asked people to mark each answer by circling a face, either "☺" or "☹" and then asked them to explain their answer. For some questions they had no answers to circle, they just wrote 'free text'. I put my results into tables in Excel, and then created graphs of my results.

My results show that the majority of students feel that eating in class would help them to achieve their full potential. Students either think this is a good gateway to getting food in class or they genuinely feel that it will help them to learn. There was a difference between students' and teachers' answers. Most teachers felt it was a bad idea; one teacher thought it would work in small groups only.

I wanted to challenge people to think about the positives of eating in class but I think teachers are still sceptical about allowing students to eat in class. I think I challenged them, but I am not sure whether all of them took up that challenge!

The successes

The Leadership Team has got a copy of all the student researchers' reports. I have already presented my powerpoint, talking about my research, to the School Council. I thought the School Council would be dismissive of my idea because the teachers wouldn't like it but actually they were interested in it and asked me lots of questions.

The barriers and problems

I knew at the beginning of this project that I was unlikely to get the result I wanted. I realised it would be a difficult thing to persuade others to co-operate with my ideas. I got the agreement on paper to my ideas but I didn't get the actual satisfaction of people behind my idea. I continued to ask people to think about my idea though to see where it went and to test my abilities as a student researcher.

The impact on me

I felt special because I was selected to do this project. Students as Researchers is a good thing for schools to do. It made me feel that students do matter. It gave me the opportunity to come up with great ideas to change the school in a way which will help students. I think we are the only people who can really help other students because we know how life is as a student now.

The impact on my school

If there was to be an impact from my research I hope that I would have challenged people to think about the positive side of eating in class. I think the responsibility to get what was learned from the research known in the school belongs to me as I

am the person who came up with the idea. I think that it is someone else's responsibility to decide what to do - after a while I can't do anything more.

My top tips

*I think I squandered the opportunity to choose to look at something which would really make a difference to learning in my school. **Be careful what you choose for your project if you want to make a real difference.***

*It was difficult to word the questions correctly on my questionnaire because I didn't want to offend anyone. **Leave time to check this out with a teacher after you have drafted it.***

What next?

I am now involved with another Students as Researchers project with students from other schools. I might also be helping to run next year's Students as Researchers group at Francis Bacon, perhaps acting as a co-researcher.

Gregory Kearns was a Year 8 student at Francis Bacon Maths and Computing College, St. Albans, Hertfordshire when he undertook his SAR project.