

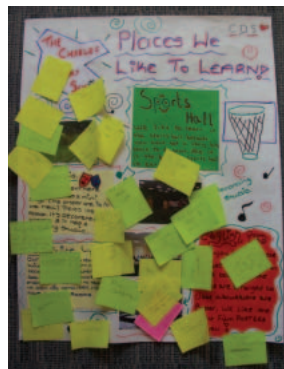
## Learning from the Cambridge Network



*Student Leadership and Research in Hertfordshire*



*Establishing Greenside School Council*



*'Building Schools for the Future in Thanet' – student consultation and participation*



*Developing young Researchers*



*'The School That Is' – innovation and involvement in Italy*

*'Partners in Learning' – students observing lessons at Nobel School*

*October 2007*

Welcome to this first edition of *inPRACTICE*.

This new publication is a companion to our regular newsletter *inFORM* which provides commentaries on emerging issues in *policy* areas relevant to LfL. *inPRACTICE* provides a brief introduction to breakthrough *practices* relevant to the broader Leadership for Learning agenda.

This first edition is prompted by the ground breaking work of the HCD Student Partnership in the areas of student voice, student research and student leadership. HCD (Highest Common Denominator) is a charitable organisation based in London which sponsors initiatives under the direction of Richard Timberlake. These come together in national conferences and regional workshops run with and by primary and secondary school students. In this publication Ros Frost illustrates some of the fruits of those initiatives and extends an invitation to those who would like to join her and us in taking forward the creation of a lively national and international network of people keen to make a difference to children's lives and to government policies which constrain or liberate.

Future editions of *inPRACTICE* will focus on other innovative work within the Network.

John MacBeath  
Chair of Educational Leadership

# Introducing the HCD Student Partnership

It is my pleasure to introduce the HCD Student Partnership and celebrate some of the excellent work that children, young people and their teachers are engaged in in this country and internationally in the area of student participation. The HCD Student Partnership is a partnership between the ‘Leadership for Learning’ team at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and the London based educational trust ‘Highest Common Denominator’. It is a key element of the ‘Leadership for Learning: Cambridge Network’ and has a coordinator, associate staff and a developing network dedicated to connecting people of all ages who have an interest in advancing children and young people’s participation, especially in relation to schools. Although we can only feature a small number of projects in this publication our forthcoming website will be able to share many more examples as well as publish research by children and young people and share resources and news of events, (see back cover for details). We hope that as you find out more about our work and network you, and others you know, will want to collaborate with us through contributing to, or using, resources on the site or working with or for us on a range of projects. Our contact details are on the back of this *inPRACTICE*. Please do get in touch and join with us in the exciting times ahead.

When we talk about ‘student participation’ we recognise that children and young people can participate in their schooling in many different ways. On one level all children and young people can be said to be participating by virtue of being present at school. However the kind of participation we seek to promote is that which enables children and young people to engage in decision-making that influences their own lives and the life of their school at all levels, whether this is through developing skills associated with taking personal responsibility, engaging in research activity or exercising wider leadership roles. Central to this endeavour is the belief that children and young people can be competent social actors in their own right and that their experiences of life are valid and valuable, and

that engaging with their perspectives is critical for informing and shaping schools and democratic societies. In the light of this the HCD Student Partnership aims

- to develop and support an international network of children and young people, educational practitioners and academics who want to share their experience in the area of student participation
- to build a wide professional knowledge base by bringing together the fruits of research and accounts of innovative practice
- to promote and support student participation through the widest possible range of strategies including the development and provision of training programmes, guidance materials and resources

We work with a range of local, national and international partners including schools, local authorities, charities, higher education institutions, research and consultancy agencies, government bodies and individual researchers. On the following pages we seek to give you a flavour of some of this work. We hope you find the examples inspiring and we look forward to hearing from you and working together to promote and support children and young people’s participation in schools.

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# Student Leadership and Research in Hertfordshire

The 'Leading Research Group' course ran between March and July 2007. It formed one element of the Hertfordshire Participation Pilot and was funded largely by Hertfordshire Local Authority's Children Schools and Families Participation Team. This Pilot was a collaborative project between Save the Children UK, Hertfordshire CSF Participation Team, the HCD Student Partnership, one primary and one secondary school, a special school for students with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and an educational support centre (ESC<sup>1</sup>) for young people who have been excluded from school. It aimed to ensure that children and young people at the participating schools in disadvantaged areas were involved in decision-making and evaluating education as well as developing the skills of teachers and students to lead and undertake research that informed these decisions.

The Leading Research Group (LRG) course was designed by the HCD Student Partnership to support the aims of the Pilot as well as build on previous HCDSR research which highlighted the need for sustainable, inclusive research development for children and young people (Frost, 2007; Roberts and Nash, 2007). The course was also offered as an award-bearing 30-hour module of Practitioner Professional Development at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. Participating students also received HCDSR Certificates of Achievement for their work.

Through the Leading Research Group the HCDSR developed one teacher and two groups of students from each of the secondary and primary schools and educational support centre as researchers. The teachers and students from the different schools and phases began the course together but the primary school unfortunately had to complete the course separately due to circumstances beyond its control.

The first group of students carried out their own research and were then supported in developing a group of their peers as researchers. Teachers were involved in 15 hours face-to-face tuition and leading

15 hours independent work with the young researchers in school. Two of the teachers' face-to-face sessions also involved the students presenting their research and planning how they would develop their peers together.



The outcomes of the course were encouraging due to the enhanced student, staff and organisational learning as well as the raised self esteem, confidence and independence of students and teachers alike. The students were able to undertake their own research as well as lead and mentor their peers largely through paired work. The research engagement motivated the students as well as helping them suggest future improvements for similar work in school. A design was also arrived at for utilising a research-led decision-making structure in the educational support centre.

The evaluation of the Pilot is still taking place however resources from the Pilot will appear on the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership website (HCTP, 2007), Save the Children UK website (SC, 2007) and HCD Student Partnership websites early in 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Education Support Centres are often known by the term Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in other local authorities.

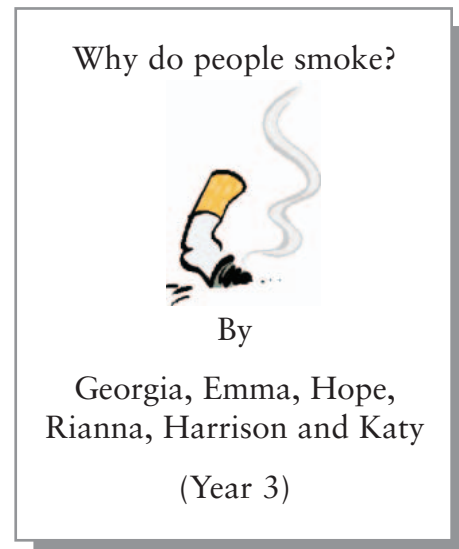


# Developing Young Researchers

In the field of student research more appears to have been published about work undertaken with, and by, secondary-aged researchers than younger children. These examples often reflect the need many schools feel to develop this work outside of curriculum time or with small groups of confident or academically capable young people. In a number of schools the HCD Student Partnership has contact with, there appears to be a growing interest in developing the research skills of younger children. 'Developing the skills of seven- and eight-year-old researchers: a whole class approach' explores the possibilities and benefits of supporting the development of social research skills with a class of thirty seven- and eight-year-old children in one English primary school over a period of seven afternoons (Frost, 2007). Conceptually the work is located within literature on pupil voice while the methodology draws on an action research approach. Pupils were introduced to a social research process, including a carousel of fun and active data collection methods, and supported in undertaking their own group research projects. Data were drawn from lesson evaluations,

pupils' reports and responses about their experience through interviews and questionnaires.

The paper concludes it is possible and beneficial for Year 3 pupils to engage in social research and considers some wider ethical, practical and safeguarding issues.



## Greenside School Council

Greenside School provides education for students from two to nineteen years of age who have been assessed as having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD) The school was a partner in the Hertfordshire Participation Pilot and undertook research and development work which led to establishing a school council suitable for their students' needs. This work was designed and led by one of the school's senior teachers.

The school had found it difficult to run worthwhile school council sessions in the past due to the diverse ways in which their students communicate. The headteacher still felt it was important that students should have a voice in decision-making at their school.

The lead teacher proposed a plan of work involving contacting five other SLD schools to find out their

experience of running school councils as well as working with a self advocacy organisation whose aim was to promote the voice of people with learning difficulties through empowerment. The group were invited into school to get to know the students informally and then to set up a school council. Data were then collected from these meetings using video and photographs to see if the students had made any decisions and communicated in any way during the meeting, as well as evaluating whether the organisation had provided the group with the correct setting and physical and social tools to communicate.

The lead teacher's account of her work describes developing a school council model that was effective in engaging their students in making decisions that had an impact on their life in school (Smith, 2007).

## ‘Building Schools for the Future in Thanet’

Consulting students about their school experience is widely acknowledged as a key theme in school improvement and central to the vision and success of the English government’s Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. This project was initiated by secondary headteachers in Thanet with support from their local authority. It sought to inform both their vision for secondary education and their response to the BSF initiative.

Working together with the HCD Student Partnership a process of enquiry was designed to actively involve 100 students from 12 secondary schools in collecting and presenting data which engaged with their views about their learning environments inside and out of school (Frost and Holden, 2007). Two full-day workshops were held to facilitate this with time in between for students to take photographs of places where they like to learn and socialise as well as those areas they would like to change in school.

The first workshop introduced students to educational design while the second asked them to reflect on their own experiences of formal and informal learning environments, both inside and out of school, through a range of interactive tasks. During the second day’s workshop the students were asked to make large posters using the photographs they had taken in their school. A ‘gallery walk’ then took place where



the groups of students circulated around the posters and stuck written notes of their observations about the contents onto each others’ work. These comments provided ideas for solutions to problems, encouragement and in some cases sympathy! Additional activities then took place to solicit further views about preferred informal and formal learning environments.

The data collected from the two workshops shows that students engage in a wide range of activities and value places that are spacious, bright, modern, adequately resourced and well-maintained.

Outside of school their close relationships and personal and public spaces provide many of the conditions conducive to learning.

Inside of school the students in this sample feel they experience in general more inspiration and success through arts based subjects while the sciences are seen as more challenging. Some students recognise a link between positive learning environments and positive behaviour.

Such findings are not unusual or unexpected. What is significant for this group of schools is that these outcomes have prompted further school-based research and teacher-led development work with students, the outcomes of which will be available in 2008.

## ‘The School That Is’

Although Italian legislation has provided for varying forms of pupil representation in school councils and committees and on different levels of the local and national education system, these do not necessarily imply authentic, meaningful participation by young people in decision-making processes of any importance nor that anyone important will necessarily listen to anything meaningful they might express. That is why many of the young people who engaged in the 10-day online forum event set up by the International Relations Department of the Italian Ministry of Education to raise awareness on a number of crucial issues related to students’ learning experiences said they were authentically surprised that anyone “up there” could be concerned with what they had to say.

Within a year-long and nationwide project aiming to raise awareness in schools and Italian society at large on the 2010 EU agenda, a group of young people working with a team of teacher-advisors seconded to the Ministry created, managed and performed in an array of “meaningful opportunities” leading them and thousands of other adolescents to investigate what an open learning environment entailed for them and why many of their peers had dropped out of school, what role they imagined in the future for their teachers and what common aspirations young learners across Europe might share.

These young people came from schools across the country and, apart from a core of 5 or 6 steady participants, constituted a rotating think tank and task force numbering between 6 and 60 engaged in building, running and supporting different project activities. They were also the main players or “Euroactors”, as some of them called themselves, on the scene of the EU-2010 awareness-raising campaign. The scope, breadth and quality of their engagement were not “pre-envisioned” as it were by

the adults, but simply emerged along the way from the sheer strength of the convictions and ideas the young people put forward. They took part in project meetings with Ministry staff and practitioners, observing them and feeding back their views on the work the adults had accomplished. They animated online fora and discussions, designed and realised campaign materials, produced and presented videos, co-managed workshops, participated in focus groups and gave large public presentations illustrating their work. They screened the hundreds of pages of bitter considerations and of hopeful dreams on school and learning environments coming from the fora and picked out key quotes and situations they knitted together into a powerful play they performed to an audience comprising the Education Minister and regional policy makers. They used all of this input to draft a *Manifesto for and by Young European Learners* ([www.europa-2010.eu](http://www.europa-2010.eu)) calling upon young people and adults alike to respond concretely to a series of commitments towards making learning a worthwhile lifelong experience. And all of this remarkably took place within the folds of an organization (a ministry) that is generally high in rhetoric.

To conclude, let us consider what Giuseppe – an initially shy and stuttering lad from a school in very challenging circumstances in the Naples area taking part in the project – emblematically achieved as a result of his participation. His actions may bear witness to the idea that democracy needs to be primarily an authentic form of shared experience if it is to be a form of government, whether at school or in Parliament. Tired of reading the waves of sensationalist headlines and articles attacking schools that appear to be a popular journalistic sport, Giuseppe wrote a resounding email to one of the country’s main newspapers, entitled “The School that *is*” (*La scuola che c’è*), which sparked an



unbelievable surge of public interest in what schools *can* and *do* achieve, in spite of all the difficulties they face. Giuseppe was then interviewed by many newspapers and invited to present his views to the Minister himself. A few weeks later, “The School that *is*” became the official motto launching the first large Ministry initiative providing all schools with the opportunity to show and celebrate their successes on the web. Unfortunately, we must also add that no public credits to Giuseppe appeared for this on the Ministry site.

*Francesca Brotto is a school head and teacher educator formerly seconded to the International Relations Department of the Italian Ministry of Education. In the UK, she has collaborated with the University of Cambridge and Canterbury Christ Church University College. Her main field of expertise lies in matters related to the European dimension of education.*



## ‘Partners in Learning’

Students observing lessons and giving teachers feedback can be seen as threatening, however Nobel School have found this to be a highly effective way to support teacher self-evaluation by providing relevant feedback as well as fostering student voice. Participants are invited to take part through personal invitations and announcements in assemblies.

Over 60 experienced and newly-qualified teachers have chosen to take part as well as 150 students over the past few years. Around 30 students are trained each year.

The training takes place in informal surroundings with casual clothes which together with team building games and activities helps to build social bonds. Students and staff discuss any worries or concerns they have as well as practice observation using videos. A code of conduct is discussed and training in giving constructive feedback is provided. The teacher and the student observer negotiate lessons to be observed and students often observe the same teacher in different lessons. There is a negotiated focus and some use a pre-designed observation sheet.

The frequency of observations is not fixed but may involve 6–9 lessons a term. Feedback is given immediately after the lesson or during a break time or lunch time. These meetings last between 20 and 30 minutes and involve students giving feedback directly to the teacher, verbally and in confidence, sometimes written feedback is provided. Sometimes the teachers give feedback on the students’ feedback.

The school has found that ‘Partners in Learning’ encourages: self-awareness of and reflection on classroom practice, awareness of students’ learning needs, more relevant feedback, student voice, student exercising leadership and taking responsibility for their learning, students understanding of teaching and learning process, confidence building, improved behaviour and trust building. There are some issues however such as providing feedback to students about their feedback, making time for feedback sessions, students missing classes, the need to hold staff meetings to maximise teacher learning and widening participation.

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## Contact us – in person or online

29th February 2008 – HCD Student Partnership website launch  
[www.youparticipate.org.uk](http://www.youparticipate.org.uk)

## Join us – in the UK and worldwide

20th June 2008 – HCD Student Partnership Conference, London  
10th–12th December 2007 – Innsbruck 5th–10th January 2008 – Auckland



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