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The cost of performance

The effects of schooling on students' disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations.

Submitted for a PhD to
The School of Education,
The University of Sheffield

October, 2014

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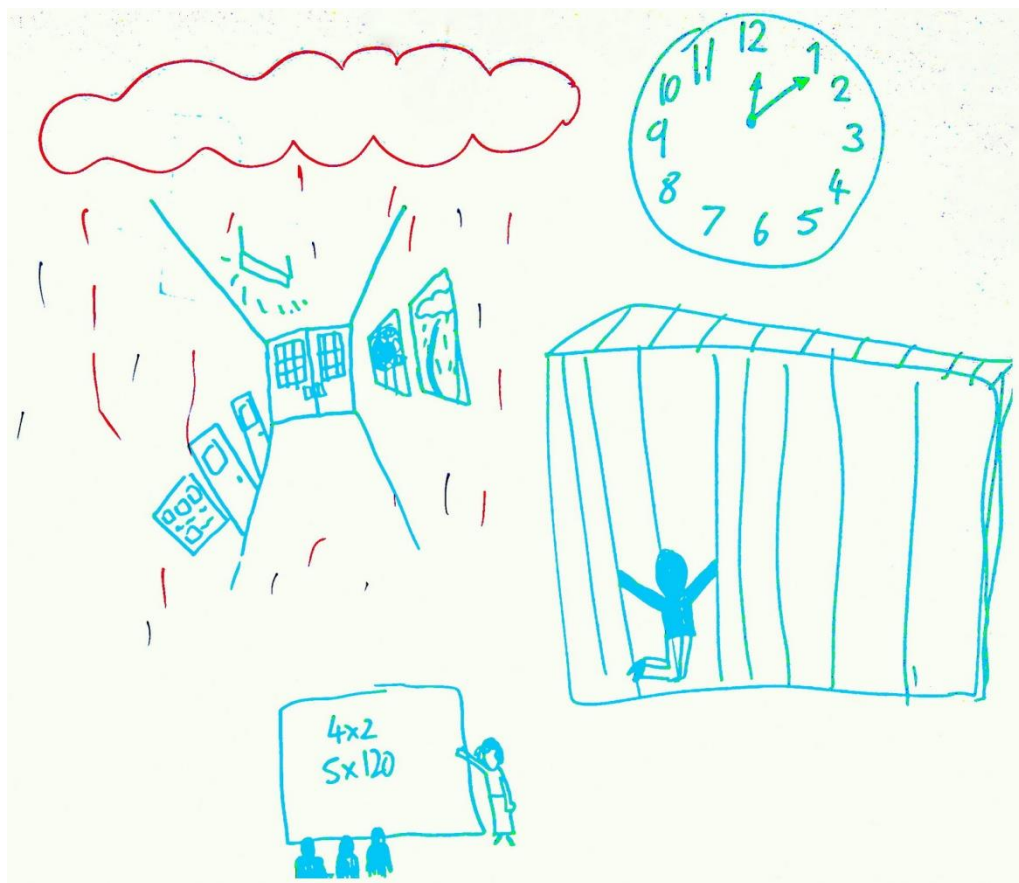
Abstract

The thesis is concerned with how schooling is affecting what students learn about acting as change agents in organisations. It is deemed of importance because of the concerns about how schools may require and valorise passive organisational roles of students and particularly because of the challenges the next generation of school leavers face in terms of organisational reform and taking the role of change agent.

The research deepens our understanding of the change agent role through a literature review which combines ideas from the sociology of education, student voice and organisational theory. It set out to develop our understanding of the problem, and attempted to affect the problem, by setting up a systemic action research process in two secondary schools. This created opportunities for students to act as change agents on cultural and organisational issues that concerned them. The process created a bounded sub-system and explored how those boundaries were affected by the students, the schools and the facilitator in order to further understand how processes may foster or inhibit the students' disposition to act as change agents and what they reveal about perceptions and understanding of the role.

The contribution this thesis makes to the field is to illuminate how schooling affects students' disposition towards acting as change agents, and their understanding of the change agent role in specific organisational terms. It does this by using a unique framework of concepts, demonstrating their feasibility, and through studying organisational processes using a convergence of educational theory, organisational theory and systems psychodynamics. It illuminates some of the processes that dispose students to interpret change agency processes and the change agent role through the lens of performance culture and the implications of this for their learning about the organisational role. It offers a model of the organisation-in-the-mind students may be developing and shows how, using a convergence of the concepts of organisation-in-the-mind and organisational socialisation, this represents learning which students may be disposed towards reproducing as adults in organisations. Finally it offers an organisational structure which may enable students to develop a less inhibited disposition towards the change agent role.

Introduction



This picture, with its rained upon corridor watched over by a CCTV camera, its imprisoned child, depressing classroom, faceless teacher and domineering clock represents a quiet 13 year old boy's view of the organisation he spent most of his time in. It is one of the many pictures the students drew during this research, I had no sense he was dramatising it for attention, nor did he have much interest in discussing it – he just quietly drew it when invited to draw a picture of his perception of school.

This research began with the question; what are students learning about enabling change in organisations *through their experience of schooling*? In other words, what are they learning about their own role in organisational change from their experience of school. Importantly, the research was not looking at their *capacity* to act as organisational change agents, which clearly would be limited in 13 and 14 year olds, rather it was looking at their **disposition** towards acting as organisational change agents – and by disposition we are loosely following Bourdieu's definition of it as the natural tendencies of each individual to take on a certain position in any context. In

other words, how was schooling affecting their tendency to act as *change agents* in an organisation? How exactly did this happen? Was it affecting some differently than others? Why?

It is important to be clear right from the outset what is meant here by organisational change. By acting as organisational change agents we are referring to affecting the purpose, vision, structure or culture of an organisation, even in minor ways. This might sound like an ambitious understanding of enabling change however it is important to note that at some level in an organisation everyone is affecting purpose, vision, structure or culture - these are all co-constructed by the members of organisations, and though those with higher status have more power in constructing them, they only have meaning inasmuch as the rest of the organisation internalises and reproduces these understandings.

The research questions can be summarised formally as the following:

1. What are students learning about acting as organisational change agents from their experience of schooling?
2. How could this learning be affecting their disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations?
3. Are certain groups learning this differently, or to a greater extent, than others? Why?
4. What do these findings mean for the theory and practice of developing student agency in schools?

These questions were pursued by creating a structured opportunity for students to actually act as change agents in their schools. This was called the 'students as change agents' initiative and I created and facilitated it, and researched the students' behavior during it, over five months in two schools. The findings from this initiative were then explored using theoretical perspectives from systems psychodynamics and organisational theory, as well as educational theories of agency and student voice.

The initial seeds of these research questions derived from the convergence of aspects of my professional experience. As an organisational consultant working in organisational change I have experienced the complexities and seemingly irrational beliefs behind adult change agency in organisations, and how particular people and

groups seemed to have a higher disposition towards acting as change agents than others. Based on this I began asking whether adult attitudes to their agency, and to organisational change, had some of their roots in their experience of school. Did some adults learn certain perceptions of organisational life and their role in it from their experience of school? And if so, how exactly did this happen? As I began to read up on the subject I became aware that similar questions had been asked before, particularly during the 1970s, and many theories had been offered about a 'hidden curriculum' of schooling. However, there was a tendency to use the idea of a hidden curriculum to make wider sociological claims about reproduction that I was not convinced by as I felt there was a unique organisational process occurring which needed to be understood in organisational terms. My experience suggested that the significance of the hidden curriculum was organisational, *ie* it was about the individuals psychological process of creating the organisation in their own mind which derived from their experience of trying to find, make and take a role in that organisation.



The significance of schooling as an organisational experience has, I will argue, not yet fully been appreciated. Indeed I will argue that the organisational nature of schooling is its key significance, its underlying purpose, and should, rather than be seen as a problem, be seen as its future opportunity. I think it always helps to look back to the experience of a child first going to school to illustrate this. The experience is not dominated by their thoughts about the curriculum but rather by their need to adapt to this new thing we call an organisation. They experience being in a formal role for the

first time, of not just being themselves but being a ‘pupil’ and being valorised as good or bad based on their capacity to, and disposition to, fulfill this role. For the first time they experience having their identity and value affected by an organisation which they seem to have little control over, whose purpose they feel they cannot change. They experience a culture and value system which they have to adapt to in order to maintain a safe status and avoid exclusion by other pupils or the organisation. For many students this period of adaptation is experienced as a kind of trauma of conditionality causing them to seek the reassurance of their parents’ unconditional love. This process of finding a role and mediating with the organisation does not end there but dominates every student’s life in school - on many occasions I have run workshops asking people to reflect back on their experience of school and their reflections often relate to the process they went through to find a way of belonging in this new organisation. This led me to conclude that this was perhaps important learning from schooling – learning how to adapt to organisational life.

However, my questions also derived from my own experience of schooling, which at secondary level was a troubled one. I was someone who struggled to adapt to the organisational culture and values of the schooling I experienced, partly due to experiencing consistent bullying. In my own school experience I developed some dysfunctional forms of resistance because I had no formal means of expressing my desire to change my circumstances in school. I became very conscious of the values that were being communicated in the school, and how they were being communicated, because I did not share some of them. More importantly I was acutely aware of other students’ struggles in school and of how little voice they had in terms of the issues they faced. I did not understand it specifically in those terms at the time, and it was through working on particular educational initiatives in the systems psychodynamic field that many of the ideas behind this research became crystallised. My experience therefore had a clear impact on my interest in student voice as a field of research. I have further explored this in the section on reflexivity in chapter 7 and issues related to positionality are discussed at the start of chapter 3.

Additionally, as an adult working in group relations in the Tavistock and Grubb traditions (a systems psychodynamic field which requires self-reflection about one’s own projections and internalisation in organisations) I became aware myself that

those experiences had developed in me a particular mindset towards organisations and my role in them. This led me again to wonder if the same was true for other people.

However, deeper than all these concerns there was a political motivation behind this question derived from a concern that younger generations were becoming increasingly passive about challenging organisations in a world that was becoming more and more dominated by them. There is a significant concern that younger generations have been disenfranchised since the 2008 financial crisis (Scarpetta et al., 2010; Verick, 2009) due to the austerity measures it has led to. This crisis, also known as Global Financial Crisis, is considered to have been the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s and caused, and was caused by, the collapse of many major organisations, many of which had to be bailed out by the state at huge cost (500 billion in the UK) (Lanchester, 2010). This crisis, I interpreted, not just as an ‘economic crisis’, but as a crisis of organisational values and cultures. It was, after all, a crisis that began in organisations and was a function of toxic organisational cultures. I see the struggle of the participating students’ generation not as a struggle for democracy, but as a struggle to guarantee that organisations in the world have a positive social purpose. After 2008, I saw a generation interested in protesting externally of organisational life but less disposed towards challenging organisations from within, which is messy, complicated, anxiety provoking and sometimes a risk to one’s status, but is also where the real change happens. I asked myself what the role of schooling was in this situation.

Academically, and in terms of the literature, the concern to do the research grew out of a concern that particular processes in schools might be inhibiting the development of students’ change agency in organisations. The key process that emerged was how the increasing performance culture in schools might be creating a particular culture in school which devalues change agency. This concern was just one of many that emerged when I began the research but now having completed it that concern has become far more developed and central. It is important to outline it here. There is an increasing anxiety about raising standards and increasing performance which has led to a culture which “*requires individual practitioners to organise themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations*” (Ball, 2003:215). New measurement frameworks like PISA (The Programme for International Student Assessment), which is an international standard of measurement of young people’s formal education, can

reinforce how ‘good’ education can be measured and can reinforce that measurable education is the only ‘good’ education. New tools are constantly developed to measure, track and label students’ performance in schools. Schools are constantly looking to the next Ofsted inspection and their place in league tables in order to meet the anxieties of parents who are now seen as ‘consumers’ of schools. This has reached a point where the Minister for Education in the UK now even wants teachers to be paid according to how well they make their students perform, and soldiers are going to be fast tracked into teaching so as to increase performance (Burns, 2013). This has led to schools being referred to as ‘exam factories’ (Coffield & Williamson, 2011). If the schools are exam factories, one has to wonder what the children are.

This ‘crisis of underperformance’ never seems to go away and somehow each new government seems to be faced with an apparently increasingly underperforming system, despite little evidence this is the case. When evidence to the contrary is offered it is put down to exams getting easier, again despite their being no evidence this is the case (Stewart, 2013). In terms of anxieties about underperformance the media often present Finland as a good model (Alexander, 2013). Ironically, Finland’s focus is on learning concepts and creativity over facts, on students having a choice of many electives, on a shorter school day, on less homework, and little testing (Friedman, 2013; Hancock, 2011). The focus on underperformance could be perceived as having led to a situation where the purpose of schools has become to perform, the purpose of performing has become to be seen as performing and the question of the actual deeper educational value of what students are performing *for* gets lost somewhere in the noise. Those who challenge this value system are often received with hostility as evidenced by the UK Minister for Education, Michael Gove, branding a group of 100 top academics who challenged his changes as ‘Marxists’ doing ‘bad academia’ (Bassegy, 2013).

This anxiety about performance detracts and hides what is a deeper anxiety about what we are teaching young people to *perform for*. Schools are not like companies where performance is a simple measurable goal, they are wholly unique organisations which have a duty of care towards each child and a responsibility to derive their purpose *from* the needs of children, rather than simply the anxieties of parents, the market and governments. What Smyth et al., (2000:140) call the “*primacy of caring relations in work with pupils and colleagues*” becomes more difficult to value in a

world of performance. Enabling students to succeed in exams may calm adult anxieties about the value of education but the question remains as to whether it is fulfilling the needs of young people who will face a world which will be challenging in ways often wholly unrelated to exam performance. These are also concerns that are increasingly being voiced by Headteachers themselves. For example; Peter Tait, head of Sherborne Preparatory School, Dorset, argues that “*students’ physical and mental health is being undermined by a ‘narrow’ form of secondary education that seeks to get the ‘best possible grades’ regardless of whether it will ‘serve them best in the future’*” (Paton, 2013). He goes on to argue that this is done to benefit the status of the organisation and “*to ensure their own position in the league tables is not compromised*” (ibid, 2013). In addition there is an increasing concern that schools are actually designing themselves around the areas school inspectorates valorise just to increase their position in league tables (Sheppard, 2013). This could mean that those students and activities which are most likely to increase the organisation’s performance are prioritised over other equally important activities, as Ball (2003:223) notes, “*in the hard logic of a performance culture, an organisation will only spend money where measurable returns are likely to be achieved*”. This is the conclusion of the research by Gray et al., (1999) that “*performance management is most likely to encourage a search for tactical improvements which result in short-term improvements.*” For the very same reasons, projects and initiatives focused on student engagement or students’ involvement in change, which demand long term commitment, are likely to be under pressure to prioritise aims, roles and behaviours which lead to increased short term student performance.

What is often lost in the argument about performance is how it affects students themselves, not just their experience of school, but also their emerging identities. The potential for this culture to be experienced as oppressive by some students was something I experienced firsthand during this research. It is easy to over-theorise it and lose touch with how emotionally degrading it could be for some children to experience a culture which valorises them in this way every day. Many of these students seemed to struggle to experience love, respect or freedom that was not conditional on their performance of roles and activities that they had no voice in valorising themselves, or any real control over. More importantly, this also led them to struggle to valorise activities, roles, values and identities not normally valued by

performance – in themselves and others. Despite this, critiques of performance do not tend to reach the mainstream because they tend to offer little to comfort the anxieties of parents, teachers and governments in a context where they themselves are being valorised on their ability to enable children to perform. At some level everyone understands the problem but feels trapped in a system where their own value in their job, or as a parent, is also based on their ability to enable children to perform within the system. The only voices, it seems, that can be heard now are those that offer answers to these anxieties.

However, the purpose of this thesis is not to critique performance in schools, or to suggest that schools should not have performance cultures. The problem, I will suggest, is not performance culture itself but how performance culture is not bounded by adequate structures in schools. This means that it has become a kind of cultural hegemony which affects a large number of processes in schools, many of which need to be guided by an alternative value system – student voice being a prime example. In other words I want to problematize the absence of alternative structures through which students can experience other roles and other value systems that constitute their identity and indicate how, without these structures, performance culture becomes a dominant variable, a variable which can affect students' experience and learning.

On this basis, the conclusions of this thesis will suggest that our current performance system is self-defeating on its own terms. This will not be done by looking to issues of children's rights and democracy, which are all valid and have already been well argued in the literature (Fielding, 2007b; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1989) but rather by arguing that even from an economic and market driven standpoint itself our current obsession with a very narrow performance is undermining the development of the kind of creative, active and innovative actors who will drive economic growth in the future. I will argue that, even from a neoliberal standpoint, the current system is unsustainable given the economic changes that are taking place now. I will also argue that our narrow idea of performance is reinforcing economic dependence rather than economic independence, reinforcing out of date passive organisational roles in a world which needs change agents, reinforcing a mindset which accepts a problematic status quo rather than faces and solve problems cooperatively, and most of all, potentially reinforcing a belief that organisations cannot be re-envisioned for the better.

A problematic question I have had to ask myself in positioning this thesis is what political position informs it. This is important, not because I want to position my own political standpoint, but to recognise right from the outset that this research is political and that political positions will affect how it is valorised and interpreted. This political tension runs throughout the thesis and I have consciously tried to avoid falling into the dogma of any particular position. In hindsight it supports aspects of multiple positions. For example, it supports the neoliberal interest in developing young peoples' capacity to drive innovation in organisations. Executives argue that, "*we can teach new hires the content, and we will have to because it continues to change, but we can't teach them how to think — to ask the right questions — and to take initiative*" (Friedman, 2013). However, these arguments have limits because when executives refer to 'innovation' and 'initiative' they do so within a very particular value system which may valorise 'innovation' but not necessarily change. This thesis is not just about enabling students who can innovate but also students who can critique and challenge organisations. Neoliberals want innovators, but only innovators in terms of increasing productivity, not innovators in terms of the social function of organisations.

In the same way the left leaning arguments can have limitations because they can focus overly on social agency and can avoid the difficult realities organisations face in a market economy. We are now living in a Europe which is likely to experience very low growth in its future. The system we have was designed for a time when employment was readily available, however the days of the passive student becoming the passive employee are ending, a whole new organisational world exists, with a whole new set of problems. It is not a world that will benefit passive students or benefit from them. Moreover, a host of new economic, social and environmental problems will need to be faced and these will require new kinds of organisations and institutions with new visions and purposes. This requires people with the agency to lead and take critical, creative and transformative roles. Additionally, we hear more and more about organisations with toxic organisational cultures. The corruption of our institutions is having an increasing effect on societal wellbeing. These organisations will need agents to drive positive and beneficial change in the future.

This research was done in a context where there has been a considerable move towards trying to develop students' agency in schools through student councils,

student leadership, student voice and students as researchers since the 1990s, particularly under New Labour in the UK. Much of this work has noble aims and indeed a lot of progress has been made in terms of integrating student voice in schools (see section 1.2). However in practice, when these ideas are adapted to the culture of schools, the underlying *purpose of, and justification for*, much of this work often becomes further increasing student engagement with performance, even if that is not initially intended. If you look underneath much of the rhetoric they are often processes which are essentially based on the late Victorian industrial reform model that '*increasing employee wellbeing improves performance*'. So, giving students a voice or leadership is done to increase their wellbeing and engagement in the school, and thus hopefully their performance. This may not seem problematic but in practice it creates ethical questions which this research attempts to contribute to our understanding of. The problem is that all experiences offered to young people in schools are *pedagogical* – in other words something is being taught and learned from these processes, or more accurately, from the *values* that drive these processes. At heart there is a considerable tension between developing students' change agency and performance culture and it is a tension that people find difficult to name because, I believe, it is deeply revealing of an ethical problem in schooling. Indeed, what this research will show is that what students may be learning from these processes is not how to use their change agency, but rather how to inhibit or co-opt it in order to be valorised by performance culture in organisations.

What is needed is a vision and purpose for student agency processes beyond just reengaging students in the status quo of their schools or increasing their wellbeing so they can perform. These visions exist, particularly in the work of thinkers like Henri Giroux and more recently Michael Fielding, however their visions tend to rely heavily on ethical, democratic and human rights concerns which are often sidelined as they fail to dampen government and parental anxieties, but rather add to them. What the current research attempts to offer is a practical vision which has an ethical basis but derives its legitimacy based on practical considerations about the dispositions, capacities and attitudes young people are going to need in order to deal with the transformations that will be needed in societies' organisations in the future. This practical vision will present a model as to how it could be applied to schooling.

The students

It is impossible to really express fully within a thesis what it is like to work with teenagers trying to change something in their school - frightening, frustrating, often funny and sometimes moving, and sometimes all these at the same time. These were students who were sceptical of adult led voice initiatives, who were not obliged to come to any sessions or activities, who could at any moment have just decided to drop the whole project but who still engaged with the process, often for complex reasons. Hopefully their voice comes through in this thesis, however the depth of the unconscious processes we all experienced is always difficult to capture in academic form.

This thesis attempts to focus on the students' experience and perceptions, rather than the reflections of the adults in the school. This is partly because, as Stoll (2006:124) notes "*education change literature has been rather quiet about students who are, fundamentally, the whole endeavor's rationale*". This is not because I feel teachers' views are unimportant or irrelevant to this process but rather that I wanted to capture the students' unique perspective and center the research on them in recognition that students are the "*only authentic chroniclers of their own experience*" (Delpit, 1988:297). Over the five months I learnt to understand, to some extent, their codes and the meaning of many of their behaviours, however there are always limitations to this and there are many aspects of their thinking that remain a mystery to me. The students owned this project perhaps more than this thesis suggests. Due to the nature of the argument I am making I focus on critical periods in the project, but there is also a whole range of interesting experiences that there was no space to cover in this thesis. As I would wait in the large room we had been allocated to work in, the students would slowly stream in for the session from the corridor and as we closed the doors they would often express themselves by running around the space with joyous abandon for a few minutes, and I learnt to let them do this. It seemed to be their way of drawing a boundary and owning our space. The project was an escape from the conditions of school for many of the students and it seemed to be no accident that those who seemed to be struggling most in the culture of the school were the most consistent attendees – at times they seemed to come just to feel differently about themselves for a while. In hindsight my reflection is that for many of these students

the most valuable part of the experience was how we constructed their problems, not just as individual issues they experienced in isolation, but as a social group issue.

These students, who were from working and middle class backgrounds, had entered secondary school just as the global crisis hit and I think this is significant. They potentially experienced higher adult anxiety about their performance than other generations. These were students with a strong sense of their voice and the idea that students had rights, but also students who experienced this as confusing to express within school. They also experienced a school where their teachers seemed extremely stressed about their students' performance. Moreover, these were students who still needed to be valued regardless of how well they fulfilled the role of student and over time I began to see their struggle as no different to that of a child starting school. They sought to be valued unconditionally in an organisation whose purpose it was to do the very opposite and their learning was how to adapt to this often painful reality. Some clearly found it easier than others, not because they had capacities or skills the others did not have, but because they found themselves more valued by the organisation and the organisation more valuable to them. Most of all, these were students who were constantly trying to understand the dynamics of the organisation they found themselves in because they simply had to in order to find a way of belonging and feeling safe there. Their learning was considerable and significant, indeed I cannot comment on these students learning in terms of the curriculum, but the depth of their understanding of the organisational dynamics in their schools was remarkable.

At the heart of this thesis is a story, and perhaps a rather depressing story - although how depressing the story seems might depend on the readers own politics. However like many sad stories it is a story that helps one imagine what a much better outcome would mean. The greatest difficulty about this story is that to an extent it is like one we have all already lived ourselves - we are all products of our schooling experience to some extent, we have all learnt about organisational life and our role already, we have come to accept many things about schooling and organisational life as 'normal' because we eventually learnt to accept that they were normal in order to adapt to schooling and belong. It is difficult, if not impossible, to turn back and see school from a child's perspective where everything is not given, not yet 'the way things are' but still to be internalised. In a sense this thesis is temporarily trying to make strange

what we have all learnt is normal, to make unreal what we have learnt is real, to question values we have all learnt are to some extent not questionable and most of all question purposes we learn not to question. It asks the reader to make their school experience 'other', to treat it temporally as something strange, to question what they learnt through it and why.

An interdisciplinary approach

The research takes an interdisciplinary approach between education and organisational theory – not only in the concerns it raises but in its methodological and conceptual approach. This interdisciplinary approach has been adopted previously by Greenfield (1975) and Handy and Aitken (1986). However, the original contribution this research makes is to explore students' learning about the organisation in terms of the role of change agent. Within the field of education it marries best with work done in the field of student voice and students as researchers, however, theoretically it is a work of organisational theory rather than of educational theory. In terms of connecting it to the literature this represented a constant struggle as concepts in the two fields do not always marry easily – and I struggled to fit what I was doing with traditional research expectations in terms of design, analysis and interpretation.

The thesis does not build on the work of any particular theorist but rather a wide range of work which is interconnected. Seminal theorists in the field of agency like Bourdieu, Willis, Bowles & Gintis, Giroux and Illich inform the work but it more closely builds on more radical work in the field of student voice which has involved students in enabling change (Fielding, 2001a; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Mitra, 2007; SooHoo, 1993) and in particular it focuses on concerns about how performance affects this work and students learning from that (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bland & Atweh, 2007; Fielding 2004a; McIntyre et al., 2005; Noyes, 2005; Silva, 2001; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003a; Thomson & Gunter, 2005; Whitty & Wisby, 2007; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, Thompson, 2010). Conceptually the thesis is based on work by Armstrong (2004), Bazalgette et al. (2005), Hutton (1997a), and Schein (1990) in terms of organisational theory (See Chapter 3).

The structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 looks at how the idea of students' change agency has been conceptualised and researched since the 70s. This involves looking at theoretical positions on how young people's agency is affected by schooling and the ideas of the hidden curriculum and resistance theory. The chapter then attempts to make an initial connection between these positions and organisational theory. The chapter concludes by looking at contemporary research in this field in student voice, students as researchers and students as change agents and exploring the problems this research has revealed.

Chapter 2 presents the methodology behind the research. It looks at the different methodologies that were considered, why Participatory Action Research was considered, its limitations and how the processes of Systemic Action Research were adopted to deal with those limitations. It then presents some of the different methods that were used and basic research information about the schools, selection, ethics *etc.*

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework that was adopted. This chapter presents the key concepts of organisational socialisation, organisation-in-the-mind, role, boundaries and systems which form the basis of how the findings were interpreted. It shows how the project was analysed as an emergent system in the school with its own boundaries and how the capacity to take the role of change agent is dependent on those boundaries. It also shows how findings were interpreted as evidence of organisational socialisation and an emerging organisation-in-the-mind of students.

Chapter 4 looks at the reflective stage of the project, the period before we took any action when we were just co-researching with the students their perspectives on their school experience. The chapter shows how students' attitude to enabling change was ambivalent and seemed to suggest significant learning. The main conclusions were that students saw change agency in the school as reinforced in higher performing students over others and that the students were conscious that enabling change can be an enactment to fulfill certain performance concerns. Additionally, it suggests that these students were concerned about their status in the school and that they found the idea of using their change agency difficult to valorise in the performance culture and were ambivalent about the consequences of using it on their status. It also noted that

they strongly connected enabling change to being consulted rather than acting, that they found a better culture difficult to imagine and that they found it difficult to understand their anger as being a positive motivation for action.

Chapter 5 presents the processes that occurred during the active stage of the project, when a decision was made on a task for the group and how the students decided to act on it. The chapter reinforces and adds to the findings from chapter 4. It shows how the boundaries of the project were weakened both by the school and the students which meant that the performance culture of the school, its roles, structures and values seeped into the project which served to legitimise the students' passivity. It shows how some of the students colluded in a process of enactment and how this seemed to be related to their internalisation of performance culture. They also resisted the process by reinforcing the student and teacher roles and structures of performance. It also shows how students may have perceived the whole process in performance terms and how their final negotiation with the leadership of the school seemed to be interpreted more as an examination of their performance than an opportunity to work in partnership with the school leadership on their concerns.

Chapter 6 returns to the idea of organisational socialisation and organisation-in-the-mind and asks what the findings suggest in this framework. The chapter suggests that the findings above represent learning about acting as a change agent in organisations and the students' behaviours could represent an internalised disposition towards inhibited change agency in organisation. It goes on to analyse what the findings suggest the students emerging organisation-in-the-mind could look like in terms of organisational change.

Chapter 7 explores issues specifically related to reflexivity and the researcher role. Chapter 8 looks at what the issues faced by this research suggest about leadership of projects of this type. It argues that the problems this project experienced in terms of the pressures of performance culture on its boundaries are likely to be experienced more intensely by school staff who run these projects and that structures need to be created to enable them to establish boundaries which are formally recognised by the school and students. It offers a model of how these structures could be introduced by treating these projects as 'a school within a school' with its own leadership role and

vision which has some independence from the performance expectations of the school.

Chapter 1: A critical review of how the development of young peoples' change agency is affected by schooling

In order to frame this review it is perhaps helpful to reframe the aims of this thesis in terms that may help make sense of how it fits with other literature. In this review the following questions related to the research aims are explored:

1. What are students learning about their disposition to transform organisations from their experience of schooling?
2. Are particular groups learning this differently, or to a greater extent, than others?
3. Is this a form of cultural production or reproduction?
4. Can it be affected through 'student voice' or 'students as change agents' work?

Showing why these questions may be important is something I have already indicated in the introduction and I now want to address the relevance of these questions to other debates in the literature. In order to do so I have to focus on a number of concepts through which these questions are implied, namely agency and structure, reproduction, resistance, habitus, organisation-in-the-mind and organisational socialisation. The chapter is broken into two main sections, section 1 explores the effects of schooling on change agency and section 2 explores student voice.

Understanding agency

In education the literature does not tend to refer directly to students acting as 'organisational change' agents per se but rather to the problem of student 'agency' (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977). This has represented a conceptual problem for the whole research because the concept of agency and the ongoing psychological and sociological debates about the relationship between structure and agency in education (McFaddon, 1995; Shilling, 1992) do not always sit easily with the idea of organisational change as it is conceived of in organisational theory or systems psychodynamics. This literature review itself is a way of introducing the reader to the concept of agency as it has been used in the sociology of schooling and student voice and form a backdrop to defining how the

concept will be used in this thesis. Within this literature review I am deliberately open to other views of the meaning of agency in order to relate them to how agency will be used in this thesis, and this is one of the aims of the review. However, it helps to provide a preliminary definition of how agency will be used in the thesis.

Agency is normally defined in tandem with structure where agency is a person's capacity to freely act, and structure is the context which may or may not limit this action. According to Vandebroek & Bouverne-De Bie, (2006:128), Wyness (1999) sees two theoretical approaches to childrens' agency:

“those who identify agency by positioning children in their own contexts and look at the micro level of peer interactions; and those who locate children within the broader (macro) social structure and are more interested in the systematic denial of this agency. The emphasis of the former is on identifying agency through the analysis of small-scale interactions and settings which act like micro-societies”.

In the case of this thesis the context is an organisation. This means we are discussing agency at a micro level but making inferences based on this to a macro level, in the sense that schooling has implications far beyond its own boundaries for students (which is its purpose to do). This means that agency is being understood as how, and the extent to which, a student affects, and is limited by, the school's organisational processes and structures. In this sense, we are discussing agency *in organisations*, which is similar to the systems concept of role (outlined in chapter 3).

On this basis, in this thesis agency is largely understood from an organisational perspective in terms of the organisational role one takes in an organisation. However, it is important to emphasise the difference between the concept of role and position. Position is static, for example 'teacher' is a position in that it is prescribed by the organisation. Role however refers to how the teacher chooses to behave within that position – how they express their free will within its limits. In others words, role is how they choose to respond to the aim of the organisation (Reed, 2001). In the same way 'student' or 'pupil' is a position prescribed by the school as an organisation, however how young people choose to actually adopt these as *roles* relates to how they

express their agency within the limits they experience. Throughout this thesis when agency is referred to it is done so within the context of the organisation and specifically the process of role taking in an organisation. The students' agency is how their free will is expressed by the role they choose to take, which is then limited by their understanding of the structure of the organisation. Change agency refers to the extent to which agency can be used with the purpose of affecting organisational change. This definition of agency is discussed in further depth in chapter 3.

This organisational perspective on agency can differ from how agency is used in the sociology of education in terms of the structures being discussed. In the sociology of education the structures can be wider sociological structures. In order to understand why I have adopted this organisational approach it is important to look at how the concept of agency has developed and understand the shift from a sociological to an organisational approach.

1.1 The effects of schooling on change agency

The first questions about how schooling affects students change agency were a reaction to functionalist studies of classroom processes in schools. Functionalists like Parsons looked at how, "*the school class functions to internalise in its pupils both the commitments and capacities for successful performance of their adult roles, and how it functions to allocate these human resources within the role structure of the adult society*"(1959:81). Parsons frames this socialisation as developing the "*commitment to the implementation of the broad values of society, and commitment to the performance of a specific type of role within the structure of society*" (1959:81). Parsons ideas naturally raised some fundamental questions that have never entirely gone away.

His work begs the question of whether being prepared to 'fit into a specific type of role within the structure of society' is problematic, what criteria it is based on, and to whose benefit this process might be occurring. Most of all, it begs the question, which underlies this whole thesis, as to what kind of *agency* students themselves have in this process. The assumption that this process was broadly positive would inspire an array

of critical questions for researchers. However, the very idea that schools were not just 'teaching subjects' but developing young people for organisational roles was an important contribution and led to researchers asking; what do students learn outside of the curriculum through schooling? What roles are they actually being prepared for?

In many ways Parsons had opened a can of worms in terms of what would become questions about the 'hidden curriculum' of schooling in terms of organisational socialisation. Robert Dreeben (1968) suggested that, rather than just the classroom, it was in the whole school as an institution that these processes were most significant. According to Lynch (1989:2), Dreeben saw the overall school prerequisites of *"performing alone, of having one's achievements judged by certain standards, of being treated as a member of a particular category, and of adapting to the experience of casual associations"* as contributing *"respectively to the promotion of norms of independence, achievement, universalism and specificity"*. It was not until Jackson (1968) that this term 'the hidden curriculum' was first coined to suggest that the processes Parsons was referring to might be more complex. These processes, as he saw them, were social requirements of the students to find a role in the institution, and in the sense that they were social requirements, they were also learned requirements about adapting to institutional life in a school. Jackson identified processes such as students learning to accept certain power relations, accept adaptation to an organisational group, and accept evaluation as a norm. By indicating that accepting these requirements was valorised by the school as an organisation Jackson was indicating that students were learning far more than a formal curriculum.

Around the same time, Goodwin Watson introduced what would become an important theme in the whole debate, *i.e.* that this hidden curriculum of schools could be indirectly designed to reinforce a particular kind of passivity in students. How Watson conceives of this is interesting as it is a conception I will return to later in this research. Watson does not focus on how school personally inhibits students' freedom but rather on how it develops in young people an 'illusion of impotence' by indirectly teaching them that they should not try and change the external conditions of their school experience. He argued, based on Freudian theory, that the process of schooling works with the development of the super-ego to reinforce in young people a distrust of their own impulses for change;

“within each young person there are powerful forces condemning and repressing any impulses which do not correspond with the established routines, standards and institutions of society as it is and has been. Every clash between their desires and what adults expect of them adds an increment to each child’s self-rejection. ‘They must be right: I must be naughty to have such terrible feelings.’ This guilt is mobilized to prevent action for change, men conclude that they are not worthy of a better life. To be ‘good’ is to accept the status quo ante” (Watson, 1971:11).

Watson’s work was powerful because he made a connection between this passivity he saw as learned through schooling and the passivity he researched in working class men during the great depression in America:

“The author, during the depth of the economic depression, found that most of a sample of unemployed men did not lay the blame for their predicament on faulty social mechanisms. Rather they internalised their responsibility. They said ‘I ought to have stayed on in school’ or ‘it was my fault that I lost the job’ or ‘I shouldn’t have said what I did’ or ‘I should have waited to get married and have a family. Only about one in five wanted to change the economic system, the majority only blamed themselves” (Watson, 1971:11).

In making the connection between the process of schooling and the dispositions of these men Watson indirectly suggested reproduction was occurring. He suggested that children, through schooling, learnt not to locate the locus of change for their problems externally and to fear change, which then affected their attitude to problematic situations as adults.

The complexities of these processes, however, were often best understood by practitioners. A.S. Neill had set up the experimental school ‘Summerhill’ in 1924 and developed a theory as to how schooling developed anti-social behavior in students. Neill believed one of the core problems of schooling was that it was not voluntary and was imposed and thus freedom was impossible within the given structures. Students felt hostile to this oppression but naturally found it difficult to express hostility towards parents or authority figures based on their dependency on them in terms of positive projections and identity formation. Because of this, children were more likely to internalise that hostility into forms of self-hate. This self-hate was then expressed

through passive forms of self-exclusion from the organisation or disruptive behavior. Although Neill did not discuss how this affected student change agency the implication of his work was that the students may learn to disengage from the organisation at one level in order to adapt to it at another level, in other words belonging on adult terms may lead to a dysfunctional organisational relationship for students. Although he never fully developed these theories they were remarkably ahead of their time and, as will be seen, still have great validity in relation to the debate today.

During this period a similar approach worth discussing is Cusick's research outlined in his (1973) book *Inside High School*. He analysed the process and incentives that maintained students in what he called a subordinate position and how students are 'denied freedom of activity', 'massed' and 'undifferentiated'. He argued that "*it is the teacher who articulates the total learning experience, not the student (1973:212)*". He concluded that the main concern of the school seemed to be with "*orderliness, attention and compliance*" rather than learning and that because of that students themselves seemed more concerned with the organisational processes of compliance than with their actual learning. What was most important was his approach in that he argued that a symbolic interactionist point of view meant that "*instead of attributing the students' behavior to their social class, individual psychology, age, homelife, or parental relations, we should rather examine the environment where that behavior took place (1973:205)*". This meant that the meaning of students' behavior in school could often be explained as a rational response to their experience of the school as an organisation, rather than necessarily a product of home life or their individual psychology. More specifically he argued that students' behaviour was a response to what the school as an organisation did not offer them in terms of fulfilling their social and developmental needs. This opened up the idea that much of the behavior that was perceived as problematic in schools could be being caused by the way schools themselves were structured, which would become important in later work like Bowles and Gintis's.

Freire and Critical pedagogy

Many of the thinkers I later discuss were significantly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, and it is in his work that we find the core ideas of the field now called

‘critical pedagogy’. It is also particularly useful to look back to Paulo Freire’s work as it frames the concern for transformation that underlies much of the work of Neo-Marxists. Freire’s work focused on transforming education into a process that would enable students to transform the status quo (which for Freire was characterised by social injustice), rather than merely conform to it. As Mayo summarises, Freire argued that;

"there is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Mayo, 1999:5).

Freire makes a division between what he sees as the ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressors’ and, in terms of schooling, argues that the oppressed (which can be both students and teachers) need to come to ‘critical consciousness’ about how they are oppressed and then through a process of ‘praxis’ (critical reflection focused on taking action) work for social transformation. However, he argued that the oppressed must develop their own model for liberation because they have been taught to identify with the value system and power relations of the oppressor. They have learnt that “to be men is to be oppressors” (1968:45) and therefore may see liberation as reproducing the power status of their oppressors. Therefore, before they attempt liberation they must reflect on, and develop a clear understanding of what liberation means for them, otherwise their attempt at liberation may replicate the status quo. Freire also notes that this process may be difficult as the oppressed may have a ‘fear of freedom’ because freedom means ejecting the internalised values of the oppressor and replacing it with “*autonomy and responsibility*” (ibid, 47).

However, he sees the main obstacle to liberation as the banking concept of education. The banking concept of education, where students are seen as a tabula rasa to be filled leads to a situation where “*the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits*” (ibid, 72). This banking concept of education reinforces an idea of people as manageable because “*the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical*

consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world (ibid, 73)". Perhaps most relevant is how Freire equates the banking concept of education to passivity. He argues that banking education teaches people to perceive their state as fated and unalterable, whereas critical pedagogy would enable them to see their situation as merely limiting and therefore a situation that can be challenged and transformed; "*whereas the banking method directly or indirectly reinforces men's fatalistic perception of their situation, the problem posing method presents this very situation to them as a problem (ibid, 85)*".

In terms of application of his theories Freire focuses on a dialogue based approach. Through this dialogue the potential for social transformation becomes possible because the teacher can allow for a problem-posing approach from students. This problem-posing education enables students to act as "*critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher*" (ibid, 81) which would enable critical intervention in reality. Freire argues that this approach could lead to a new culture which may allow students to recognise themselves as "producers of culture" (Puiggros, 2006) and lead to social transformation.

There are two issues that are worth discussing here. The first is Freire's perception of power, which is of power as binary oppositions – the 'oppressed' and the 'oppressor'. He provides no clear definition of the distinction and does not clarify whether it is an objective or subjective position. This could be problematic if an oppressor perceives themselves as oppressed or vice versa, which in any organisation is always complex. Freire notes that "*an act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human (1968, 57)*" however acts by the oppressed on the oppressors could equally be experienced as preventing the oppressor from being more fully human. Indeed, in terms of schooling both students and teachers may experience themselves as the 'oppressed'.

Secondly, in terms of this thesis, what Freire see as the context of action is worth discussing. When he speaks of 'problems' and 'change' the tendency is to discuss injustices outside of the school system itself – in "the world". "*Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge.*" (1968:81). The locus of change, for the oppressed person, could be construed here as

lying outside the school system. However, he also argues that “*the point of departure must always be with men and women in the ‘here and now’ which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged*”. On this basis the problem may not only relate to issues outside of the school experience but also issues within that experience, i.e. within schools themselves. In terms of organisational theory and the concept of agency being worked through in this thesis, Freire’s approach does not deal with the messy complexity of what his theory means for the student as subject in a school and whether the transformation of their world is a dialogue about what is occurring outside the school as a system, or an attempt to transform the school itself as a system. In other words in terms of agency it is not entirely clear what the ‘structure’ is in Freire’s writing and whether there are distinctions in the problems of agency in different structures.

Nevertheless, Freire’s work represented a radical critique of what he saw as the dominant educational approach and powerfully introduced the notion that schooling could be intentionally disabling students capacity to develop as critical actors in the world because of the ‘oppressors’ interest in maintaining the status quo of power relations. However, his binary opposition of the oppressed and the oppressor would be developed in a more nuanced way by later neo-Marxists writers in critical pedagogy.

The Neo-Marxist critique

The ideas of functionalists like Parsons that the way in which schools organisationally socialised children was consensual came under most sustained attack not only from Freire, but also from other neo-Marxists, and it is within this field that the future debate in the sociology of education was partly focused. For the Neo Marxists;

“education was not about equality, but inequality.. education’s main purpose of the social integration of class society could only be achieved by preparing most kids for an unequal future, and by insuring their personal undevelopment. Far from productive roles in the economy simply waiting to be fairly filled by the products of education, the ‘Reproduction’ perspective reverses this to suggest that capitalist production and its roles required certain educational outcomes” (Willis, 1983:110).

Bowles and Gintis, in their controversial work *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) attempted to show how schools reward students who conform to the status quo and penalise or exclude those who do not, and their argument proposed that this process itself was intended. They argued that *“the social order of the school involves submission to a set of authority relationships which are inimical to personal growth”* (1976:42) and asked *“why do schools reward docility, passivity and obedience?”* (ibid: 42). Their answer was that this was mainly due to the power capitalist interests had taken in schools in terms of promoting “business methods” and “efficient management” and how the student had become “an object” to these interests. Students, nor teachers, were controlling their educational experience, rather it was being moulded in the interests of capitalism which desired passive employees who would not critically challenge organisations. To *“reproduce the labor force, the schools are destined to legitimate inequality, limit personal development to forms compatible with submission to authority, and aid in the process whereby youth are resigned to their fate.”* (ibid: 42). Bowles and Gintis’s argument hinged on the idea that this occurred in a school due to ‘a structural correspondence’ between its social relations and those of production. This structural correspondence could be seen in, for example; the hierarchical division of labour in schools which prepares students for submissive roles, the alienated nature of pupils’ work (in how they cannot construct their own learning), the fragmentation in work reflected in *“the institutionalized and often destructive competition among students”* (ibid:131), the exam system which prepares them to accept status divisions and competition in organisations, and the process of streaming and the different levels of schooling which *“feeds workers into different levels in the occupational structure”* (ibid: 132). Additionally, Bowles and Gintis showed how many of these processes were reinforced at the lower levels of the hierarchy in schools.

The analysis offered by Bowles and Gintis is valuable for two key reasons. Firstly, they look at the organisational experience of schooling holistically, accepting that there is no one hidden curriculum but rather that students experience different hidden curricula based on their own status. It is in this way that social class reproduction actually occurs. Secondly, they supported with research the idea that a ‘structural correspondence’ exists between the social relations of school life and the social relations of production and how the social relations of school life are internalised by

students. The analysis of how this structural relationship actually occurs has been considered unconvincing (Demaine, 1981:105); however, the idea that there was a structural correspondence at all was important, and the debate about the nature of that correspondence would, as will be shown, become important.

For Bowles and Gintis, students have little agency or resistance in affecting this situation, they, and the school are largely passive victims of external pressures on schools and because of this, their work has been criticised for its determinism (Apple, 1988; Moore, 1988), not to mention the problems with their supporting research. These critics would go on to suggest that the education system produces culture itself, rather than just reproduces the external prevailing culture, a point Bowles and Gintis concede to some extent in their later work (2002). Bowles and Gintis, and other neo Marxists, are also criticised for their ideological assumptions that all features of the schooling process are solely determined by capitalism (Collins, 1979; King, 1980) rather than a multiplicity of forces, and criticised for simply being ‘vulgar’ in assuming such a deterministic relationship (Hargreaves, 1982). Bowles and Gintis’s argument does at times seem overly skewed in order to act as a critique of capitalism, particularly in its reliance on external forces and its inability to account for how internal processes in schools may produce similar outcomes. Additionally, as Livingstone (1995:60) notes; “*various critics dismissed their treatment of educational ideology as based on a top-down, one-dimensional view of domination/value internalisation*”. This is important, as Bowles and Gintis’s portrayal of students and teachers as somehow victims of this process because of their apparent lack of resistance to it does not allow for their potential collusion, acceptance or even support for the external values determining the structure of their school experience. In other words educational ideology may be internalized in more complex ways than simply internalized from the top down.

Resistance theory

At the same time as Bowles and Gintis forwarded this idea of a structural correspondence, Paul Willis in his book *Learning to Labour* (1977) significantly complicated this idea by showing how working class boys seemed to reproduce their own working class consciousness and social relations through an alternative sub-culture they created in reaction to the structures of the school. This idea had been

implied in the early work of Hargreaves (1967) who showed how pupils in the lower streams of a streaming system created an anti-academic subculture because they had been labeled as failures. However, Hargreaves did not develop what this might mean as a socialisation process. Willis showed how, in resisting the authority of the school, a resistance which was experienced as affirming and empowering, working class boys created a masculine subculture like that found on the shop-floor of a factory. Their focus was on avoiding work through truancy, roaming the corridors and even going to the wrong classes. Unlike in Bowles and Gintis's model, where organisational passivity was imposed on students, these students had agency – however an agency that, though experienced as empowering, they actually used to disengage from any formal possibility of affecting the organisation. Indeed, it is questionable whether this resistance is agency at all given that it did not seem to have any effect on the structure of the school. Willis argued that their practices of resistance in school locked them into a creating a culture that would prepare them to accept a subordinate social position later in life, *i.e.* that they would reproduce this organisational resistance as adults. Though this seemed like a highly negative reaction, according to Walker (1986:60) Willis also saw it as;

“a highly creative process in which through making and remaking their own culture 'the lads' exercise a certain freedom and autonomy, transcending sheer cause-and-effect mechanisms of social structures. Secondly, on a small-group based cultural level, 'the lads' see through - 'penetrate' - ideological mystifications of schooling, such as doctrines of equal opportunity, credentialism and career choice. Their rejection of school, their resistance to authority and their aggressive confidence in their own vibrant culture are confirmed by these penetrations.”

In this way, though their behavior is a kind of self-damnation, they experience it as empowering and as true learning.

As Lynch (1989:16) points out, what is most important about Willis's findings is that they challenge the idea that it is the hidden curriculum of school structure that causes reproduction but suggests that it can be the hidden curriculum of student resistance that causes cultural production. In other words schools *create the conditions* whereby students then produce certain cultures. Perhaps the most problematic part of Willis's

work is that the twelve students he worked with represented relatively extreme forms of resistance which do not capture the behavior of other working class pupils who nevertheless can reproduce the same behavior in a factory setting. This suggests that though Willis's work explains one process, there must be other processes occurring and other ways students adapt that cause reproduction, indeed, the work of Woods (1979) suggested that a model of student resistance alone could not capture the various ways in which students adapted to schooling. Ultimately however, for this work, Willis is important in suggesting that certain students who experience resistance to the school's culture may not experience this as disempowering but may find disengaging from the formal organisation an empowering process.

Perhaps the most important effect Willis's work had was to challenge the inherent pessimism of Bowles and Gintis's theory where the possibilities of social change seemed slight because schools were determined to reproduce the status quo. Apple stated of Bowles and Gintis's correspondence theory; "*if schools are wholly determined and can do no more than mirror economic relations outside of them, then nothing can be done within the educational sphere*" (Apple, 1980:6), a point that Willis himself later supports, as he says of Bowles and Gintis's theory; "*there is no theoretical basis for a politics of change, for the production of alternative or radical consciousness*" (1981:56; 1983:121). Willis's (1976, 1977, 1981) work overcame this by suggesting that students in schools produce their own culture to some extent and in doing so he opened up the idea that transforming schools could lead to social change of some kind, an idea followed up by Michael Apple (1988), Henry Giroux (1980) and Anyon (1981). This was a significant shift but one that is rightly treated with suspicion by some commentators who see the need to make space for the 'radical social change' agenda as putting "*the political cart ... before the social-scientific horse, thereby crippling the horse in the process*" (Hargreaves, 1982:110).

Hargreaves may have a point because the problem with this apparent shift may be that it is not really a shift at all because though the students in Willis research show independent agency, in Willis's account the nature and content of that agency is still determined by the structures of the school. In other words, they do create their own culture but the nature and quality of the culture they create is still determined, rather than based on their own free agency. The question remains as to whether the students' behavior in Willis's research could be understood as agency at all when it has no

effect on organisational structures of any kind, and indeed represents a retreat from developing a disposition towards enabling change in organisations.

Despite its problems in terms of explaining agency, resistance theory's attempt to explain the reproduction of educational disadvantage remains potent as it challenged traditional notions of school resistance. Apple argued that the problem was that we often located deficiencies, deviance and failure in the child, rather than in the systems that affected the child, that we were "*defining the ultimate causes of this deviance as within the child or his or her culture*" (1983:95). Giroux further suggests that "*conservative educators analysed opposition primarily through psychological categories that served to define such (resistance) behavior as 'deviant' but more importantly, as disruptive and inferior – a failing on the part of the individuals and groups that created it*" (1983:26). This can lead to the deficit being located in the child rather than in adult constructions of schooling. Apple argued that the focus of change needed to be shifted onto the systems and structures that affected the child. It is this idea of where the locus of change should lie which is crucial in terms of this research.

Problems in resistance theory and Henri Giroux

Resistance theory was further developed in the work of Anyon (1981), Giroux (1983) and McLaren (1986). However, resistance theory is problematic as an analytical framework for research. Giroux (1983) argues that forms of oppositional behaviour need to be differentiated between those which are actually accommodating and those which are resistance with an emancipatory motivation and Giroux argues that the ability to make this distinction should be one of the aims of resistance theory. It is Giroux (1983) who first attempted to turn resistance theory into a 'critical science'. He argued that resistance theory had to look at how students, teachers and others were agents in the process and whether there was a difference between the oppressive structures of domination and how they actually unfolded, and what their effects were. Though Giroux was also trying to escape the pessimism of determinism, his call to critically understand the relationship between human agency and the structures that cause reproduction was important as it introduced a more complex psychological perspective whereby humans can collude in their own oppression. He argued that;

“resistance and reproduction approaches to education share the failure of recycling and reproducing the dualism between structure and agency, a failure that has plagued educational theory and practice for decades, while simultaneously presenting its greatest challenge. Consequently neither position provides the foundation for a theory of education that links structures and institutions to human agency and action in a dialectical manner” (1983:5).

Giroux also problematises this resistance theory in a nuanced way which is very important for this research, he notes that not all students turn their experiences of oppression in school into acts of rebellion as Willis’s students did. Giroux argues that;

”what resistance theorists have failed to acknowledge is that some students are able to see through the lies and promises of the dominant school ideology but decide not to translate this insight into extreme forms of rebelliousness. In some cases the reason for this decision may be an understanding that overt rebelliousness may result in powerlessness now and in the future” (1983:32).

Perhaps far more importantly many choose not to act on these insights but rather adapt as best as possible anyway for pragmatic reasons, in a sense these students choose not to voice their resistance in order to succeed within the system. The adaptation these students make represents a far more potent (and probably more representative) cultural reproduction, in that these students end up reinforcing the status quo. Even though this is experienced as oppressive, it brings a limited kind of success, status, and belonging, as defined by the school system. Giroux also points out, following on the work of Walker (1986) that a focus on the more extreme acts of student resistance overlooks the more subtle but more common forms of resistance where students disengage from certain school practices but nevertheless maintain the outward appearance of conformity. This kind of resistance may be far more usual and in its own way shows a sophistication and progressiveness in that the appearance of conformity may not always mean actual submission. Students in these cases have little political sense of being dominated or oppressed but do experience a need to disengage without excluding themselves from the opportunities and safety provided by the system.

It is when Giroux indicated the need for a deeper psychological understanding of how students experience domination that he links to an idea that is missing from neo-marxist discourse. He argues that;

“radical educators have a lamentable tendency to ignore the question of needs and desires in favour of issues that center around ideology and consciousness. A critical psychology is needed that points to the way in which “un-freedom” reproduces itself in the psyche of human beings” (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985:103).

Critical Pedagogy's and the Neo Marxist's focus on liberating students and teachers always seemed to assume that students and teachers would perceive themselves as oppressed and desire change from a neo-Marxist perspective. However, even if students and teachers do perceive themselves as oppressed and desire change, the very rational and practical human need to belong, be included, and receive positive projections in an institution may be a priority for them, which may explain why not all working class students behave like Willis's 'lads'. This psychological need to belong and the organisations capacity to turn that into status provides the experience of safety in an organisation where forms of exclusion are rife. Indeed, students need to belong might be unconsciously manipulated in a host of ways by the organisation in order to produce compliance. Willis's lads created an alternative culture to experience belonging through, however they are a particular case of disengaged working class boys. The vast majority of students may seek belonging to the status quo as they learn, and perhaps are intended to learn, that being excluded at any level in a school is unsafe and represents deviance and exclusion.

Like Willis, Giroux is limited by the Marxist framework from which he writes, because this framework struggles to respond to suggestions that the emancipatory perspective may be limited. Instead, the Marxist framework forwards the notion of emancipation, that students can critically transcend their schooling experience. Giroux argues that *“resistance must be situated in a perspective that takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interest”* (1983:34). This focus on escaping the idea that young people's change agency may be determined by their experience of schooling, and the liberation of some kind if possible, may inhibit neo-Marxists from fully

grappling with the psychological complexities of submission and the theoretical problem, and evidence, of students and teachers *not* desiring ‘emancipation’.

Beyond the dialectic of structure and agency – Pierre Bourdieu

It is in the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) where the correspondence between society and schooling in terms of reproduction is perhaps most developed. It is not possible within the bounds of this review to explore Bourdieu in any depth but a limited overview of its implications for organisational change is important.

Bourdieu’s argument is essentially that schools embody the dominant culture of society and are structured in such a way as to favour those with a cultural capital they recognise. In this way, Bourdieu argues, the culture of the dominant class is imposed through schooling on other groups in an act of ‘symbolic violence’. This act is allowed to occur because schools seem independent and neutral because what is reproduced is not dominance in economic capital but the dominance of less visible cultural and symbolic capitals.

Bourdieu’s theory rests on the key concept of ‘habitus’. His own definitions of habitus can be very obscure, for example; “*The habitus is a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices*” (1977:7) or also “*a system of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action*” (1977:40) which reflect the interests of the dominant class. Perhaps Bidet’s reinterpretation is clearer: Habitus is “*the culture (of an epoch, class or any group) as it is internalised by the individual in the form of durable dispositions that are at the basis of his/her behaviour*” (1979:203). In other words, it largely refers to how class culture is embodied in a person. In simple terms the habitus of privileged groups is recognised as cultural capital and the structures of the school reinforce it as ‘successful’ whereas for underprivileged groups their habitus is not recognised as cultural capital and its connection to failure is reinforced. The additional complexity is that underprivileged groups themselves then misrecognise the processes and values of education and school as belonging to the dominant culture and exclude themselves from it – ‘education does not belong to me’, a process similar to that seen in Willis’s research. The consequence of this is the primary task of schooling becomes, for some, facilitating the acquisition of the habitus of the dominant group as this is the only means of success.

Bourdieu's theory has significant implications for change agency because it suggests that different groups will experience change agency differently in schools. For underprivileged groups the process of acquiring the habitus of the dominant group means a higher level of assimilation and submission to organisational structures, as Harker (1984:119) states;

“the schools reward with 'success' only those students who acknowledge the criteria of that success and the authority of the school and its teachers to dispense it. With the schools embodying only one 'currency' of cultural capital, this has a very powerful assimilationist outcome”.

This means that higher levels of organisational passivity may be required of underprivileged groups in order to succeed. This also means that they may learn to locate the need for change in themselves rather than in organisational structures and learn to perceive the act of challenging organisational structures as detrimental to the process of acquiring the habitus of the dominant class. In this sense, Bourdieu's theory may imply that those with a cultural capital most recognised by the school will experience the least desire to change its culture – whilst those with a cultural capital least recognised by the school will experience the strongest need to change the schools culture but also be given the least opportunity to do so as the pressure on them to passively assimilate is higher.

Bourdieu's theory however struggles in its determinism because for these students their habitus and the field (context) it relates to are largely defined at an early age. Giroux (1982:7) has argued that Bourdieu's theory of habitus excludes the possibility of agency in its determinism and that *“the notion of habitus smothers the possibility for social change.”* Underprivileged students are locked into a system they cannot affect and in Bourdieu's analysis do not even seem to have the capacities to change. Harker (1984) argues that there is room for agency in Bourdieu's theory but only largely outside of the school through reproduction in families. Bourdieu's theories are very challenging to the notion of young people's change agency in schools as they would suggest that even the concept of young people having agency is problematic as they are already determined to a large extent by their received habitus.

Bourdieu would seem to be suggesting that those whose habitus is recognised positively by the school are less likely to want to change the school, and those whose habitus is challenged by the school are more likely to simply misrecognise school as not belonging to their culture thus do not feel the ownership needed to use their agency, or will locate the need for change internally rather than externally. In other words Bourdieu's theory may go some way to explaining why working class pupils may be less likely to use their agency in recognised ways by the school – such as through student councils, student voice projects or even student as researchers. The significance of Bourdieu's theory is that for working class students the whole process of schooling, either because they misrecognise its ownership and disengage from it, or because they focus on conformity to acquire the dominant habitus, means underprivileged students may be more likely to experience organisational passivity as valorised by the school.

Schooling as creating institutional dependency

De-schoolers added a wider element to the understanding of how schooling effects agency by arguing that schooling reproduces institutional conservatism by inculcating a passive dependency on institutions which is reproduced in adulthood.

Ivan Illich argues that “*the existence of schooling produces the demand for schooling*” (1970:38) because one of the main learning processes of schooling is simply to learn that schooling is needed and that one is dependent on it, the aim of this being to teach that institutions are needed and that one is dependent on them, which is then reproduced. In essence “*school prepares for the alienating institutionalization of life by teaching the need to be taught*” (ibid:47). Illich argues that, through schooling, non-professional activity and self-teaching is discredited, the value of learning can only be legitimised by an institution. Also young people allow their imaginations to be formed by curricular instruction and thus are conditioned to accept institutional control over their creativity and “*the transfer of responsibility from self to institution guarantees social regression*” (ibid:39). Even those who resist schooling can never stop seeking being legitimised by institutions and thus never really challenge the status quo. Even more importantly school “*initiates young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself*”.

As children learn to submit to having their growth measured by an institution, they also begin to do it to themselves and seek to measure their own growth according to the status quo such that *“they no longer have to be put in their place but put themselves in their assigned slots”*(ibid:40). The other consequence of this is that what cannot be measured stops seeming valuable and indeed can seem threatening. Illich’s critique of schooling is particularly important, for this work, in how it suggests students will collude with maintaining the organisations status quo in order to maintain their own dependency on how it valorises their passivity. This means that students desire to change the organisation may be experienced as far weaker than their need to maintain its structures, because those structures legitimise their dependency.

However, it was not just neo-Marxists who saw schooling as inculcating passivity into the status quo, American liberals were arguing the very same from a different standpoint. Perhaps the most influential of these being Neil Postman. Postman saw huge conflict of interest in the education system whereby it was largely designed by those who have no interest in producing active questioning citizens, he is worth quoting at length on this point:

“In our society as in others, we find that there are influential men at the head of important institutions who cannot afford to be found wrong, who find change inconvenient, perhaps intolerable, and who have financial or political interests they must conserve at any cost. Such men are, therefore, threatened in many respects by the theory of the democratic process and the concept of an ever-renewing society. Moreover, we find that there are obscure men who do not head important institutions who are similarly threatened because they have identified themselves with certain ideas and institutions which they wish to keep free from either criticism or change. Such men as these would much prefer that the schools do little or nothing to encourage youth to question, doubt, or challenge any part of the society in which they live, especially those parts which are most vulnerable. 'After all,' say the practical men, 'they are our schools, and they ought to promote our interests, and that is part of the democratic process, too’” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969:7).

Postman goes on to argue then that our focus should be on developing students who can think critically about society and be, as he calls it, effective ‘crap detectors’. He

develops a notion of the hidden curriculum as teaching these main lessons; his analysis here relates very closely to an analysis of learning from performance culture:

- *“Passive acceptance is a more desirable response to ideas than active criticism.*
- *Discovering knowledge is beyond the power of students and is, in any case, none of their business.*
- *Recall is the highest form of intellectual achievement, and the collection of unrelated 'facts' is the goal of education.*
- *The voice of authority is to be trusted and valued more than independent judgment.*
- *One's own ideas and those of one's classmates are inconsequential.*
- *Feelings are irrelevant in education.*
- *There is always a single, unambiguous right answer to a question” (1969:21).*

Postman is essentially looking for schools to create ‘free thinkers’ who can critically analyse society. However, there is less focus on whether and how they might change society and there tends to be an assumption that with learning to think critically in school it follows that one learns to *act* critically. In a sense Postman’s theory, which is very representative of the progressive liberal tradition in the US, overlooks the socialising institutional experience of school forwarded by writers like Illich. For Postman we can formally teach young people to be critical thinkers even if their informal institutional experience teaches them something different in terms of organisational roles. However, surely an authentic critical thinker in school would also need to be able to act critically within a school as an organisation when, as Postman argues, critically challenging organisations is of such importance? If they never experience acting critically in their lived experience, then learning to think critically is legitimised as sufficient – and indeed ‘thinking critically’ without acting becomes a kind of cultural capital itself.

Reproduction and neo-liberalism

Although concerns about reproduction have been largely dominated by the left there is a growing critique of schooling from commentators on the right who believe that

the way in which schools inculcate passivity is in fact a problem for Capitalism, rather than a product of Capitalism. For example, the outspoken American teacher John Taylor Gatto argues that the real purpose of schools has little to do with traditional notions of teaching and learning rather, he argues; “*schools teach exactly what they are intended to teach and they do it well: how to be a good Egyptian and remain in your place on the pyramid.*” (1992:14). His argument is that cultural production occurs through seven key processes that teachers indirectly find themselves teaching about institutional life. They are to accept; confusion, class position, indifference, emotional dependency, intellectual dependency, provisional self-esteem, and that ‘one can’t hide’. Gatto’s argument that children learn through schooling how their decisions, success and confidence need to be validated by an authority figure in order to be legitimate is perhaps his most important contribution to understanding how schools produce passivity and inhibit young people from challenging or attempting to change institutions. Additionally, this learning of provisional self-esteem could be an important cultural vessel through which schools produce adult inhibitions about changing institutions.

This dependent mindset fostered by schools is one that Gatto sees as problematic for his American view of Capitalism where the notion of the passive employee needs to be replaced with a focus on capitalist agency. This critique is also shared by many of those who wish to foster entrepreneurship. For researchers in entrepreneurship education evidence suggests formal schooling discourages entrepreneurship (Kourilsky, 1995; Plaschka & Welsch, 1990; Timmons, 1994) by encouraging the adoption of passive organisational roles (English & Jones, 2004) a fear of failure (Kourilsky, 1990) and discouraging divergence in behaviour and thinking in the classroom and school which leads to passivity (Kourilsky, 1990). These critiques, though they share a different concern to neo Marxists, perceive similar problems in schooling. In an age of low growth the concern to develop entrepreneurs has increased in relevance, particularly social entrepreneurs (Leadbeater, 1997; Tracey & Phillips, 2007; Wallace, 1999). However, more relevant for this work is the growing concern to develop ‘intrapreneurs’ (Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2003), those who act in entrepreneurial ways within established organisations – who are disposed towards internally transforming unproductive, visionless or corrupt organisations.

Change agency and the organisational perspective

Organisational theory and systems psychodynamics may also have important contributions to make to any discussion of organisational change agency in schools. In a sense this research represents a cross-disciplinary approach between education and organisational theory on the issue of change agency in schools. One of the weaknesses, I would argue, of the whole debate about agency is that it is overly focused on the sociological context. From Bowles and Gintis to Willis, to Giroux and Bourdieu the cultural production or reproduction that occurs is of a sociological role – the overarching focus is on developing a coherent sociological explanation rather than see the school as a unique organisational context with unique dynamics that cannot necessarily be interpreted in the wider theories of sociology. What is missing from this analysis is that students' primary experience in school is of an *organisational* role, not a sociological one – and they may not experience the same limits in the sociological roles they take outside of school. In other words the role they find at school may be a distinct one which would benefit from analysis in organisational terms.

Systems theory, on the basis of the concept of boundaries, would argue that students make a significant distinction between the school as a system and its sociological context and that the roles and agency they experience and indeed may reproduce in school may not be reproduced in other sociological contexts. Theorists on reproduction, because they want to develop general social theories on schooling, can tend to leap from the personal to the social without fully analysing the mediating factors of organisational life, and in doing so may be missing the key locus of reproduction. Schooling in the West represents 12 years in the same kind of organisation for most young people and throughout that time their primary experience is of having a *role* in an organisation. The primary mediation they have to work out is relating their person to that role and relating that role to the organisation. These are the mediations that dominate students' experience of their agency. As school is a young person's primary organisational experience over the time they are there they develop what Hutton (1997a) calls an 'organisation-in-the-mind' – a mental construct of the organisation and their role in it. This 'organisation-in-the-mind', if it is of the

same organisation during the developmental period of childhood, becomes something deeply internalised that may be a significant factor in cultural production and reproduction. It is important to point out that ‘organisation-in-the-mind’ is not wholly determined by the structures of the school but rather the product of how the person relates with those structures. Acting as an organisational change agent then involves a purposeful mediation with an organisational system, *ie* it involves finding, making and taking a particular psychological *role* in relation to an organisational system (Bazalgette et al., 2005). This involves not only mediating with an organisation in its reality but also mediating with how that organisation is constructed ‘in-the-mind’ (Armstrong, 1997, 2004; Hutton, 1997a, 2000). In other words acting as an organisational change agent is acting on the organisation through one’s own internalised mental and emotional construct of the organisation – which will include how one has internalised the organisations culture. So, when students attempt to act as change agents, it is understood as both a real process but also as a psychological mediation with their own internalised construct of the organisation and its culture.

In this sense the culture of school and how it is internalised is crucial to the debate. Culture in organisations is often best understood as unquestioned assumptions about ‘the way things are done here’ – it involves basic assumptions about the roles, values and behaviours that best achieve a purpose. Schein (1992) argues that culture exists because it helps the organisation to survive and perform, and thus cultures form, in large part, based on performance.

From an organisational perspective, students, in learning to adapt to a school’s culture, internalise that culture to the extent that culture comes to represent a kind of reality. Over time their experience of taking a role and emotionally mediating with this culture forms a particular mental construct of the organisation ‘in-the-mind’. It is this process of organisational socialisation and how it forms the organisation-in-the-mind which may be the most distinct effect schooling has on students change agency. This organisation-in-the-mind a student leaves school with will not necessarily affect their social behavior but only create dispositions towards behaviours within or towards organisations. The important point about organisation-in-the-mind is that the students are likely to accept or reproduce similar structures and roles they experienced in school, because of the emotional experiences they learnt to

connect to organisational behaviours during the most developmental, and vulnerable, period of their lives. For example, students may have learnt, and witnessed, that changing aspects of the organisation may expose them to types of exclusion and integrated this learning into their organisation-in-the-mind. However they may also resist attempting change because changing the organisation also involves changing an internal construct they themselves hold which may provide an experience of safety and control. Schools, as has been argued, produce or reproduce passivity but this is not a generalized passivity, it is an *organisational passivity* and has distinct organisational qualities.

The value of this organisational perspective is that it accepts that schooling is a unique organisational experience that many people transcend, *ie* that its main influence is on our organisational behavior rather than necessarily determining wider sociological behaviours. More importantly it enables to us to be more specific here about the problem about agency we are concerned with - where Giroux, Willis, Bourdieu and others are concerned with wider issues about agency in society we are concerned here with agency as the capacity, and disposition towards doing, organisational change. What experiences then, do students have of acting as organisational change agents? and what do we know about their learning from it?

Enabling organisational change is rarely directly framed in those terms in education, rather students tend to experience aspects of organisational change through their involvement in school improvement processes like student voice, students as researchers or students as change agents, which is the subject of the next section.

1.2 Performance culture and student voice – the tensions of developing students' change agency

The main practices, since the 1980s, concerned with students change agency are, on the whole, best encapsulated by the field of student voice. Student voice has in fact been around for some time; the first student voice activities were, in some ways, really carried out by alternative schools like Robert Owen's school in New Lanark (Donnachie, 2000), A.S.Neill's Summerhill School (Neill, 1968), Alexander Bloom's

St Georges-in-the-East Summerhill School (Bloom, 1948) and in state schools such as Howard Case's work at Epping House and The Just Community School Movement in the 1970s (Fielding, 2013), and Harold Dent's (1930) work with academic underachievers. Student voice as a fully integrated aspect of the school was never carried over to the mainstream, however these schools did introduce ideas that were adopted, particularly ideas like democratic school councils and whole school meetings. Student Voice has now become a catch all for a variety of interventions, for example, involving students in education improvement (Cruddas, 2005; Grace, 1999) re-engaging students with learning (UK ESRC Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project; Johnson & O'Brien, 2002; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Smyth, 2007; Smyth, & McInerney, 2007) student voice for school improvement (Levin, 2000; Raymond, 2001; Rudduck, 2007a, 2007b, Rudduck et al., 1996, Rudduck & Flutter, 2003; Tolman et al., 2003), student voice for democratic engagement (Apple & Beane, 2007; Bastian et al., 1985; Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Crick, 1998; Fielding, 2011; London & Cambridge, 2005; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003b), student voice for critical reform (Silva & Rubin, 2003; Slee, 1994), as a process of emancipation from oppressive structures (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1998; O' Loughlin, 1995), as citizenship education or 'active citizenship' (Kennedy, 2007; Kirby et al., 2003; Willow, & Neale, 2004) as choice or 'personalised learning' (Hargreaves, 2004; Leadbeater, 2004, 2005) and as an opportunity for children to express their personal stories about school (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001).

Student voice reached the height of its popularity under New Labour in the UK where it became a central part of their wider concern to increase public consultation. It was integrated into a number of education acts, of particular importance being Every Child Matters and the Children Act of 2004. In 2005 it became part of Ofsted school inspection criteria which had a significant effect on how, and why, it is now practiced. Although Ofsted do not specifically grade student voice in schools they claim to take account of it in their evaluation of pupils' behavior and safety and their SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social, Cultural) development. New Labour particularly emphasised the importance it placed on student voice in terms of the 14-19 reform programme:

There is no group whose view is more important in terms of the 14–19 reform programme than the young people themselves. That is why it is critical that the

student voice is heard, at both local and national level, and that the planning and delivery of 14–19 reforms can respond to the ideas and energy of 14–19 year olds. (DCSF, 2008, 61, para 4.26).

Student voice can be seen in relation to a wider concern to develop choice in public services (Dowding & John, 2009) which was a New Labour priority. However it has been argued that “*where there are benefits from choice, these are enjoyed most by those with access to social and cultural capital*” (Harding, 2012:172), which, as will be seen, is also a criticism levelled at student voice. This concern generally to develop consumer choice in public services should also be seen as closely linked to concerns to improve performance (Greener, 2008).

In 2008 a specific amendment to the Education and Skills bill made it a legal requirement for schools to ‘invite and consider pupils’ views’. On passing the bill Baroness Morgan, the then children’s minister, told Parliament:

“As a minimum, schools should seek and take account of pupils’ views on policies on the delivery of the curriculum, behaviour, the uniform, school food, health and safety, equalities and sustainability, not simply on what colour to paint the walls (Stewart, 2008).”

The 2011 Ofsted Framework for Inspecting required schools to evidence how they gather the views of learners and take action based on these views. For example this could be done through the school self-evaluation form (SEF) and also through Ofsted inspectors liaising with student councils. In 2012 The Department for Education produced the report ‘Listening to and involving young people and children’, which has been updated in 2014. This report states the government’s position about the benefits of student voice. They are cited as:

- *“It encourages pupils to become active participants in a democratic society*
- *It contributes to achievement and attainment (Gov.uk, 2014: 2)”*.

However, in the 2013 framework for school inspection little mention is made of student voice and there is currently a diminished focus on it in government policy relative to previous years. This indicates how politicised student voice is as an issue, and how connected it is with the ideology of particular governments. Due to the current government's concern with 'raising standards' and its prioritisation of cuts in public services, the future of student voice is less clear.

Student voice, or pupil voice, is a difficult concept as it is used, rather problematically I would argue, to cover such a vast range of activities and ideas. As much as there have been attempts academically to define it more radically as a force for change (Fielding, 2001a; Fielding & Bragg, 2003, Mitra, 2007; SooHoo, 1993), and though it is often framed as a process of enabling students to be involved in change in practice, it is often used in schools for other reasons. Indeed, Fielding (2006: 223) argues that; *'school improvement is probably the dominant justification for consultation and participation in the present performance-dominated climate'*. It is how student voice type projects that set out to, or claim to, involve students in enabling change in schools can be undermined by a number of processes that I want to explore here. This is because this reveals much about what students may be learning from their experience of acting as organisational change agents in schools.

The different understandings of student voice can be represented as different levels of student participation as exemplified by Roger Hart's ladder of participation (1992). Here he makes the useful distinction of suggesting that the highest level of participation is when student voice is initiated by children and where they have authentic power to make shared decisions with adults. He also makes an important point that where student voice becomes tokenism it is not really a form of participation at all. Though it is rarely defined this way it is helpful to see two poles on the student voice agenda, one which sees it as a means of liberating young people to critically understand and challenge the given structures of schooling (normally from a Neo-Marxist or Critical Pedagogy perspective) and one which sees it as a means of improving the *given* structures of schooling by giving students 'choice' about school as a service or improving engagement. With the first the focus is on empowering students to transform structures whereas with the second the focus is on enabling students have a voice in 'transforming learning' *within* the given structures.

Most theorists' positions seem to lie somewhere along this spectrum and many use aspects of both ideas.

Student Voice is often based on a children's rights agenda, for example: Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lundy, 2007), as well as concerns about how the hidden curriculum of schooling may affect children's agency (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Illich, 1970; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1979). These concerns have led some to argue that '*children should be recognised as competent agents, who are participants in, and producers of, rather than passive recipients of, social and cultural change*' (Bragg, 2007: 15). In other words student voice supports the notion of cultural production, and it is this idea that student voice could be liberating which makes it so attractive to theorists of the progressive left. There was great optimism about how student voice has grown as a field, as Fielding noted in 2004;

"perhaps to our surprise, two decades of profoundly damaging policies and practice have also seen the emergence of apparently positive developments in what has come to be known as pupil or 'student voice'. ... This 'new wave' of student voice activity seems to hold out real hope both for renewal and for the development of pre-figurative democratic practice that give teachers and students the courage and the confidence to create new practices and proposals for a more just and vibrant society" (Fielding, 2004a:198).

However, it is not the goals and ideals of student voice that are important but what has been happening in practice and whether that is an authentic form of student led cultural production or something else entirely. A growing number of commentators are concerned with how student voice practices can be just tokenistic (Chawla, 2001) and with how it can be changed in order to adapt it to the status quo. As Fielding (2001a:123) earlier pointed out;

"those teachers and researchers who have for many years fought long and hard for the legitimacy and necessity of student voice as central to an authentic educative undertaking are currently faced with a disturbing paradox, namely, that the very processes and form of engagement to which

they have been so committed are in danger of turning out to be stifling rather than empowering."

This may have been because, as Thomson & Holdsworth argue (2003a:372) "*neoliberal education policy had not killed off student participation, but had confined it to curriculum projects and elite forms of student leadership*". Moreover, the potential for student voice to be a useful political tool which supports tokenistic change has been acknowledged, as Arnot and Reay (2007:2) suggest, "*the egalitarian mythology of voice as a concept provides a valuable legitimating tool for any government keen to shift attention away from increasingly aggravated social inequalities*". In other words, providing for student voice, because of its egalitarian credentials, can be a means of appearing to be interested in change, whilst being able to avoid doing it. Additionally research suggest students are not actually consulted in terms of the important reforms that affect them (Elwood, 2013).

One of the main problems with voice is that, with the often uncritical emphasis on student voice as positive, the potential for it to teach students questionable forms of organisational change can be overlooked. One of the main ideas in student voice is that it is valuable because students are consulted and are empowered by being consulted, with consequent potential outcomes for their self-esteem and engagement. This focus is usually connected to the children's rights agenda. However, research suggests that often when students are consulted little action is taken based on those consultations (Pedder & McIntyre, 2006, Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Thompson, 2009). When Whitty & Wisby did research into the actual practice of student voice and policy interest in it in 2007, what they found was revealing. Firstly they found that only 2% of the 999 teachers in the maintained sector that they surveyed "*cited children's rights as one of their school's motivations, a finding that was reflected among the independent schools*" and concluded that "*few schools included in our research saw pupil voice as a means of empowering pupils in relation to their rights*" (2007:10). Additionally they found that most student voice tended to be directed at non-cultural and non-organisational change aims like improving environments or 'toilets and chips' issues. More importantly, they found that students seemed very uncomfortable in being involved in cultural or organisational change issues which suggests that the structures were not there to enable them to take new roles, as they

pointed out “*the introduction of pupil voice activity was not necessarily accompanied by supportive changes in school ethos, structures or processes*” (2007:11). In addition, Wyse (2001) found that children’s opportunities to express their views were extremely limited even where councils existed. So, regardless of the rhetoric about rights, student voice seems to be considered valuable for other reasons than necessarily empowering students.

The problem could lie in how performance culture in schools tends to put pressure on student voice to be a process which supports adult performance concerns in schools. These problems with student voice and performance culture are reflected at a policy level. Whitty & Wisby (2007:3) explain that, pushing for authentic student voice, “*having the potential to challenge the status quo, could erode support for pupil voice among policy-makers and schools*”, which can explain why student voice is often adapted to suit adult performance priorities. Thomson & Gunter (2005) suggest;

“there is a marked tendency for senior policy makers [in England] to bring ‘pupil voice’ into the policy conversation as a means of achieving school improvement and higher standards of attainment, rather than as a matter of the UN convention, citizenship and rights”.

The problem with this focus is that there may be a considerable, often unrecognised, potential conflict between enabling performance culture and enabling students to experience acting on their ‘student voice’. At a very practical level this has been noted in how school staff find they have to be selective in terms of what ‘voice’ they can listen to, as McIntyre et al. (2005:159), noted in their research;

“teachers’ responses to pupil suggestions for change are, necessarily, selective and the selectivity favours ideas that are already in teachers’ repertoires. Given the current demands on teachers it is not surprising that they opt for ideas that affirm or extend present practices.”

Schools, and teachers, can be faced with the difficult position of asking what issues the students can actually work on and may often end up choosing very minor issues because larger issues may challenge the ‘teacher voice’ or produce conflict that there

is simply no framework for managing given the expectation on teachers in terms of performance. This may lead to very particular learning about the processes, meaning and purpose of enabling organisational change.

It has also been argued that performance culture can affect student voice work in that it can cause this work to be valorised in relation to whether it reengages students in the schooling process in order to improve attainment in schools (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003a; Thomson & Gunter, 2005). Student voice in this way can come under pressure to be a process of co-opting students into the school's structures rather than empowering them to affect those structures. This is particularly problematic when it is considered that adult performance concerns are not always the core concerns of students, indeed "*research suggests that learning (as defined by the school) is not the highest priority for many children*" (Noyes, 2005:5). Even so, many student voice initiatives end up focusing on using voice to improve learning outcomes and engaging students' change agency towards this aim. As Whitty & Wisby (2007:314) argue, this can lead to questions about whose voice is being empowered;

"even if all pupils were somehow having a voice, the extent to which pupils are being allowed a voice other than to legitimate the policies of Government or school leaders would be a further issue... If pupil voice involves some real power and influence being given to pupils, there may well be occasions where it challenges Government and teacher priorities and, thereby, has the potential to disrupt the status quo in schools."

They go on to argue that, where there is no potential for such challenge, "*pupil voice might be seen in terms of co-option or incorporation*" (ibid, 2007:314). Lodge (2005:133) calls this a "compliance and control" approach where "*the students' voice is used to serve institutional ends*". This is significant because in this case acting as organisational change agents for the students is experienced as a given role with a given task, like the student role, rather than one which requires critical change agent roles on their part. Their learning from being involved in these kinds of processes may be significant.

The pressures of performance culture could also mean that students learn that some are more legitimised in acting as organisational change agents than others. Student voice can reinforce certain social and symbolic forms of capital by favouring students who may be more likely to support adult outcomes (Silva, 2001, McIntyre et al., 2005) or middle class voices (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Fielding 2004a; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009), whereas students who most need involvement in voice may see it as a form of capitulation to the very values and interests they struggle with. Manefield et al. (2007:15) point out that:

“the very people who most benefit by maintaining the system as it is; that is, those who find success in the system, are also the most likely to be involved in consultation and conversation, while the most disengaged are least likely to raise their voices.”

In this way student voice can in theory reinforce the culture it intends to challenge because *“if student participation and consultation is going to help schools and students achieve better, then those who will not participate, or not correctly, put the school at risk, and are variously seen as defiant, deviant or in denial”* (Bragg, 2007:355).

Additionally, Silva points out that some students are more able to articulate their needs in the dominant discourse (Silva, 2001; Rubin & Silva, 2003), while Bland & Atweh (2007) and Rodriguez & Brown (2009) point out that low-income, alienated and disaffected youth are often excluded from student voice research. Taylor & Robinson (2009:167) suggest that Ellsworth (1989) sees Student Voice processes as often unclear on what they desire to empower students for, but between the lines can betray *“a rationalistic, universalistic, paternalistic Enlightenment concept of the person and of social action which is in conflict with the socially transformative goals of radical pedagogy”* by positing norms based on particular views of what are ‘rational’ responses, and thus actually silencing minority and alternative voices. In a similar vein, Fielding suggests that middle class voices can be prioritised; *“the stentorian tones of middle class ‘voice’ dominate the monologue of the ‘big conversation’ and the dismantling privilege of ‘choice’ renders inaudible the*

increasingly alien discourse of social justice and basic humanity” (2004a: 198). In practice these particular voices can also be empowered because empowering voices which are already empowered in the school causes the least disruption and produces the most attractive results. However, the result is that student voice work can just be a means of further reinforcing the status quo of power relations in the school and, in Bourdieu’s sense, student voice can be an added reinforcement of the school’s dominant habitus. Thus working class students or other minorities can misrecognise its processes as not belonging to them and thus exclude themselves from them, which may go some way to explaining why so few students feel represented by their student councils.

Perhaps more important is how performance culture valorises particular student roles and constructs a notion of the ‘good student’. This is important because as Greg Thompson (2010:413) suggests “*much of what is constructed as ‘good’ in the good student is best thought of as a set of discourses that, perversely, limit the possibilities for students to be creative and experimental of their selves*”. The good student can be related to docile behaviours, however more importantly, the good student is now seen as one who affiliates themselves with the school as an organisation (Thompson, 2010:426). However, this valorisation may be conditional on uncritical affiliation with the organisation – the ‘good student’ is one who affiliates themselves with the organisation but in a passive rather than critically active state. In other words, the desired and recognised cultural capital is passive affiliation with the organisation, rather than anything potentially critical or transformative.

Another significant issue in the practice of Student Voice is power relations. It has been argued that practitioners of Student Voice can be naïve about how they are affected by power relations in the school and can end up reproducing those power relations. Sara Bragg (2003) argues that early research in student voice was naively oblivious to power relations, and McIntyre et al., (2005:155) argue that student voice can simply empower the confident and articulate students and divide them from other students “*whose voices are silenced because ... they don’t fit the dominant discourse and academic aspirations of their schools*”. In this way student voice can be reinforcing in practice what it intends to challenge in theory. Bragg (2007:4) suggests that the power dynamics in voice can actually reinforce “*practices for acting on the*

self by the self' whereby what is reinforced is the need for the self to be empowered rather than the need for the structures that render that empowerment necessary to be transformed. This is a crucial point, because there needs to be a clear differentiation between empowering the student to adapt and empowering the student to act as a change agent. It is a distinction I will attempt to clarify later in the thesis.

Additionally, Taylor and Robinson (2009:7) point out that student voice can often work with a classical materialist view of power but in doing so simplifies power relations to binaries which implies that power can be 'given away' to students. This can lead to practices which "*produce surface compliance with a notionally transformational agenda but which fail to take account of the intransigencies of power or disrupt its operations at a deeper level*" (Taylor & Robinson: 2009:7). Additionally, this conception of power dynamics can fail to account for students own potential role in maintaining power structures in the school. Systems psychodynamics and post structuralist critiques suggest that power is not simply wielded over others but implicates "*those governed in the maintenance of the discourse*" (Pryor et al., 2005:4) which means that the role of students themselves in maintaining power structures in schools needs to be more seriously considered by student voice, as Giroux had pointed out. The role students themselves learn to play in maintaining these power relations, and why they do so, is another theme the thesis later focuses on.

This issue of performance is perhaps even more problematic in how it can be indirectly reinforced by the literature, because of the need to support student voice there appears to be more a reference to 'successful' student voice work (Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Mitra, 2001; Sabo, 2001; SooHoo, 1993), where there is evidence it may have improved engagement in learning, self-esteem and student-adult relationships *etc*, than reference to the obstacles, resistances and contradictions student voice processes may be experiencing. There is a dearth of research (with notable exceptions, e.g. Mc Intyre et al., 2005) into the ethical or practical problems *school staff* themselves face in envisioning how to do student voice work in their schools. By ethical here I mean in the higher sense of the *purpose* of student voice work in practice, rather than in theory. The problem over time may be that the student voice projects in schools that have outcomes favoured by adults are reinforced as successful

and those which may ‘fail’, or are simply too messy to fit with adult priorities, or produce disruption, are undervalued and so the pressure to produce ‘successful’ student voice projects increases. In other words the reinforcement of what is ‘successful’ student voice is redefining student voice to fit with adult priorities. If students attempt to seek other outcomes schools find it difficult to fit those into the prevailing agenda about student voice and may find themselves under pressure to control the outcomes. Desired positive outcomes include, for example; helping to improve teaching and learning; improving teacher-student relationships; increasing student engagement with learning; and raising student self-esteem and efficacy (Fielding, 2001b; Mitra, 2003, 2004; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). However, it is not always clear from the literature what would define negative outcomes. If students actually try to change something adults do not want changed and conflict emerges, is this then a failed student voice process?

Student Voice may also be creating new understandings of organisational change in how it transforms problems of responsibility and ownership into situations of consumer choice. A good example is how it has been adopted to support the political agenda on public service ‘choice’ which was fashionable under New Labour in the UK. Take for example this influential OECD report:

The challenge is to ally choice with voice: voice for the pupil, voice for the parent. That is the new frontier for education. Personalised learning aims to engage every parent and every child in the educational experience. Only if we offer the best to students will we get the best. And it means a school ethos focused on student needs, with the whole school team taking time to find out the needs and interests of the students; with students listened to and their voice used to drive whole school improvement; and with the leadership team providing a clear focus for the progress and achievement of each child (OECD, 2006).

Two significant ideas are clear; the alliance of ‘choice with voice’ and ‘students listened to and their voice used to drive school improvement’. In terms of allying choice and voice the emphasis is not on student voice as empowering or liberating in any sense but as an aspect of consumer choice within a defined structure – *ie* the students are not being given a voice to question structures, rather they are being given

a voice to reinforce their consumption of those structures. This is further reinforced by the phrase ‘students listened to and their voices used to drive school improvement’ the emphasis being on consulting students but not on enabling students to engage in school improvement themselves. Essentially in this model of student voice, student voice becomes a kind of consumer role where students are essentially consulted in the same way as one would be consulted for market research but they are still essentially passive in the process. They are given ‘choice’ for the same reason adults are given ‘choice’ in public services – an (often tokenistic) act to enable them to feel engaged with the institution, and manage their relationship with the institution. What this does is emphasise that somehow the important value of student voice is the ‘voice’ part - consulting children and giving them choices, rather than the change part – enabling children to act themselves on their own ideas. This choice agenda connects with the school improvement agenda and ‘responsibilization’. Kelly (2001:30) has identified moves to “*normalize youth as rational, choice-making citizens, who are responsible for their future life chances through the choices they make with regard to school, career, relationships*”. The question Whitty & Wisby (2007:315) ask is whether “*pupil voice then is largely about making pupils responsible for the success of their school? And, if so, in whose terms?*” In other words, the call for student responsibility and choice may be giving them real choices and responsibility for certain limited conditions of their own experience in school but may also be also pushing them into taking responsibility for conditions they are not allowed to actually challenge or affect.

To conclude this section, in terms of learning about organisational change it is worth considering that students in the UK are likely either to experience some involvement in student voice type projects like student councils or at least be aware of these processes in their schools. These processes may be the closest experience they will have to being involved in organisational change and thus represent significant learning in this regard. Some of the main issues that have emerged in this section are that student voice has been criticized for potential tokenism, for selecting engaged students, for its naivety about power relations in its processes and for how it can be used as a consultative process related to adults concerns about improving teaching and learning. Many of these concerns were taken up by those interested in the field of ‘students as change agents’.

Students as change agents

Since student voice as consultation has become more widely adopted and there has been a growing interest in reinforcing that student voice is “*not simply about the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it is about having the power to influence change*” (West, 2004). The complex question arising from this is what it means to ‘influence’ change in a practical sense, what characterises the role of change agent. This idea of students as change agents has been repeatedly reinforced in the field (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001a; Fletcher, 2003; Holdsworth, 2000, 2005; Holdsworth & Thomson, 2002; Prieto, 2001; Thomson & Gunther, 2006) and ‘students as change agents’ is based on the recognition that, as Fielding (2001a: 124) argues,

“if we are to avoid the dangers of developing increasingly sophisticated ways of involving students that, often unwittingly, end up betraying their interests, accommodating them to the status quo, and in a whole variety of ways reinforcing assumptions and approaches that are destructive of anything that could be considered remotely empowering, then we have to explore approaches that have different starting points and quite different dispositions and intentions.”

The problem may lie in what is problematised. With student voice the suggestion is often that it is that students do *not* have a voice which is the problem. This can also imply that having a voice equates to having agency. However, Wolk (1998:186) argues all students do have a voice and it is not something that adults ‘give’ to students, the issue is not student’s voicelessness but *how that voice is acted on, and who acts on it*. Moreover researchers like De los Reyes & Gozempa (2002) suggest that it is not their powerlessness, but the lack of an opportunity to experience their actual power that inhibits students taking roles as social actors and change agents. Student may not be expressing their voice, not because they are voiceless, but because they have been inhibited from discovering, or do not believe in, a purpose for using that voice.

Students as change agents is an idea, often indirectly expressed, by a number of academics in student voice and students' participation (Bahou, 2011; Fielding, 2001a; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Giroux, 1989; Kellett, 2010; Kurth-Schai, 1988; McLaren, 1998; Pekrul & Levin, 2007; SooHoo, 1993). 'Students as change agents' is not a term used by all practitioners, however academically I have found it useful in differentiating projects where students lead structural or cultural change in schools based on their own concerns to projects where students are just consulted or involved in decision making based on adult priorities. Some example of students as change agents at work are Roger Holdsworth's Student Action Teams (2002) where students identify problems and lead attempts at change, however these are largely focused on developing student citizenship through focusing on community issues, rather than transforming schools. Other example include: Goldman and Newman's (1998) work on student leadership, Fielding's (2001a) work, Thomson and Gunther's (2006) work on student's as researchers and Roberts & Nash (2009) work on school improvement.

Students as change agents could be seen as differing from student voice work in a number of ways. It deals directly with the problem of change agency because in some student voice work, as Roberts & Nash (2009) found, students themselves can report feeling they do not have the responsibility to act because teachers have to decide on what action is appropriate. Secondly, students as change agents focuses on enabling students to be action researchers in some form or 'students as researchers' (Brownlie et al., 2006; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001a; Frost, 2007; SooHoo, 1993; Nieto, 1994; Oldfather, 1995a, 1995b; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998; Wetherill, 1998). Cook-Sather (2002) notes that as well as being engaged in change work, it is essential for students to see themselves as change agents and be enabled to use their own interpretive frames of analysis. She also points out that when students are given the opportunity to analyse their educational experience in school they gain a new perspective which increases the likelihood of them taking ownership of the change process. The idea of students as researchers is most important because it legitimises the concerns students choose to do change work on.

Potentially underlying all these ideas is an implication that organisational structures may need to be changed to enable processes where students act as change agents to be incorporated sustainably in schools. Actors in the field of students as change agents

recognise that that “*there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together*” (Fielding, 2004b:309), and therefore that student voice projects, “*however committed they may be, will not of themselves achieve their aspirations unless a series of conditions are met that provide the organisational structures and cultures to make their desired intentions a living reality*” (Fielding, 2004a:202). In this sense, students as change agents can be seen as an attempt, if not to create, at least to understand, what those structures might be and how they could be created, which is a key aspect of the aims of this research. This is a notable shift, and if it were adopted as a fundamental principle of students as change agent’s projects, the pitfalls of student voice work might be avoided. The point of students as change agent’s work, is that students themselves should be involved in creating the conditions and structures in schools that allow them to use their voice and act. The key question in this research is not just what students are learning about acting as organisational change agents but what this reveals about the structures needed to foster learning about this role in beneficial ways. The fundamental question is how to adopt students as change agents in a way that makes it still intrinsically transformative but also adaptable and acceptable to the status quo, an issue I explore in chapter eight.

Conclusion

This review has attempted, in broad brush strokes, to summarise the theory and practice in terms of the problem of students learning about acting as organisational change agents from schooling. The review began with these questions:

1. What are students learning about their disposition to transform organisations from their experience of schooling?
2. Are particular groups learning this differently, or to a greater extent, than others?
3. Is this a form of cultural production or reproduction? *and*
4. Can it be affected through ‘student voice’ or ‘students as change agents’ work?

In terms of the first three questions, we saw how Bowles and Gintis argue that change agency can be understood as largely determined by capitalist structures where schools reward “*docility, passivity and obedience*” (1976:43) in order to prepare students for roles in organisations. This is a general tradition which is more or less shared by, but developed by commentators such as Postman, Illich, Giroux and Apple. However we also saw a recognition that the process is more complex, that students can inhibit their own change agency through resistance (Willis) and that students may also inhibit their change agency out of fear that using it will lead to powerlessness (Giroux).

Overarching these ideas is Bourdieu’s theory of habitus which suggests that schools could be selectively inhibiting agency by only recognising the agency of those with the dominant cultural capital.

In terms of question 4 we looked at work in the field of student voice and student involvement in school improvement. It was recognised that though this work can have child-centered intentions it can be transformed by the pressure to produce outcomes which lead to increased engagement or attainment without disrupting the status quo. These pressures can then lead to a preference for involving more engaged students in student voice activities which can undermine the democratic goals of student voice. Based on this, it was recognised that change agency processes need to develop their structures and that more research is needed into what affects those structures.

Overall the review suggests there is an issue here that should be of concern and which has not yet been resolved. Ultimately, Ranson (2000: 263) argues that;

“while much public policy focuses upon the skills young people will need to enter and survive in the labour market, less emphasis is accorded to the significance of encouraging them to find the voice and practices of cooperative agency indispensable to flourishing within a democratic civil society”.

This is a familiar refrain, however perhaps what needs to be added to this, is that even less emphasis is accorded to the significance of encouraging students to act as change agents *in organisations*. This tendency to focus on students’ agency in a sociological sense – their democratic and civil engagement - overlooks another form of change agency which matters. I think it is worth exploring the perspective that we also affect

society through the organisational roles we take (in how we contribute to how organisations affect society). Our agency in a wider sociological sense is an abstract experience but our change agency in the organisations we work for is something that engages us everyday, and can be the means through which we have most effect on the world around us. It is for this reason that we need to explore it further as a distinct issue and be more concerned about students learning in relationship to it.

Chapter 2: The methodology

The methodology used in this research derived from a combination of ideas from Action Research (AR) and Systemic Action Research. The aim of this chapter is to firstly explain why these methodologies were chosen in terms of the research questions and how they were adapted. Following that the chapter outlines basic information about the schools, the students, and practice and methods in the actual sessions in the schools.

In this research there is considerable crossover between the methodology and conceptual framework (as covered in the next chapter). It is useful to see the project as having two layers, for example the students as change agents project as run in the schools is essentially covered in the methodology section of this chapter, however how the overall process was conceptualised using systems psychodynamics is largely covered in the next chapter (though it also touched on in the next section on epistemological and ontological assumptions). The process could be pictured as thus:

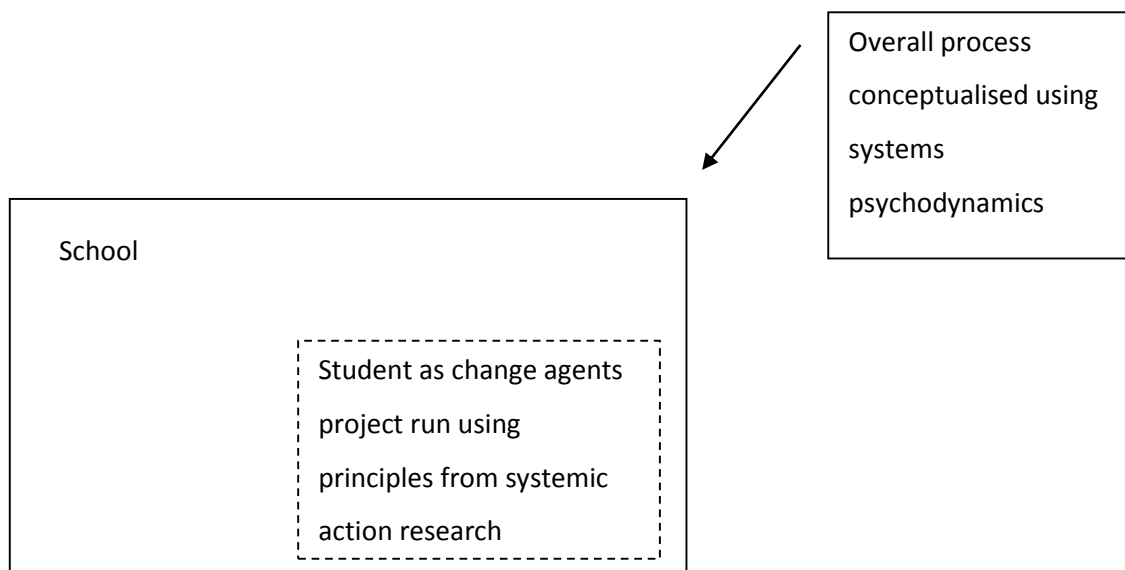


Fig 2.1: Picturing the relationship between systemic action research and systems psychodynamics in terms of the methodological approach.

The aim of the diagram is to show how within the school the methodology of systemic action research was used in running the students as change agent's project and I explored the students, schools and my own behavior in this process. This overall process was conceptualized using system psychodynamics and organisational theory

and the emergence of the project was explored in systems terms. This means that I was exploring the research process through the lens of action research but also through the lens of systems psychodynamics and organisational theory. In practice this meant that there was not only an interest in the outcomes of the project but also in the process of the project. These interests require further discussion in terms of my ontological and epistemological assumptions.

2.1 Epistemological and ontological assumptions

Some epistemological and ontological assumptions lie behind my methodological perspective, and though these are touched on in the literature review, it is considered important to make those explicit in terms of the methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative research is interpretative and inductive and relates to the particular features of the people being studied and the context in which the data is being produced (Gobo, 2005). In terms of this research the context was an organisation so the research focused on an organisational approach and makes ontological and epistemological assumptions about organisational life based on the approach it takes to organisational analysis, i.e. a systems psychodynamics approach. These assumptions are drawn out in detail in chapter 4 and it is worth discussing them in relation to the methodology.

My ontological assumption here is that organisational reality is constructed by the members of an organisation, but that an objective organisational reality also exists. The approach is broadly based on a constructionist paradigm but because it is designed to be organisational research the ontological and epistemological approaches have a particular organisational character. For example, particular assumptions are made about how people perceive and understand organisations, these assumptions are not assumptions about the entire nature of social reality. Indeed one of the main reasons why a systems psychodynamic approach was used was because it accepts the organisational perspective as having unique qualities, whereas qualitative research paradigms tend to make totalising statements about reality. The approach here is that organisations are a unique reality themselves, formed and understood psychologically in a unique way, this is often understood in organisational theory as the Human

Relations perspective which sees organisations as constructed by their members (this is outlined in more depth in the next chapter).

The systems psychodynamics approach derived from the sociopsychological perspective which argued that *“when one examines social systems one finds there are two undercurrents simultaneously influencing organisational life. On one level, there are socio-factors that influence reality within an organisation such as the organisation’s culture, policies and procedures. On another level, there are psycho-factors that affect organisations such as the fears, anxieties, values, hopes, and beliefs of the people that work within them”* (Fraher, 2004:79). Systems psychodynamics makes certain assumptions about the nature of the organisation and a person’s relationship to an organisation. It *“provides a way of thinking about energising or motivating forces resulting from the interconnection between various groups and sub-units of a social system”* (Neumann, 1999:57). This involves studying the behaviour of *“a group as a social system and individuals’ relatedness to that system”* (Wells, 1985:112). In other words the focus is less on that of individuals but on understanding individuals as rooted in a specific context and culture, which in some ways is similar to a constructionist paradigm.

Systems psychodynamics is largely concerned with the human aspect of organisational life (Mayo, 1933:1) as opposed to mechanistic views of organisations. It does not assume human behaviour in organisations to be rational but to have irrational and unconscious motivations. It does not assume humans to be wholly concerned with the technical performance of organisations but to also have a complex set of needs they attempt to meet through organisational life. In its earliest formations this approach has critical aspects to it in that it was also based on a desire to see democratic values integrated into society and organisations through action research, largely owing to the wartime experiences of Kurt Lewin (Wheelan, 1986).

In this research, though there is some psychodynamic theory, the systems psychodynamics perspective largely rests on an open systems perspective and a number of key concepts that form certain assumptions:

1. First of all it suggests that organisations exist ‘in-the-mind’ – that they have a social reality but no one can access that reality in its totality. This concept of organisation-the-mind is outlined in detail in the next chapter. Similar to an

interpretivist position this position holds that reality is socially constructed and “*the researcher becomes the vehicle by which this reality is revealed*” (Andrade, 2009:43). In terms of this research, this suggests that the organisation-in-the-mind of the students is a limited and subjective picture of the school as an organisation. It is their own construction, which is however based on their experience. This restricts generalisation of the research findings.

2. The Open Systems perspective assumes that the researcher or facilitator works through their own organisation-in-the-mind and equally has a limited and subjective picture of the organisation. They clarify this picture, and attempt to bring it closer to the social reality by making mental hypotheses about the organisational behaviour they perceive and testing those hypotheses. A researcher will bring with them into the school as an organisation their historical organisation-in-the-mind of school as an organisation and will have to come to as much awareness of possible about how that is affecting their behaviour or interpretation of behaviour. This reflects the constructionist position that the researcher cannot be divorced from the phenomenon they are studying (Smith, 1983). It also means that “*no construction is or can be incontrovertibly right [and researchers] must rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than proof in arguing [their] position*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:108).
3. Organisations can be understood as open systems with permeable boundaries between their internal and external life (Rice, 1965). Leadership is an act of managing these boundaries. Likewise sub-systems in an organisation have permeable boundaries which can be managed by leadership from within those sub-systems. As an action researcher I would manage certain boundaries which means I would affect to some extent the internal processes of the sub-system of the research. How this was managed is discussed in chapter 7.
4. In terms of data analysis assumptions were made about group behaviour. It was understood that groups have properties of their own. As Lewin argued “*there is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own, which are different from the properties of subgroups or their individual members, than behind the fact that molecules have properties, which are different from properties of the atoms or ions of which they are composed.*”

(Lewin, 1947:8). In practice this meant that, though participants were recognised as individuals, the group they formed was recognised as having characteristics of its own. In systems thinking this is often explained by the phrase ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’.

5. Systems psychodynamics assumes that a person is always engaged with the organisation in some way. Organisations are constructed by their members and once bounded by an organisation’s boundaries a person is engaged with it (Bazalgette et al., 2005). This means their engagement will be active. In terms of this research this means I started with the assumption that these students had some personal agency in terms of constructing the organisation, even if that just meant passively accepting the organisation as they experienced it.

Action research is a core methodology within systems psychodynamics based on the original ideas of Lewin (1946). However the systems psychodynamic approach, as well as focusing on outcomes, focuses on process. This is because in organisations process, in terms of learning about weaknesses in existing processes, finding new forms of process, and improving existing processes, is a key outcome itself. This is why this research is clarified as ‘systemic action research’.

The research is also influenced by the critical pedagogy paradigm, though in limited ways which are important to clarify. The critical pedagogy paradigm has been discussed in the literature review in terms of Freire, Giroux and Apple and been shown to partly influence the field of student voice generally. However it is worth clarifying some of its assumptions in terms of the research.

The critical pedagogy paradigm assumes that reality exists and has been created by directed social bias (Comstock, 1982; Freire, 1967; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). It accepts unequal power relations as a reality and tends to be critical of interpretivist paradigms for avoiding issues of power (Gage, 1989). It must be recognised that I start with the assumption, taken by most researchers in the field of student voice, that student voice is a problem issue related to student empowerment, and that there is value in enabling students to have a voice that can lead to change in schools. This, as I have tried to indicate in the literature review, is a position shared by many researchers and even government policy (Fielding, 2001a; Fielding & Bragg, 2003, Gov.uk, 2014: 2; Mitra, 2007; SooHoo, 1993). The assumption that there is a problem in this regard

led to the action research approach, however although I made assumptions that student voice could be a problem, I did not make assumptions about the exact nature or extent of the problem that would exist in the schools I went into.

I also made certain assumptions about the nature of the power relations that would exist in the school (Taylor & Robinson, 2007). These assumptions were that the students were, in terms of the formal structure, in subordinate positions. It is based on these assumptions that I developed the bounded systems approach that I used, which was developed both to give the students opportunities to take a new role and to enable them to feel more bounded within the process (See section 3.2 for clarification of this approach).

Critical theory also affected interpretation. Systems psychodynamics offered a paradigm for interpretation, however the processes of power meant that a critical approach also provided interesting perspectives. This is worth discussing in more detail. The systems approach focused on the processes of boundary formation and role formation – *i.e.* my research question was on the role of change agent so I was focussing on the project as an emergent system and the role of change agent as an emerging role and the processes that affected them. The thematic analysis focused on these areas:

1. Critical incidents where the boundaries of the project were affected by the school or students (or myself).
2. Critical incidents when students shifted between the roles of student and change agent.
3. Critical incidents when I became anxious about the boundaries of the project.

Thematic analysis was done by analysing the three processes above in depth and noting repeating behaviours that occurred (for example the process of students actively reinforcing the student role) and then relating these behaviours to the primary task at that moment and deducing whether these were forms of resistance or evidence of the weakening of boundaries or whether another explanation was available. This then became a form of coding; connecting behaviours that might represent resistance to the role of change agent with the specific task we might have been working on and from that developing an interpretation as to the reason for that resistance. The difficult

part of the coding was not identifying the behaviours but interpreting the motivation behind behaviours. I explored motivation by studying their perceived identity, value and attitudes in relation to the change agent role in the reflective stage and then noting how these affected their behavior when we moved to the active stage.

Interpreting the students' motivation behind these forms of resistance is a difficult area and the research will clearly face some limitations faced with the potential complexity of human resistance. Applying a critical perspective meant exploring questions of power in the research, how the school, the students and I were affecting the process using power. This critical perspective played a role in interpreting the culture of the school as reflecting certain understandings about power which were internalised by the students. The critical approach was also used in the analysis of the data in terms of trying to understand how power, in terms of action for change, was being understood and wielded at different moments throughout the research, by the school, the students and myself (this is discussed further in the section on reflexivity in chapter seven).

Finally, there are tensions between the systems psychodynamics paradigm and the critical pedagogy paradigm which I chose not to resolve as I felt those tensions formed aspects of the research questions themselves. For example the critical pedagogy paradigm would tend to assume the students to be actually oppressed, whilst the systems psychodynamics paradigm would see them as potentially constructing their own oppression and oppression itself as an interpretation of experience. Though these perspectives may seem in tension, both emerged as having validity throughout the research. Indeed I found that a combination of constructivist and critical pedagogy paradigms was necessary to interpret the findings.

2.2 Adapting action research for a systems approach

In this research I had these research questions.

1. What are students learning about acting as organisational change agents from their experience of schooling?
2. How could this learning be affecting their disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations?

3. Are certain groups learning this differently, or to a greater extent, than others? Why?
4. What do these findings mean for the theory and practice of developing student agency in schools?

The problem this research faced then was how to research students' learning about their change agency through their experience of schooling. There were two ways of researching this available, firstly by observing general school behavior ethnographically – the reason this was not chosen was practical - because the situations in which students would be using their change agency could be very disparate and difficult to identify and it would demand longitudinal research. Additionally identifying what was change agency from other behaviours would involve high levels of complexity and ambiguity.

The second option was to directly observe student voice projects that were already running, however this was rejected for a number of reasons. The first reason was that the normative student voice projects that occur in schools do not tend to focus on enabling students take the **role** of change agent, rather their usual aim is give students an opportunity to express their views on problems in the school or improve engagement or teaching and learning – in systems terms the child is still in the student role and subject to it. Secondly, student voice projects are often selective in terms of selecting students who already feel they have formal agency. This project aimed to understand the agency of the average student who may or not be normally interested in these kind of initiatives. Thirdly, the person who takes the role of facilitator in change projects experiences group processes directly. This provides highly important data which would not be experienced by just observing another project, and indeed turned out to be a major data resource in this research. In order to enable the project to form as a system I needed to initially stand at the boundary between the project and the school and provide some management in terms of boundaries (otherwise the students would not have an opportunity to distinguish the project from the school in systems terms). In this way I would also experience the projections onto the project directly. This, as will be seen, was crucial in terms of the methodology and understanding the project as an emergent system. Lastly, the research was interested in to what extent students could actually deliver organisational change in their school by focusing on the *culture* of the school as opposed to changing material things. This

was a key issue as I was well aware that many change processes in schools can end up focusing on material things and my hypotheses as to why this was the case was that it was generally easier, involved less conflict and most importantly did not demand any changes in behaviour or roles. Although students do use their agency in these types of projects, it is very limited agency in terms of the quality of change being sought. For all these reasons, it was felt that the best approach was to develop my own initiative that would directly enable students to act as change agents.

So, this third idea was to create a process whereby students would have the opportunity to directly use their change agency – an intensified experience which I would participate in, which would, in line with action research principles, aim to benefit the students involved. However, I needed a very particular kind of action research methodology to enable me to do this. For example, based on the research aims, there were some principles the methodology had to conform to. The methodology should be one that could be derived from the dynamic generated by the students, rather than be imposed on them – it had to be led by the students as much as possible in order to be able to research the students change agency. This was also important because the project needed, as much as possible, to be able to work with natural dynamics as they emerged rather than force a direction sought by adults. This was because I needed to be able to allow for all possibilities if I was to authentically give the students leadership of the project, one of these possibilities could be, for example, that the students rejected an imposed methodology. In this sense, the methodology also had to be one that the students could influence themselves, that would be both offered by me but allow for the students intentions. In other words, the methodology needed to allow for, and be able to meaningfully account for, students expressing resistance to the process, even if that involved no data being given, no action being taken or even the process completely disintegrating.

Additionally, the methodology needed to be process focused, as well as outcome focused. So, although the students as change agent's project would be focused on achieving some change – it would need to be made clear to the students and the school that the purpose of the project was also to help understand the process, the problems everyone faced and how it could be improved. This was crucial because a single focus on achieving outcomes would potentially increase the likelihood of performance affecting the process. Having said that, it was important for the project to

be purposeful and focused on an aim to deliver some change, otherwise it could end up being a study of students' idea of delivering change rather than students' actual experience of doing so.

The focus on the process however was also a key methodological focus. A methodology was needed to help understand what was fostering or inhibiting students' disposition to take the role of change agent, and it needed to be one that could account for group, systemic and structural processes. This methodology had to be able to see the project as an emergent system in the school and focus on how that system was affected by the school and the students and what this revealed about the students learning about acting as organisational change agents.

Action research also made sense because it has been connected to organisational change and indeed in systems psychodynamics action research is used as a form of organisational change itself (Rapoport, 1970). Moreover, Zuber-Skerritt's research (1996) argues that emancipatory action research is organisational change 'best practice'.

On this basis, the research carried out in the schools was predominantly informed by principles from Action Research (AR) which helped me model the project as purposeful and Systemic Action Research which helped me model the project as an emergent system. It is worth beginning with AR, which principles were used and what its limitations were perceived as being, and why the AR work in the project became informed by Systemic Action Research.

Action Research

AR has in its implementation an 'action purpose' – in other words, it is research designed to enable a group of people to solve some kind of organisational, social or cultural problem and it has been used in schools (Hendricks, 2006). It aims "*not only to discover facts, but to help in altering certain conditions experienced by the community as unsatisfactory*" (Curle, 1949). Rodriguez & Brown (2009) suggest three guiding principles for participatory action research with youth. Firstly it should be 'situated and inquiry based'. One of the main focuses of action research is to work with participants' lived experience. In order to enable the students to work on an issue that concerned them it made sense to work within the context they experienced that

issue. Therefore in this project the research was done in the schools during school time. This was very important for practical reasons, in the sense that we needed access to the school in the ‘here and now’ in terms of doing activities, conducting research and engaging with the school. Doing it outside of school hours would have forced the project to become an entirely reflective process with no potential to engage with the students lived experience in school. It was also done within school hours to give students a fair opportunity to be involved in terms of the practicalities of their own timetables bearing in mind that many students have after-school activities, indeed during the project students did have problems with timetabling after school activities.

It was ‘inquiry’ based in that the whole first half of the project was given over to students inquiring into the issues that concerned them. Secondly the research should be ‘participatory’ – this was achieved by engaging students in reflective dialogue and activities about their experience and enabling them to take a lead on the aims of the project and its responses to obstacles. Thirdly it should be ‘transformative and activist’ – this was done by creating opportunities for the students to partner with adult staff in bringing about structural changes – this dominated the second half of the project. AR was an obvious choice to begin with because it emphasises participation over consultation, action over voice and participants leadership of research – issues all related to change agency.

The important characteristics from AR the research adopted were the focus on action, participation, the facilitation role of the researcher and an openness to the problems of power dynamics. In terms of action, the project needed to be focused on creating opportunities for students to act – not to force them into action, but to create conditions where action was legitimate and ‘authorised’ (Cook-Sather, 2002) because it was based on the analysis of agreed upon organisational problems. AR fits very well with this intention. In terms of the role of the researcher, it is argued that “*within participatory action research the researcher is the tool for facilitating change, rather than the owner, director and expert in the research project*” (Walter, 2009:2). Although this was difficult to achieve in practice, and the obstacles to achieving this make up important findings, this was intended throughout the project. In the very opening session, rather than stand where a teacher might stand, I sat down amongst

the students – on being asked why I was sitting there I told them it was because in this project they were the experts, not me and I constantly reinforced this. In terms of participation, Rapoport (1970:1) states that “*action research aims to contribute to both the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable framework*”. The research in the schools emphasised the participatory, indeed the emphasis on the participatory was so strong that it was strongly resisted at times by students who sought to reestablish dependency on me or other adults – this is covered in detail in later chapters. In this sense the research indicates some of the limitations of this approach in schools. The project also worked with the students’ problems without dictating what those problems were – students took part in methods to explore their situation in school and were invited to develop an aim for the project based on the problems that had surfaced. In terms of power dynamics, it was recognised right from the start that the students would be working within a structure where the power dynamics were already highly structured and that on this basis attempting AR as it is normally conceived would be naïve. On this basis the project looked to systems psychodynamics to create a system which would provide the students safe boundaries to work within.

Finally, unlike typical AR, to some extent this project had ‘top-down’ features (which was necessary to set it up in a school). It was recognised that projects in the past which have had too much top-down teacher involvement have led to less student engagement (Bland & Atweh, 2007:346) so, when possible, the project attempted to use a ‘bottom up’ communicative process whereby its direction was determined solely by the participants in consensus (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

The action research cycle

One of the characteristics of action research is its lack of rigidity in how it is used and how it allows for considerable variation in approaches. Reason and Bradbury (2006) argue that “*action research is a particular orientation and purpose of enquiry rather than a research methodology*” (Koshy et al., 2010:9). One of the characteristics of action research is its use of models of its cycles, however there were some limitations to strictly using these models in this research.

The model used here was largely based on Lewin's (1946) model but also looked to similar models by Elliot (1991), O'Leary (2004) and Kemmis and McTaggart, (2000). Lewin's model involves identifying a general or initial idea – doing reconnaissance or fact finding – planning – taking action steps – evaluating – amending the plan and then returning to the cycle. Elliot (1991) questions Lewin's model for starting with an idea and not involving enough analysis at that stage, his model focuses on a more analytical approach to understanding the problem itself. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000:595) describe the action research model as a process of: “planning, acting and observing, and reflecting” and then revising the plan and repeating the process. However, they clarify that this is not a rigid structure and that these stages may overlap. O'Leary's model stresses a cycle of observation-reflection-planning-acting and then back to reflection *etc.*

Bearing in mind the variety of models that exist, Koshy et al., (2010:9) argue that “*excessive reliance on a particular model, or following the stages or cycles of a particular model too rigidly, could adversely affect the unique opportunity offered by the emerging nature and flexibility that are the hallmarks of action research*”. This was a position I took seriously as I did not want to overly impose a model on the process. Nevertheless a general model was needed. Generally all action research models follow a general cycle of gathering information, analysing that information and then acting on that information, and this research roughly followed the same processes. In this research we began with reflecting (which was also here a form of observing and gathering information about the students' experience of the school). Beginning in this way was chosen based on Elliot's critique of how in Lewin's model you begin with an idea. Rather than start with a fixed idea we would start with reflection and analysis in order to enable an idea to emerge. The reason for this is that I felt that a period of reflection would be necessary for the students before they would feel in a position to consider any plans of action. Then we would work on planning, and then acting and observing and then back to reflecting.

In practice this process did not work as clearly as I had intended as the very issue of acting became complex itself – discussing this is partly the overall aim of this thesis and will become clearer to the reader in later chapters. For this reason the cycle itself became confused and we often moved between reflecting and planning, without

having considerable action to observe. Students at times were ambivalent about taking action and observing actions, and this limited the cyclical nature of the action research process. In this sense, though the process intended a clear action research model, the natural dynamics that occurred did not fit neatly into this model.

This process was clearer in terms of the project methods. Within each school I constantly adapted the approach based on the students' responses to the research methods (which I would ask them to feedback on). If they were not engaged with a method, a new method would be attempted in the next session based on that learning. Each new method was designed based on the learning from previous methods. For example, if it emerged in one session that the students had an interest in talking about groups in the school then in the next session I might offer a method to further explore that. Methods changed significantly throughout, for example the students began doing research on very general issues by walking around the school and talking to staff and students, this became refined (based on their responses) to them going into classrooms with more organized and specific inquiries. The action research process was also influenced by working in the two schools. However, this process between the two schools was limited to my learning about methods and could not be described as a participatory cycle. I would often learn from one school about potential problems with the process and take my learning to the other school to improve the process. For example activities I felt had not worked (like the students' labelling activity) were not repeated in the second school. So, I was constantly reflecting and changing my approach based on observing the two schools.

In conclusion, the action research model used involved reflection (building a picture based on students' experience and information), then planning and then acting. As will be shown there were significant limitations to how this occurred in practice.

Adapting action research

In this research it was recognized that “*too purist a definition of action research is disenfranchising*” (Holly, 1996) and that a certain amount of flexibility was going to be needed in terms of doing it with students in a school context. There were a number of issues with using AR in this project which led to adaptations.

The first issue was in terms of gathering data itself, as Walter argues the action purpose of AR differentiates it “*from methods whose primary aim is to research or investigate*” (Walter, 2009:1). Clearly there is a fine line with this research as the overall aim *was* to research and investigate students’ disposition towards acting as change agents. However, others recognize that “*action research is a family of research methodologies which pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time*” (Dick, 1991 quoted in Altrichter et al., 2002:131). I managed this by perceiving the project on two levels, the first being the AR approach in the schools, and the second being my research reflections on that process. Within the schools we sought to solve an organisational problem using AR, the focus was very much on working on the problems the students were concerned about. In other words, attempting to solve an organisational problem through AR was the main research aim in the schools, however over that period I was also gathering evidence about the process, which the students were well aware of. This evidence would later be analysed outside of the AR process.

Secondly, I felt that over-emphasising an expectation that the students would act may make it difficult for them to opt out of acting if they chose to. In other words, the research offered students’ opportunities to take action as envisaged by action research but did not try and impose this behavior on them. This was an important distinction as the aims of the research were to explore whether they would choose to act – their *dispositions* and what action they would take and why – the opportunity *not to act* had to be available to them. I also found AR can be too prescriptive in terms of expected outcomes. The expectation that AR achieves positive change can make it difficult to allow for negative outcomes which may represent important findings. Adelman (1989, cited in Robson, 1993:440) argues that AR’s claims, of being an “*alternative research paradigm, as a democratising force and means of achieving informed, practical change arising from issues at the grass roots are overbearing*”. In this research AR was experienced to some extent as overbearing and perhaps idealistic, for that reason as facilitator I allowed us to let go of some of the positive expectations of AR and allowed, to an extent, behaviours to emerge more naturally. Additionally, the push for ‘positive change’ could, I was aware, at times be construed by students as an unwelcome pressure that mirrored performance pressures in school. This could

reinforce their perception of my role as teacher or of the project not belonging to them, so there had to be limitations to this.

Thirdly, AR is normally a cyclical process that continues for some time until the problem is resolved. In this research the problem both groups of students chose to work on was students' relationship with teachers, which was identified as a cultural problem in the school. This process of deciding on a problem was complex in terms of students' ownership and is discussed in chapter four. Ideally this would lend itself to long term AR research, however practically the research had to have a timeline because the schools could only allow students to miss a certain amount of classroom time.

Fourthly, AR can tend to assume commonality in group participation which was not always backed up in this research. The need to avoid subsuming difference into one 'student voice' was an important research issue in terms of validity. I wanted to be able to account for the "*cacophony of competing voices*" (Reay, 2006:179). Walter (2009:7) argues "*categorising a group with a shared interest or problem as a 'community' does not automatically result in a consensus on what the problem is and how it might best be addressed.*" This became a significant problem in one of the schools where students resisted being perceived as a community and I tried to take account of this by allowing them to work as sub-groups. In presenting this material I also wanted to be careful not to imply that the students had, at any time, a singular 'student voice'. Not only would that be inaccurate it would also have frustrated them deeply to be presented in this way. As Fielding notes "*voice has too much about it that smacks of singularity, of presumed homogeneity*" (Fielding, 2007a:7). On this basis I have tried to account for difference as much as possible whilst still trying to indicate trends. However, on the whole I found that the differences between students tended to be differences of degree rather than opinion, *i.e.* some students were more positively engaged with the school than others, however that did not mean they disagreed on the issues that concerned them.

Fifthly, the AR research process was also problematic in that though my intention was to create a "*genuinely democratic and non-coercive process whereby those to be helped, determine the purpose and outcomes of their own inquiry*" (Wadsworth,

1998:9), in practice students seemed to be used to experiencing processes in the school as coercive in some way. In other words the cultural values behind the somewhat idealistic definition of AR fundamentally clash with the culture students experience in school. AR was a very foreign experience for them and one that engendered a significant amount of suspicion and was at times assumed to be secretly coercive. I managed this by enabling them to discover their own control over the project.

Finally, AR assumes that participants have some involvement in the interpretation of the findings (Kagan et al., 2008: 42). Throughout this research reflective dialogue between the students and I was the main focus of content. This means that the students were constantly offered opportunities to reflect on and critically question their experience and relate it to wider structures. Their experiences were explored in the reflective stage through the methods outlined at the end of this chapter, and during or following these activities we often engaged in dialogue, this usually meant clarifying issues that had emerged in activities which also allowing to students to add to critical points that may have emerged about their experiences. In other words the main role of dialogue between the students and I was to clarify their perspectives on issues that had emerged through activities. In as much as possible when I had hunches or tentative hypotheses during the project I fed them back in through further activities to test the students responses, however I learnt not to offer direct hypotheses as students latched onto them and I was concerned this would affect their behavior in terms of social desirability. The core hypotheses that I developed did not become clear until well after the project had finished and I no longer had formal access to the children, this was one of the practical constraints of working in schools. As will be shown later a key issue became students disengagement from the process towards the end which rendered shared interpretation very difficult. As other researchers have noted, the realities of doing AR with children can be at odds with theory due to how unused children are to controlling the terms of their learning or collaborating with adults in this way (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009).

Action research and power dynamics

It is important to state right from the start that this was not a ‘students as researchers’ project as they would normally be conceived, its aim was not to train students to do

research, though the students participated to an extent as co-researchers (see the methods section p93). However, it did derive principles and ideas from this practice in terms of the work done in the schools, particularly in terms of dealing with power dynamics. Students as co-researchers derived from a concern that “*much participatory research is still adult-led, adult-designed and conceived from an adult perspective*” (Kellett, 2005:5). Even when research does involve students as participants it can be very tokenistic, as Kellett reminds us;

“criticism is still being leveled at the tokenism of some of this participation, the adult manipulation, unequal power-relations and the adult focus of such research. It is the adults who frame the research questions, choose the methods and control the analysis. For the most part, children are unequal partners.” (ibid, 2005:6).

This was the key factor I took account of in the research, however I also needed to be able to explore whether the idea above would be supported by the findings. In other words, I needed to be able to explore to what extent students might collude in being guided or manipulated in terms of issues they saw as important. In this sense I needed a methodological approach that would allow for a more critical and systemic view of power dynamics. The issue of power in research with young people has been explored in the field of student voice (Holland et al., 2010; Ellsworth, 1989; Taylor & Robinson, 2009) and problematised at a number of levels. Using AR was problematic in that it defined to some extent the terms of the power dynamics of the process and power dynamics were an important field of study for this research. For example, some emancipatory AR processes tend to presuppose that the participants are disempowered and the aim of the AR process is one of their empowerment (Fals-Borda, 1987; Selener, 1997). Systems psychodynamics tends to perceive power as held and co-created by everyone in the system and roles of empowered and disempowered as partly socially constructed. By allowing for this perspective a richer understanding of the power dynamics could be developed. The tension between this and the classical materialist perspective proved a valuable analytic tool as I was forced to keep returning to the complex question: are the students structurally disempowered or are they disempowering themselves? Or is this the same process? This methodological tension was also acted out in behaviour as the project developed and was a

consistently difficult dialectic for me to manage in terms of making decisions, however maintaining that tension became very important for the findings.

Reflexivity

This is not ethnographic research, it was research that was strongly influenced by an action research tradition, so there is no attempt to suggest that the researcher's subjectivity did not affect the research. The researcher was part of the sub-system that was being studied, not a passive observer – in this regard I have tried to make myself an object of study too. In the same way as Bourdieu (Jenkins, 1992) I understood reflexivity as a process of standing back and reflecting on my observations themselves and why I might have made them. This was a process I saw as inherent in doing action research itself as I constantly reflected on my actions and role as I explored what had been learnt from previous sessions and how future sessions could be improved. In addition reflexivity is an attempt to make visible how the work of representation is done (Britzman, 1995; Fine, 1994; Lather, 1993). I generally understood reflexivity as reflecting on how the research intervention itself, in its design, would affect the research participants and others in the school, for example, the teachers.

In order to create this project it was necessary that I held the leadership boundaries of the project in order to protect the students and establish the project as a sub-system. However, it is also recognized that by taking this role I may have impacted on the students' role as research participants. It is important to restate here that this boundary management role was developed in order to provide a structure for the students to work within, not to lead the direction of the project. I also was careful to observe how I was being perceived and noted periods where I was given more leadership by them or they took more leadership and analysed the processes behind this. The extent to which they chose to do so and how they influenced my role in the project became one of the core findings of the research itself. These issues of reflexivity are further discussed in Chapter 7.

Using systemic action research

Based on all these potential limitations of AR I looked to combining it with principles from Systemic Action Research (SAR) which seemed to allow for a more exploratory approach which fitted better with the aims of the research.

The key methodological problem was how the change agent role would be conceived in practice and how the processes affecting it (both from the students and the school) would be observed and interpreted. In addition an approach was needed to provide the students with enough safety to take a new role because a direct action research approach would likely lead to role conflict (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001; Holian, 1999). In order to do this I turned to systemic action research and systems psychodynamics. The aim of the next section is to argue why it was deemed to be a more suitable methodological approach to others. In this section I only present this methodology in brief, it is explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Systemic thinking is growing in importance in contemporary action research (e.g., Burns, 2007; Bell, 2008; Checkland & Howell, 1998; Checkland & Poulter, 2006; Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Coghlan & Brannick, 2001; Flood, 2001; Jackson, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; McIntyre, 2008). Systemic thinking can best be described as *“the understanding of a phenomenon within the context of a larger whole; to understand things systemically literally means to put them into a context, to establish the nature of their relationships (Ison, 2008:5)”*. In this sense systemic thinking is the core research focus of this research as I was focusing on the emergence of this initiative in the context of the larger whole of the school – how the school and the initiative interrelated and interconnected and how this affected, and was affected by, the students’ behaviour. In the context of this research the term systemic is used to focus on interrelating systems, particularly those of the project and the school. It is used to emphasize the organisational processes that were occurring during the project and its use should be understood as a means of focusing on organisational processes in systems terms. This use of systems thinking is outlined in greater depth in chapter 3. In this sense, the action research had a systemic focus, i.e. it was action research which had an additional focus on how that action emerged in systems terms.

Systemic action research is not a widely used distinction from AR, however it is useful to make that distinction in this case because this research is so focused on change agency in systems. Systemic action research, derived from Kurt Lewin's application of AR to organisational life (Lewin, 1951). It is AR but with an emphasis on the systems and systemic dimensions of that research and as such an emphasis on the organisational dynamics of the process. The reason for focusing on this distinction is to emphasise the methodological focus on this project as an emergent system within the school as a system. Rather than a focus on this project's actions and outcomes, it is a means of focusing on organisational dynamics. In other words, the focus was not on just the outcomes of an AR process but also on that process as a system and what fostered and inhibited its emergence towards achieving outcomes. Studying the project's emergence as a system and the processes that inhibited and fostered it would reveal the evidence needed about the processes affecting the change agent role. As Ison (2008:2) notes "*in contemporary systems thinking more attention is paid to the process of 'formulating' a system... In this process a boundary judgement is made which distinguishes a system of interest from an environment.*"

This initiative then became a 'system of interest' and 'sub-system' in the school with its own boundaries and systemic action research enabled me to focus on how those boundaries emerged, and how they were inhibited or reinforced. This meant that the concept of boundaries became central to the methodology (see chapter 3). This distinct system within the school would have its own boundaries of time, space, leadership, membership and task. These boundaries would also be accepted by the school leadership, or at least the extent to which they were was a focus of the research. The research then used this systemic action research approach to explore how the boundaries of the 'students as change agents' project developed as an emergent system in the school and how they were strengthened or weakened by the school, the students, or indeed the researchers. Exploring this process would reveal how cultural processes in the school affected these boundaries and thus the conditions from which students could act as change agents. This focus on the project as an emergent system formed the core of the conceptual framework used. With this focus systemic action research also enables use of the concepts of purposeful and purposive systems – purposeful being voluntary willed purpose by participants and purposive when a purpose is attributed to the system externally. This project aimed to create a

purposeful system where the students would voluntarily create its aims, though at the same time I explored the pressures on the project to be purposive from both myself and the school. As Ison (2008:18) summarises;

“if a system is conceptualized as a result of the purposeful behavior of a group of interested observers, it can be said to emerge out of the conversations and actions of those involved. It is these conversations that produce the purpose and hence the conceptualisation of the system. What it is and what its measures of performance are will be determined by the stakeholders involved”.

This was then largely the process we followed, through conversations, and methods I developed to enable the students to reflect on school culture and what concerned them about it, a purpose was produced and the system conceptualized. However, at the same time, I was also focusing on what kind of pressure there was from the school and the students to make the system purposive.

This systemic action research is essentially a form of action research which focuses on the emergence of systems of action, rather than as in AR on the actions and outcomes themselves – it is a focus on process as well as content. Systemic action research is a methodology characterised by emergence in a whole experience and fluidity and openness to allowing natural human processes and dynamics to emerge – as Burns (2007:39) puts it;

“we can never predict the detailed outcomes but we can make judgments about the direction of travel when we can see more of the picture. Despite this, things will not happen as we expect, so we need a process that allows us to change course flexibly and quickly. Systemic action research is a vehicle for that.”

This methodology in terms of the conceptual framework is presented in far more depth in the next chapter.

The use of systems ideas in AR has been shown to add benefit to participants (Checkland & Poulter, 2006; Ison, 2008; Salner, 1986). These can add benefits by providing tools like rich pictures, a focus on understanding and accepting different worldviews (Armstrong, 1997; Hutton, 2000; Krantz, 2001; Sher, 2012) (which leads to the concept of organisation-in-the-mind), and ways of exploring a prevailing culture (Katz & Kahn, 1966) which then provide a coherent structure for discussion about changes which are desirable and feasible. These tools informed the methods that were used in this research. Most of all, a systems approach enabled me to conceptualise the role of change agent (see chapter three), which was an important tool in this research.

Systemic action research and the role of researcher

This section explores how the role of researcher and facilitator worked together in this research. The diagram below, illustrates in systems terms a difference between the two roles, the arrow indicating the focus of interest. In practice I needed to maintain elements of both roles and manage the tension between them. Additionally, as can be seen, in the researcher role I was interested in all aspects of the project, including my own role as facilitator.

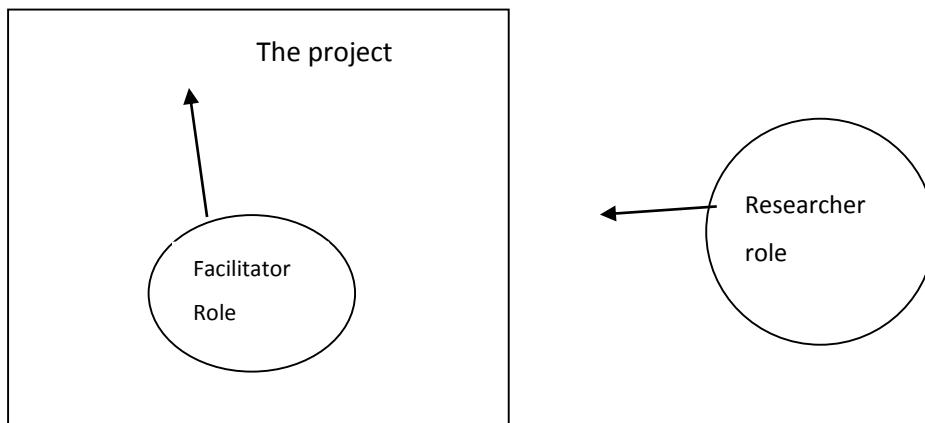


Fig 2.2: Picturing the relationship between the facilitator and researcher role

The aim of this diagram is to illustrate how I conceptualised the roles, in other words I was facilitating the students as change agent's projects but also attempting to stand outside the process at times as a researcher. I conceptualised it this way particularly in

terms of enabling reflexivity, so that I was also researching how my role as facilitator emerged. Exploring the processes affecting the facilitator role was considered important data given that the facilitator managed many boundaries between the project and the school.

In practice in this research that role tension, as will be shown in the findings, was sometimes acute because as a facilitator I felt the pressure to achieve outcomes for the students whereas as a researcher I felt pressure to allow as much natural dynamics to emerge as possible – even if that led to disappointing outcomes for the school. Systemic action research gave me some focus as it suggests that the facilitator should act less as an objective researcher and more as an active participant, however the main role of this participation should be to distribute leadership amongst the participants. In other words I conceived of my role as one of initially holding leadership and then, as the project developed, distributing that leadership amongst the students. This was not a process that could be done through observation but involved considerable participation on my part. Again, this methodological approach was one that students sometimes resisted, and the very notion of what it means for them to take leadership in the context of this kind of research is something this research project raises questions about. With this kind of research it tends to be assumed that participants feel ownership of the system and its aim. In practice in these schools students sometimes struggled with whether they owned the project, I owned the project, or the school did. Indeed they often transferred their own ownership of the project onto others when it suited them to do so. The role of facilitator was one I interpreted in systems terms along with the rest of the methodology. This meant that I placed myself on the boundary between the project as a system and the school as the context of that system and saw myself as managing the processes across that boundary and clarifying those boundaries for all involved. These boundaries were those of time, membership, space, task, and leadership. As the project went on I tried to hand more and more control over these boundaries to the students, particularly that of task. However, I maintained a boundary management role for the duration of the project, in terms of the boundary between the school and the project.

Conclusions to section 2.2

In conclusion, the methodology that informed the research was derived from ideas from AR and systemic action research. The project used AR due to the concerns outlined in students as researchers work about the power imbalances when students have little involvement in shaping the direction of the research. The main focus in the schools was on enabling the students to act as change agents based on a problem they had identified, in this sense it was AR. However, from a research point of view, the interest was in the process as well as the changes made and in order to focus on the process the project used ideas from systemic action research in order to model the project as an emergent system with emergent new roles. In other words, the project in the school was focused on enabling the students to achieve some form of change. I as a researcher was focused on this but I was also focused on the process through which this might or might not happen. The students were being enabled to act as change agents but also invited to reflect on this process. I did not understand this as an either/or situation but as dual focus, which, as I understood it, was a part of the action research process.

2.3 Setting up the project

The aim of this section is to outline how the project was set up and how data was gathered while the project was running.

Selection of schools

Three criteria were used to choose the two participating schools:

1. They should be state schools. This is because, even though this research is not focused on generalisability, I wanted the context of the research to be as representative as possible of most school experience in the UK, which, at the time, I felt would be best achieved by doing it in state schools. I also felt that if I had done it in private fee-paying schools the project could be affected by the selective nature of those school themselves. Having said that, as I mention,

in the conclusion I think it would also be valuable to run research of this type in private schools.

2. They had to have a senior member of staff who would champion the initiative.
3. There would be some comparable differences between them in terms of social and economic context.

The project was presented at a City Council meeting of school leaders and schools were invited to contact me if they wished to be involved. Ten schools signed up, most of which were met with. I chose two of them, to be called Greenfield and Chippinghouse (not their real names). They were chosen because they differed slightly in terms of social and economic context and because the Deputy Heads in these schools were particularly motivated about the project and showed a particular openness to the project's design. After the schools were chosen the Headteachers of both schools were met with and the logistics of the project discussed and agreed to.

Greenfield is a much larger than average secondary school (1800 pupils). The proportion of students with special educational needs is above average. The school is in a predominantly white working class area. At the time of the research this school had in the previous year been failing (rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted in 2010) but in its most recent inspection (2011) had been rated 'good'. At the time of the research the school had a temporary headteacher. The Deputy Head supported and facilitated the project. During the period of the research the school was still under considerable pressure to continue to raise academic results, particularly for the 'most-able' as Ofsted put it.

Chippinghouse is a large (1700 pupils), multi-ethnic and oversubscribed comprehensive school. It was a slightly higher performing school than Greenfield. A higher number of students than usual speak English as an additional language, and about a third of the school's population comes from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school's social and economic context and students' levels of attainment when they enter the school are slightly above average. In comparison with other schools nationally the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is nearly double the national average. The proportion of minority ethnic sixth form students is also higher

than average. Average attainment on entry into the sixth form is close to the national average.

Selection of Students

The selection of students was an important issue in the project as one of the key goals of the research was to overcome criticisms of Student Voice projects about how participants tended to be selected, particularly when those projects are run by schools themselves. Many critics, as has been noted, point out the possibility that Student Voice can end up being divisive rather than inclusive by giving preference to particular voices (Bragg, 2003; McIntyre et al., 2005). In practice these particular voices are usually the voices which are already empowered in the school (Silva, 2001) and focusing student voice work on them can just recreate the status quo one may be trying to change. This situation is backed up by students own opinions of student leadership activities in their school as presented in this research (see chapter 4).

In order to take account of these critiques the selection of students was done so as to try and represent average voices. By average here I mean students who would be perceived as representing a majority of students in the school. My main goal was to gather a group of students who

- were not extremely high or low academic performers
- had shown some disengagement academically or behaviourally but their disengagement was not seen as particularly unusual for that school.
- would not normally volunteer for student councils or student leadership projects.

These criteria were used:

- In order to gather a group who neither teachers nor other students in the school would be likely to perceive as unrepresentative of the majority of the student body.
- To gather a group who would not perceive themselves as having been overly selected based on performance.
- To guarantee that the findings of the project could have credibility in terms of having worked with a sample that represented some norms in the school.

The deputy heads chose the groups based on the criteria above. Initially, 15 students were selected from Greenfield and 12 from Chippinghouse. The group in Greenfield ended up being predominantly boys whilst the Chippinghouse group was mixed. It was decided to work with year 10s, however in Chippinghouse this proved too difficult to timetable so in that school year 9s were chosen. So, it is important to note that throughout the research we were working with two different age groups. This is not consistently made reference to, but some of the behavioural differences in the two schools could be attributed to the difference in how close they are to their GCSE's.

Logistics of the project

Context: Initially there were two options to running the project, it could be done inside or outside school hours. I chose to run it inside school hours for two reasons:

1. If students had to come to a project of this kind after school hours it would itself be a form of selection as potentially only the very engaged would come, which would have challenged the purpose of the project.
2. It would have disabled us from working with the dynamics of the school as they were occurring which would have defeated the aims of the research.

Timing: Negotiating the time to run the project with the schools was a complicated process as understandably the schools wanted the students to miss as little lesson time as possible. After negotiation it was decided to run it for one hour every week from the end of September 2011 to February 2012. The timing was not arbitrary but was designed to give the project momentum and a time boundary which is of particular importance with systemic action research. The choice of one hour long sessions was made to fit it into the school timetable. Sessions had to be staggered so that students would not keep missing the same lesson – this proved to be complicated as it involved informing the students every week.

Space: In order to enable the students to develop the project as a system I knew it would be very important that they had a non-classroom space to work in, and a space they could keep as their own for the duration of the project. Suitable spaces, a large

conference room and a large multi-purpose space were found in each school. In practice the boundaries of these spaces were constantly broken and on a few occasions we had to use other spaces as the students spaces were given over to exams or conferences. This problem again challenged the development of the project as a system.

Practical ethical issues: It was recognised that Students as Change Agents might involve students experiencing resistance to change which could in some cases, depending on their previous experience, be potentially experienced as distressing. However, the project was designed with a number of safeguards to limit this possibility.

- Firstly students worked in pairs or teams at all times when acting as change agents.
- Secondly, students were enabled to understand what to do in case they encountered any misunderstandings about what they were doing. What is meant by this is that if, during any of the research activities, they encountered any confusion from others about what they were doing or why, I discussed with them what they might say. This was only a precaution in case staff might be unaware of the project. Additionally, they had badges to identify their involvement in the project which they could use voluntarily. In practice no problems related to negative feedback occurred as I and the Deputy Head made sure staff were sufficiently informed.
- Thirdly, all adult staff they worked with were made aware that the students were in the role of change agents and were told to expect different behaviours.
- Fourthly, I or the school representative, were available at all research times in case any difficulties occurred.
- Students were continually reminded that they had the option of opting out of activities, individual sessions, or the whole project if they wished.

The key ethical questions that emerged in terms of research were the following.

1. **Were students being put in unnecessarily anxiety provoking situations?**

It was recognised that the project had the potential for role conflict (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Holian, 1999) between the change agent role and the teacher role. On this basis all the activities where these roles engaged were structured and facilitated. The one activity I had less control over structuring was the meeting with the Senior Leadership Team where the Deputy Head, who had been briefed about the purpose of the meeting and was well aware of the process of the project, had to take a more central role for practical reasons.

2. **Were students being expected to do something that was impossible with the structural constraints of the school?**

When I first mentioned to the students that we were going to ‘change the school’ they quite rightly pointed out that this was impossible, however I constantly clarified that we were going to attempt a small, but hopefully meaningful change. I found that students were not overwhelmed by the magnitude of what we were trying to do but rather by the process of engaging with the school in formal ways. The ‘impossible’ for them was believing adults in power would take them seriously and act on their interests, not that an improvement in teacher-student relations (the aim they chose) could actually be achieved. The aim we worked on was relatively conservative and well within the ability of the school to work on. In other words the aim chosen was an aim the school and the students could achieve some outcomes in relation to.

3. **How did the students know what they could and could not do?**

On this issue, I clarified that they should use their agency only if they could show how it fitted with the aims we had developed for the project. Actions were always reflected on and discussed before they happened, and clear boundaries made. Throughout the project no student experienced any problems with the school because of their involvement in the project and I and the Deputy Heads kept a close eye on their experiences. Within this project, students were well able to opt out of activities, as evidenced by the fact that the majority did opt out of some of the formal engagement activities with the school.

Consent: The project was ethically reviewed and approved by the University (See Appendix A3). Letters were sent out to all parents about the project in order to obtain consent. Additionally, students were provided with consent forms about how their responses would be used anonymously. Students were fully informed about the project in an opening session and consistently reminded that involvement was voluntary.

2.4 Stages of the project

The general aims of the methods were designed according to the stages of the process as outlined in the diagram below. Each stage of the project has a different aim and the methods were designed to support that aim, the stages also derive from the methodological processes outlined previously.

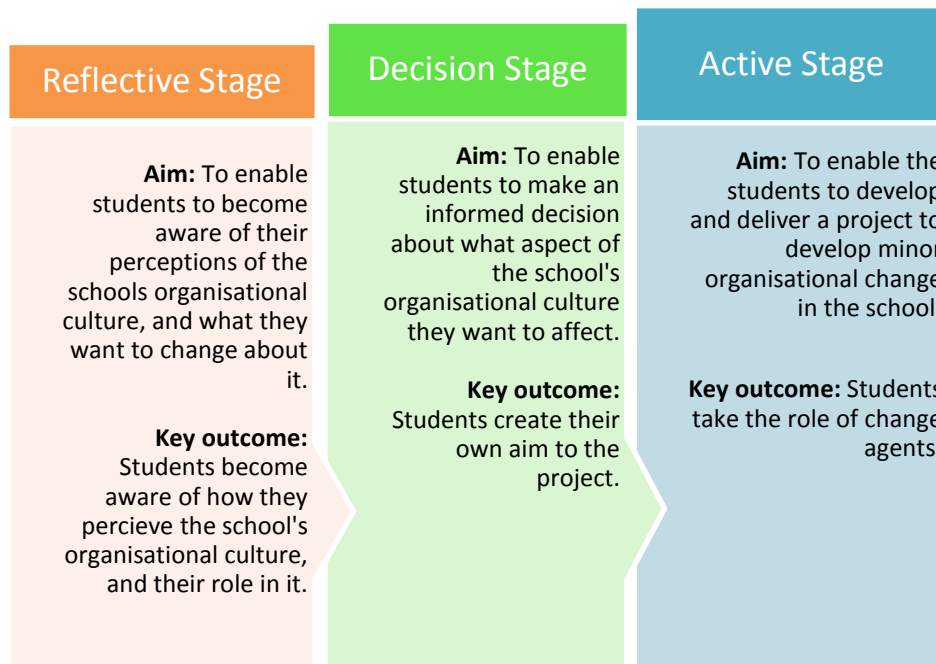


Fig 2.3: The stages of the project described in terms of aims and outcomes.

Stage 1: The Reflective stage

Before anything began students were invited to an introductory session. Then the reflective stage began, this stage was designed as a necessary precursor to taking any action. The purpose of the stage was two-fold, firstly it was to enable the students to

become more aware of how they perceived the organisational culture of their school, and likewise to enable me to become aware of how the students perceived that culture. In terms of the methodology, this stage was essentially about enabling the students to construct their problems not just as individual issues, which may be how they tend to experience them, but potentially as social group issues which are of collective concern. The key outcome of this stage was that students would be ready to develop ideas on what they wanted to change after they had analysed the object of change to some extent. In practice this proved very beneficial as student's initial ideas about change tended to be materialistic, like demanding a swimming pool or new uniform *etc.* Enabling them to consider what the culture of the school was from a more organisational perspective enabled them to develop ideas that involved relationships in the school – something that concerned them deeply but they had no formal experience of trying to affect. The process at this stage was still my focus, i.e. that regardless of whether we produced interesting data I wanted to keep reemphasizing the culture of the school as something worth talking about and analysing and researching so that it became a real object to them and were able to observe it, to some extent. It must be stated that though this created some minor limitations in terms of working on unachievable material issues, the concept of organisational culture we worked with was very general and open-ended. This is discussed later in this chapter on p99.

Stage 2: The decision stage

From roughly sessions 4-6 I focused on activities designed to enable students to decide what aspect of the schools organisational culture they wanted to work on. Making a decision on task was the key process in the emergence of the project as a system and would define all other systemic relationships, particularly the extent to which the school could be perceived as a context.

Stage 3: The active stage

The aim of this stage was to enable students to deliver some small but real organisational change in their school based on their previous analysis. This stage largely focused on creating opportunities for students to take the role of change agent. This stage involved a number of steps that culminated in a student teacher agreement

being reached in both schools, and a student – leadership team meeting. Unlike the previous stage I attempted to take less of a role and enable the students to take leadership of the project. As will be shown, this only worked to a limited extent.

2.5 Data gathering

Data gathering was done in different ways

1. The primary source was researcher observation of behavior using the methods outlined in the next section. Other data here was based on recordings of parts of the sessions using a Dictaphone (which the students were often given control of). Excerpts were selected to be reproduced in the thesis based on the extent to which they captured a repeated theme in the students' voice. There was no editing for coherence and I chose to maintain the localised character of students' responses because I felt changing the language might affect their intended meaning.
2. The second main source was research methods used with the students – these were primarily used for the students benefit but also became a useful secondary form of data for me.

The *main* methods used with the students were as follows:

1. Rich Pictures
2. Systems maps
3. Role Play
4. Students as Researchers
5. Diaries
6. Conceptual frameworks
7. Institutional activities
8. Unstructured conversation
9. Student-teacher negotiations

Rich pictures

The drawing of pictures has been widely used in education research, mainly in terms of eliciting students' ideas on the school as a physical space (Burke, 2007; Flutter, 2006; Woolner et al., 2008). However, they are also used in Peter Checkland's (1981, 1985) soft systems methodology, which is the model that inspired how they were used in this research. Picturing has received criticism for not undergoing rigid deconstruction in terms of how it is used as content (Piper & Frankham, 2007), however in this research I only refer to the students comments on the content of their pictures, or to the process of drawing the pictures, rather than analyzing their pictures in depth myself (in this I refer to the creative pictures).

Rich Pictures or 'illuminative research', were used for the following reasons:

- It can be a means of avoiding traditional power relationships related to the use of the spoken word in the school (Raggle & Schratz, 2004).
- Picturing is used on conjunction with the analytical framework of 'organisation-in-the-mind' which is a central tool in the methodology of this thesis overall, and creates a very specific organisational perspective for both the researcher and the participants.
- Picturing allows for an authentic child-centred approach in that content, as well as analysis, can be wholly generated, and controlled, by children themselves in the form of a game.
- Most importantly picturing was, for want of an appropriate academic term, fun for the students (Barker & Weller, 2003) and also, I found, allowed quieter students voices to be heard.

Systems Maps

Typically a systems map is a thinking and communication tool that shows the structure of a system of interest as a hierarchy of groupings. Systems maps generally show a system with its subsystems, they do not normally focus on the relationship between the system, its subsystems and its context. The systems maps I used with the students were highly adapted from standard systems maps and 'influence diagrams' for use with the students and to call them systems maps is potentially questionable – however the ideas to use them were derived from the ideas behind systems maps.

They were used mainly to enable students to perceive the subsystems in the school. For example students did systems maps of the student groups they thought existed during break times (below). Some students also organised these groups hierarchically according to which they felt were most valued by the school.



Fig 2.4: An example of the students' systems type pictures.

Systems maps were also used to talk about emotional spaces in the school, what emotions students attached to particular sub-systems in the school.

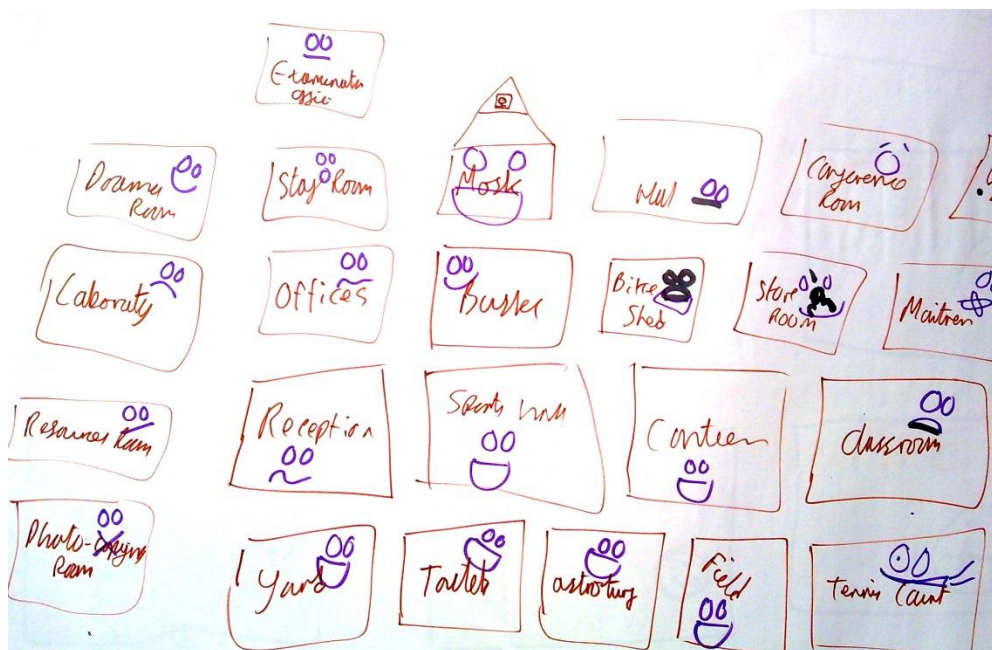


Fig 2.5: An example of the students' systems type pictures.

Most of these were not pre-planned, but were developed based on particular dynamics that were occurring in conversation in the here and now of a session. For example, if students were talking about how some groups were more valued than others then I might invite them to analyse that further in a diagram.

Role Play

Role playing, a derivative of a sociodrama, is a method for exploring the issues involved in complex social situations (Van Ments, 1999). Role play was used as a method to achieve two things:

- To enable the students to talk about ideas they might have themselves, but found difficult to talk about, through other roles.
- To express their perception of what others might feel from their roles.

The role play methods I used were not derived from an academic background but rather from my experience of using them as a developmental training tool in organisational change. In these cases participants are usually given case studies and then told to react to these case studies from particular roles. With the students we developed an imaginary meeting between students and staff in the school and students played the roles of Headteacher, Deputy Head, Teachers, and disengaged students. In this meeting everyone was going to speak freely about what was worrying them and see if any collective solution could be found. Students were free to invent their roles and their concerns as they wished.

Students as co-researchers

As has been previously outlined, using students as co-researchers is an increasingly popular method in the literature (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Carrington et al., 2010; Fielding & Rudduck, 2002; Kellett, 2005; Kirby et al., 2003; Roberts & Nash, 2009). Children themselves are well able to articulate the value of this approach:

“It’s important to see things through children’s eyes. Children see things differently to adults. I think if an adult had done this research they wouldn’t have got the same responses. They wouldn’t have asked the same questions.”
(Girl, aged 10, quoted in Kellett, 2005:15).

However, as with much work in student participation there is tension between practice and theory as what tends to happen in practice can be tokenistic (Chawla, 2001; Chawla & Johnson, 2004; Kellett, 2005) in that students can have little control over the research questions and decision making. This research used some methods from students as co-researchers but its overall methodology was not that of a typical students as co-researcher's project. I recognize in this research that the students did not have control over the overall research questions in this thesis, rather they were helped to develop their own research questions about experience in school as part of activities in the reflective stage of the project. This was not a students as co-researchers project but a students as change agent's project, so students acting as co-researchers only made up a part of the process. In this research students were enabled to act as co-researchers for three reasons;

1. To help change the power relationship between researcher and subject (Kellett, 2005).
2. To help authorise the decision they made on task (Cook-Sather, 2002).
3. So that students perceived themselves as co-researchers and its consequent effects on how they valorise their role in the project (Oldfather, 1995b).

There were some limitations how students acted as researchers in this project:

1. Students did not design the overall research questions of this thesis, rather within the project the students conducted research and had the opportunity to develop research questions and interpret the responses to their research. This required some facilitation from me, which does not mean I suggested interpretations of their research for them. In practice students tended to be uninterested in interpreting the research and more interested in the process of researching itself. In these moments students were very clearly told they were taking the role of researcher and what that entailed. The main approach used were questionnaires aimed at other students and staff. Students were given some support on how to consider what questions they wanted to ask and helped to develop their own questions. The students were then encouraged to explore the responses together in groups and share anything that surprised them, interested them, or supported or challenged their own ideas. The

responses from this research were used by the students as a basis to some of their ideas in the student-teacher negotiation (see chapter four).

2. Students acted as practical researchers in bounded activities and periods. This was because research was based around activities, mostly in the reflective stage of the research. What is meant by 'bounded' here is that in order for them to go into the school and conduct research I usually had to pre-organise this with the school. The term 'bounded' is not used to imply intended limitations on what they could research, but rather clarify that there were practical limitations (as there would be in any school situation) and that the research took place as activities. Having said this, students sought some direction from me in these activities and suggestions about what they could do, and given their unfamiliarity with the process, I considered it reasonable to provide that. They largely controlled the extent of their own leadership in these processes, however I experienced them as seeking some leadership from me. This situation makes up part of the findings as discussed in chapter 4.

Diaries

The use of diaries was considered because there was evidence that it was a popular approach with students of this age group (Barker & Weller, 2003). The use of diaries was not considered until after the first session when it became very clear that from a data collection point of view I was going to have difficulty capturing the voices of quieter students in the group. I introduced diaries in the hope that quieter students, who I thought might feel inhibited about expressing their voice in the group, would feel they could voice them in their diaries. Each student was given a diary in session 2 to use to talk about their experience of the project which they could give me to read, as or when they wished. It was made very clear this was voluntary and students did not have to use the diaries. As a method, the use of diaries was entirely unsuccessful. Students did not perceive them as liberating but rather seemed to connect them to the curriculum and homework. In order for them to perceive the system of the project as different from school it seemed necessary for them to deny the use of diaries as a methodology in preference for more physical forms of expression. Additionally, in hindsight I made the brief for using them too open-ended and wide and should have

given them a simple structure to follow. I stopped using them as a method very early on and none of the students actually used them.

Conceptual frameworks

A number of concepts were introduced to the students. In this section I will use the example of how ‘organisational culture’ was introduced. This table is an analysis of the kind of factors that define organisational culture.

Foundation	Content	Result
Beliefs	Verbal manifestations	
↓		
Convictions		
↓		
Philosophy	Behavior manifestations	Effective/Ineffective Organisational culture Effective education
↓		
Mission		
↓		
Vision	Visual manifestations	↓ Academic achievement ↓ Effectivity/ineffectivity
↓		
Aims and objectives		
↓		
Assumptions		
↓		
Ethos		
↓		
Values		
↓		
Norms		

Figure 2.6: A model of an effective organisational culture, adapted from Van der Westhuizen, et al. (2005:94)

I presented the concept of organisational culture to the students by breaking it into constituent parts for them to reflect on. These parts were developed based on aspects of organisational culture they had already introduced themselves but organised more formally. I tried to introduce all the different facets of organisational culture and then let them focus on the ones that caught their attention. The initial presentation I gave them on organisational culture was very focused on the internal culture of the organisation and did not go into its relationship with the community or society, in hindsight this was a mistake as it perhaps reinforced and supported a very internal view of what affected the culture of the school. An example of how we worked with organisational culture is indicated in this diagram which we worked with at one point.

The diagram was generated out of issues I had directly or indirectly heard them refer to which were connected to culture which I then formalised.

Fig 2.7: An adapted picture of organisational culture, part based on students' school experience.



The influence of diagrams like this should not be overstated and students tended to pick up on issues that interested them rather than engage with them holistically. Regardless of the use of diagrams like this, the students in both schools ultimately developed their own understanding of what was meant by organisational culture and that was 'relationships in the school'. This became a manageable and relatively accurate way for them to understand the concept and also focused on the aspects of organisational culture they were clearly most concerned with. However, because they used the idea of 'relationships in the school' consistently throughout the project to

talk about organisational culture, external forces affecting organisational culture were easily overlooked, particularly external educational structures. Nevertheless students found it useful as the idea of relationships in the school was something they could differentiate from what they saw as the kind of material and superficial change the student councils did.

It could be argued that by focusing on organisational culture I was limiting the student voice aspect of the research. However I used the concept very inclusively to account for all behaviors and values within the school and I was not aware of it excluding anything except a focus on material issues. The only issues it limited us from exploring were material changes that we did not have the resources to achieve and it would have made no sense to pursue. Organisational culture is about how the reality of school life is constructed, as Morgan (1986:128) points out

“in talking about cultures we are really talking about a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions and object, utterances or situations in distinctive ways. These patterns of understanding also provide a basis for making one’s own behavior sensible and meaningful.”

It was also felt that a focus on culture was necessary to enable the students to make an informed decision on action, this is a position held by organisational theorists (Collins, 1998:117). In addition the definitions used in chapter 3 suggest a wide and inclusive understanding of organisational culture.

Institutional activities

Institutional activities were physical activities designed to enable the students to engage with the school as a system. These are discussed in detail in chapter 5. They emerged out of the students’ insistence on being able to physically engage with the school, rather than do so abstractly. Institutional activities were the most difficult and anxiety provoking methods for me, but often the most engaging for the students. Indeed, any activities that enabled them to explore the school were favoured. They were also complicated in terms of role conflict as once the students left the confines of the space we normally used, the boundaries of the project as a system became more and more challenged by those of the school as a system and thus the student’s role as

change agents became very easily blurred with their roles as students. However, the students stayed remarkably in role throughout these activities which made the activities even more powerful. One of the purposes of these activities may have become the students testing the boundaries of the project itself, rather than of the school and testing the boundaries of my control over them. This is discussed further in chapter 5.

Unstructured dialogue

There is some difficulty in suggesting that unstructured conversation is a method. However, it is a crucial tool in enabling epistemic learning in systemic action research. My primary aim was to see where their conversation brought them and how much it would reveal about what was really on their minds compared to what they formally told me they were concerned about. This method proved very important for it became clear that, for example, they constantly stated that it was the relationships between students and teachers they were most concerned about in formal work, however their conversation usually focused on bullying, conflict, and status issues between students and only rarely referred to teachers. My secondary aim was simply to enable the students to form as a group and feel ownership of the time. In this sense creating this time played an important role in differentiating the project as a system from the school as unstructured time in, for example, the classroom, was often counter to their normal school experience. What I mean here is that they would be used to unstructured time through breaks or form periods, however having lengthy time, during what was normally classroom time, where they could choose what to talk about, or choose not to talk, would have been less normal for them. By allowing this time I sought to differentiate the sessions from their classroom experience.

Unstructured time was usually created by students as they became disinterested in other activities we were doing. I would make some attempts to keep them on task but if it was clear they wanted time to talk with each other I usually allowed it. I usually allowed unstructured time towards the end of sessions or sometimes it happened between particular groups of students whilst others were doing an activity. In using unstructured dialogue I sometimes got involved if I felt a dynamic was leading somewhere interesting whereas sometimes I would leave them alone for up to five minutes to just talk amongst themselves, sometimes for far longer periods. To qualify

my involvement, sometimes discussions were unrelated to school and when they began talking about their school experience I might ask clarifying questions. In these moments I tried not to lead discussions but facilitate them in a way that involved all the students and provoked further discussion.

Unstructured activity also took place and, though it is arguable, became a method students used for managing anxiety and making the role. At particular points, usually prior to making a decision or taking responsibility, students would act out in very physical ways, usually with play fighting, running around or misusing furniture. These periods never felt out of control but always seemed to be purposive. They also sometimes seemed to simply be a celebration of simply being allowed to move. Indeed in some sessions in Chippinghouse some of the boys would come into the session running and continue to do so for a minute, seeming to enjoy it immensely. Although it is tempting to dismiss this behaviour, at the time it felt that this was their way of owning the space and taking the role.

Student – teacher negotiation

This method dominated the final stages of the project and was something I developed very carefully. It was not developed based on any particular academic precedent because it emerged out of the dynamics of the project. The students had decided they wanted to meet the teachers, however they had mixed ideas of what they wanted to do with them, except that they generally wanted to improve how teachers treated them in some way. My experience to date suggested that an open meeting between the students and teachers would just be subsumed by the culture of the school such that students and teachers would resort to familiar roles and be afraid to communicate differently. I needed to find a way for the students to engage with the teachers *but in the role of change agents*. To do so I used the following ideas to mark it out as a new system with new roles for those involved:

- **Depersonalisation:** The students did some research on what other students in the school felt and used it in the negotiation. This would mean that they could depersonalise what they were saying, i.e. ‘well, this student said...’.

- **Authority:** Doing the research also meant that the students could feel they were deriving their authority, not from themselves, but from a wider student body.
- **Physical separation:** During the meeting I would physically separate the students and teachers and have them communicate through a plenipotentiary. This is a method that is used in Group Relations, and indeed was most famously used in parts of the Northern Ireland peace process where none of the negotiating parties actually physically met. The purpose of this method is to enable people to change role, i.e. to be less entrenched in the sociological roles they experienced and take the new role of negotiator in a new system. This method proved particularly successful with the students but some of the teachers said that they would have preferred to have been in the same room as the students.
- **Clear task and outcome:** The meeting would be purposeful and expect an end product. Students and teachers were told the aim was to produce a set of agreements about how relationships could be improved and I kept them strictly to task. As part of this they were able to veto each other's ideas if they strongly disagreed with them.

The method proved very successful in one school but less so in the other as a split formed in the student group. The method is presented in more detail in the Appendix.

Conclusion

The main methodological problem this research faced was how does one research students' change agency in schools in terms of organisational change, particularly when this is not a role they normally experience. If we return to the first two research questions it is clear that an approach was needed where students would have an opportunity to take the role of change agent:

1. What are students learning about acting as organisational change agents from their experience of schooling?
2. How could this learning be affecting their disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations?

The solution used was to set up a students as change agent's initiative informed by student voice and SAR, using AR and systemic action research as the means of analysing the dynamics that occurred. The action research approach was an adapted approach based on a number of practical limitations due to working in a school context. Using systemic action research was a distinction that allowed for a focus on the project as an emerging system, rather than an overt focus on just producing outcomes.

The methods used in the sessions worked on different levels, firstly the students as change agents initiative itself became a method for exploring students' agency. Secondly, within this initiative, the methods I used were chosen as a means of enabling the students to become more aware of their own perceptions of the school as an organisation and make an informed decision about what concerned them.

Researching change agency felt at times overwhelmingly complex in the schools because so many factors were in play. However, the systems approach did provide me with a framework to interpret what was happening and, as the project continued, I began relying on it more heavily than I had initially intended to. The limit of these approaches, however, is that one ends up focussing on systems dynamics and perhaps loses focus on individual voices in the process, particularly those which might not fit with the overall dynamics one observes. This is a limitation in this research as there were individual stories of interest in the wider organisational dynamics that I could not always pursue.

The most significant limitation of the overall methodology was also a deliberate limitation. This entire research is based solely on observing the experience of these students and not of other students or adults in the school. This was deliberate because the research was intended to reflect in as much as possible the unique reality of their experience, like Willis I was prioritising depth of understanding over generalisability. Additionally, researching change agency systemically in the whole school would have

been a major research undertaking beyond the capacities of one researcher. However, I was aware from conversations with teachers of the many complex adult processes and politics that affected these students' experience and I recognise that further research would be valuable on this issue.

The research methodology was only one part of the process however. Having set up a context for students to potentially take the change agent role, I had to find a conceptual means of understanding how to interpret the process that might occur, and this is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Analytical frameworks

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the framework which informed how the project was designed and analysed.

3.1 Conceptual frameworks

The conceptual framework used in this research is derived mainly from organisational theory and systems psychodynamics and represents an attempt to apply these theories in an educational context. It is important to emphasise that this project was not solely concerned with the kind of data student voice or students as researchers' projects tend to be interested in – its main focus is not intended to be research in those fields but rather is research into organisational dynamics in relation to student voice. The important data in student voice initiatives tends to be students' opinions and what they reveal about both students interests and needs. This was a part of this project but I was also interested in what happens in terms of organisational dynamics and roles when a project like this is introduced, and what that then reveals about students' learning in terms of the role of change agent. There is indirect data on this point (Ellsworth, 1989; Fielding, 2001b; Fielding & Rudduck, 2002; Silva, 2001; SooHoo, 1993; Whitty & Wisby, 2007), however the aim of this project was to directly study these processes as they occurred and thus develop a deeper analysis. So, theoretically speaking this research project was not concerned solely with student voice or students as change agents in terms of outcomes but also with the organisational dynamics of these processes.

It is important to clarify how this fits with the research questions:

1. What are students learning about acting as organisational change agents from their experience of schooling?
2. How could this learning be affecting their disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations?

These research questions relate to the role of change agent, this is theorised as an organisational role. It is also important to state the project was presented as a students as change agents project, which given the focus on the students as change agents role, I believed required a theoretical perspective from organisational theory. The context for this organisational perspective is the fields of student voice and students as change agents. In other words, the research represents an attempt to marry an organisational approach with a student voice perspective, and indeed show how a student voice perspective must take account of organisational dynamics.

As previously shown, systemic action research allowed me to interpret the project as the introduction of a sub-system into the school and then explore how the school and the participating students fostered or inhibited the development of that system. The ways in which they would do so would provide the evidence about their wider beliefs about organisational change within the school. As will be shown the project as a sub-system became undermined in a number of sophisticated ways which provided important evidence.

The following section has been divided into 6 key conceptual frameworks which informed how the project was designed, researched and led.

1. Organisational culture and performance culture.
2. Organisational socialisation and organisation-in-the-mind - the emergence of consciousness of differing mental models of the school.
3. The emergence of the initiative as a system in the school and concept of boundary formation.
4. The emergence of the role of 'change agent'.
5. Psychodynamic concepts.
6. Interpreting resistance to change.

Organisational culture and performance culture

Throughout this thesis performance culture is discussed and thus it is important to discuss its meaning. Organisational culture has been defined in a number of ways, as; assumptions, values, norms, ways of thinking, belief systems, history, heroes/heroines, myths, rituals, artifacts, art, and visible and audible behaviour patterns (Owens & Valesky, 2007). Most theories of organisational culture focus on assumptions and norms – the shared beliefs of most members of the group about what is legitimate, appropriate and desirable behaviour in the organisation (Cohen et al., 1984). Culture is developed over time, and is;

“(a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1990:111).

Schein (1985, 1990) argues that culture exists because it helps the organisation to survive and perform, and thus culture forms, in large part, based on performance. Kehoe (2013) suggests that;

“Performance aspects of culture are understood as how activities, roles, behaviours, mindsets etc are valorised based on how they enable an organisation to survive and perform. So in schools, performance culture is far more than just a culture of examination, it is a culture which constitutes student identities and valorises students based on their capacity to take certain roles relative to organisational performance outcomes that are external to them. A school would not meet the external demands on its performance unless it valorised the performance of certain student roles, beliefs and values over others. The important aspect of culture though is how new members of an organisation internalise it in order to adapt and belong in the organisation.”

Additionally, Van Maanen & Schein (1977) suggest that culture can be a form of ‘organisational socialisation’ in that new members learn to adapt to an organisation by

internalising culture. If this is the case, then students' experience of school culture may involve socialisation into aspects of performance culture.

Performance culture then, is an aspect of organisational culture. Not all cultures in the school will be performance cultures and alternative sub-cultures will exist amongst students and teachers but even these will likely form in relationship to performance culture which is the dominant value system. This is illustrated by Willis's (1977) work in the sense that the students created an alternative culture but did so in reaction to the prevailing culture. Performance culture became an important theme in the findings based on certain critical incidents in the project, and in that sense it is important to include it here. Performance culture is an important concept in the work of Stephen Ball (1987, 1990, 2001, 2003). The interpretation of performance used is based on his (2003:216) definition;

“performance is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement.”

What is most important about Ball's definition is the recognition that performance is relative to a 'field of judgement' and that *“the issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial”* (2003:216). Performance is not based on any objective truism but rather a relative set of judgments normally held by those in power in any context. The values of performance pushed on schools are presented as *“misleadingly objective and hyper-rational”* (Ball, 2003:217) but here we recognise them as relative positions reflecting particular values systems. In schools students clearly have little control over the field of judgment of their performance, it is something imposed on them. One way of understanding the implications of this research is that they suggest why we should involve students in that field of judgment. What Ball's position implies is that if you do not involve students in effecting this field of judgment, then

you are not changing power dynamics in any authentic way.

Conceptually it is how this performance is experienced as culture which is important here. This is because, as the analysis in the next section will show, performance is not just something students experience but a set of values they internalise which affect their identity. Performance culture comes to represent ‘the way things are’ – the truth and reality about life in the organisation which is beyond question because it is the purpose of the organisation – its *raison d’être*.

From organisational socialisation to ‘organisation-in-the-mind’

This is perhaps the most important process the research focused on, how organisational culture may be internalised by students to form a mental construct of organisational life – an ‘organisation-in-the-mind.’ The research sought to explore this ‘organisation-in-the-mind’ students had developed and what it revealed about their beliefs about their organisational change agency. In order to develop this idea two theoretical tools from organisational theory were used and connected, Schein’s theory of organisational socialisation and Armstrong (1997) and Hutton’s (2000) theory of ‘organisation-in-the-mind’. The best way to illustrate the process is to begin with a student’s experience of organisational culture in a school.

It helps to return to how Schein defines organisational culture in three interconnected ways as:

1. *“A body of solutions to external and internal problems that has worked consistently for a group and that is therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think about, and feel in relation to those problems.*
2. *These eventually come to be assumptions about the nature of reality, truth, time, space, human nature, human activity and human relationships.*
3. *Over time, these assumptions come to be taken for granted and finally drop out of awareness. Indeed, the power of culture lies in the fact that it operates as a set of unconscious, unexamined assumptions that are taken for granted”* (Owens & Valesky, 2007:167).

Organisational socialisation is then the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role – in this case the ‘student role’. Van Maanen & Schein (1977:3) argue that “*the entire organisational career of an individual can be characterized as a socialisation process*”, and in the same sense the entire schooling experience can be characterised as an organisational socialisation process whereby an organisational culture becomes internalised. In Schein’s definition, points 2 and 3 suggest organisational culture is internalised by the individual as unconscious reality, as a mental construct of organisational reality, organisational culture begins as something external but becomes internal.

Systems psychodynamics offers another tool to understanding how this process occurs, the concept of ‘organisation-in-the-mind’. Organisation-in-the-mind developed from the concepts of mental models and applies them to organisations. Organisation-in-the-mind helps us understand how people view organisations as a system, how people assemble their experiences of the organisation and organise them into a “*coherent mental construct of activities within a boundary*” (Bazalgette et al., 2005:78). No one can ever experience or perceive an organisation in its totality yet we do create mental constructs, based on what we experience, of what we think of the organisation in its totality, indeed it is necessary in order for us to relate to the organisation. Every student in a school has a limited experience of the whole school as an organisation, nevertheless, based on their experiences will develop a very complex, and emotional, internal construct of the whole school as an organisation. This construct is referred to as their ‘organisation-in-the-mind’. As Armstrong (2004: 5) explains:

Any organisation is composed of the diverse fantasies and projections of its members. Everyone who is aware of an organisation, whether they are a member of it or not, has a mental image of how it works. Though these diverse ideas are not always consciously negotiated or agreed upon among the participants, they exist. In this sense all institutions exist in the mind, and it is in interaction with these entities in-the-mind that we live.

Additionally this construct is formed out of emotional experience. As Bazalgette et al. (2005:79) explain;

An institution has a specific existence, though the nature of the evidence of its existence may not be obvious. For example, a school exists as a building with people, lessons, technology, resources, but each pupil and member of staff may have a different idea of what it is about because of their feelings and experiences of it, that is, the school as an institution exists in-the-mind. It exists in the minds of people within the school and outside it, representing a wide range of attitudes, feelings, memories and ideals.

In this sense the organisation-in-the-mind can be seen as made up of the internalisation of organisational culture and affects a person's projections onto the organisation.

In conclusion the theory of organisational socialisation and the tool of organisation-in-the-mind provide a framework for interpreting the students' organisational behavior. Rather than interpret behaviours as acts of individual agency it allowed them to be interpreted as revealing insight into students' organisation-in-the-mind and thus potentially how they had internalised beliefs about their change agency from schooling.

The initiative as an emergent system and focusing on boundaries

In order to introduce this section, it helps to briefly introduce systems thinking. Systems thinking (also called system dynamics) is a means of describing the world as interrelating systems. It can be understood as a process of understanding reality as different bounded systems and exploring how they interrelate and interdepend on each other. It is used in many fields such as; ecology (Von Bertalanffy, 1973), technology (Weinberg, 1992), agriculture (Bawden, 1991), health (Huz et al., 1997), organisational theory (Beer, 1966), research (Checkland, 1981, 1985), and education (Richmond, 1993). *“System dynamics is growing at an impressive exponential rate. Interest in system dynamics is spreading as people appreciate its unique ability to represent the real world. It can accept the complexity, nonlinearity, and feedback loop structures that are inherent in social and physical systems”* (Forrester, 1994:3)

It originates from ecology (Von Bertalanffy, 1973) where it is used to understand natural processes holistically in terms of interdependence. It is also used in medicine to describe the functioning of the body in terms of, for example the circulatory

system, and how all these systems affect each other. In the same way an organisation can be viewed as interrelating systems. Systems thinkers are often most focussed on interdependence, *“it is a shift from viewing the world as a set of static, stimulus-response relations to viewing it as an ongoing, interdependent, self-sustaining, dynamic process”* (Richmond, 1993: 118). Systems thinking is also a focus on understanding behaviour as patterns related to how systems are functioning, rather than just exploring isolated behaviours as individual or linear processes. For example a school might exclude six children every year, systems thinking might explore this as a pattern that might reveal something dysfunctional about the system itself.

There is no single accepted approach to systems thinking; the field represents a variety of different approaches that share an aim to understand reality in systems terms. However, systems thinking can be understood as having two main perspectives, hard systems thinking and soft systems thinking. Hard systems thinking treats systems as having an objective reality in the world whereas soft systems thinking treats them as perceptions and mental models. As Jackson (1991a:133) notes with soft systems thinking, *“thinking becomes much more “subjective,” the emphasis shifts from attempting to model “out there” in the world toward using systems models to capture possible perceptions of the world”*. In soft systems thinking *“structure is defined as the interrelationship of a system’s parts and not the parts themselves, structure is invisible”* (Anderson & Johnson, 1997:5). In the 1990s a further perspective developed called critical systems thinking (Flood, 1990; Jackson, 1991b; Flood and Jackson, 1991) which sought to use systems thinking critically to challenge *“existing structures of inequality of wealth, status, power, and authority”*, rather than helping to *“buttress the status quo”* (Jackson, 1991a:131).

Systems thinking can be divided into closed systems thinking and open systems thinking. *“In system dynamics, a causally-closed system is one in which the causes creating the behaviour of interest lie within the system* (Forrester, 1994:13). Whereas an open system is one where the system is constantly interacting with its environment. In this research the systems psychodynamic approach was also used which is based on an open systems approach and focuses on the dynamics between systems. Systems psychodynamics, *“provides a way of thinking about energizing or motivating forces*

resulting from the interconnection between various groups and sub-units of a social system” (Neumann, 1999: 57). This approach also focuses on the concept of role in systems terms which, given that the research is focused on the role of change agent, provided the most suitable way forward.

In terms of this research, we need to look at how the concepts of system, role, and boundaries were used. One of the advantages of perceiving the project as a system, based on general systems theory, was that it enabled both me and the students to conceptually differentiate the project from the school in terms of aim, membership, space, time and leadership. However, the project was still a sub-system of the school in the sense that it was authorised and supported by the school’s leadership.

Another advantage of using systems thinking was that it enabled me to focus on **the emergence (or not) of the project as a system**. In terms of data analysis then the focus becomes the boundaries of that system and what is happening to them because *“boundaries of systems are determined by the perspectives of those who participate in formulating them”* (Ison, 2008:13). Boundaries are not barriers but are permeable and best imagined like membranes as Von Bertalanffy (1973) suggests. Boundaries are created by members of the group to make it a purposive system, as Reed (1999: 8) suggests; *“the task of any purposive system is to decide where to 'place' boundaries which denote the difference between the inside and the outside. This signifies that activities are started up and planned to achieve a purpose.”* In other words researching the boundaries would reveal data on the perspectives of the students and school staff about the formulation of the system of the project and its purpose.

Systems begin as groups. As a purpose is made explicit, and boundaries of time, space, task, membership and leadership are defined the group begins to become a system. The next diagram expresses how this process was conceptualised during this research:

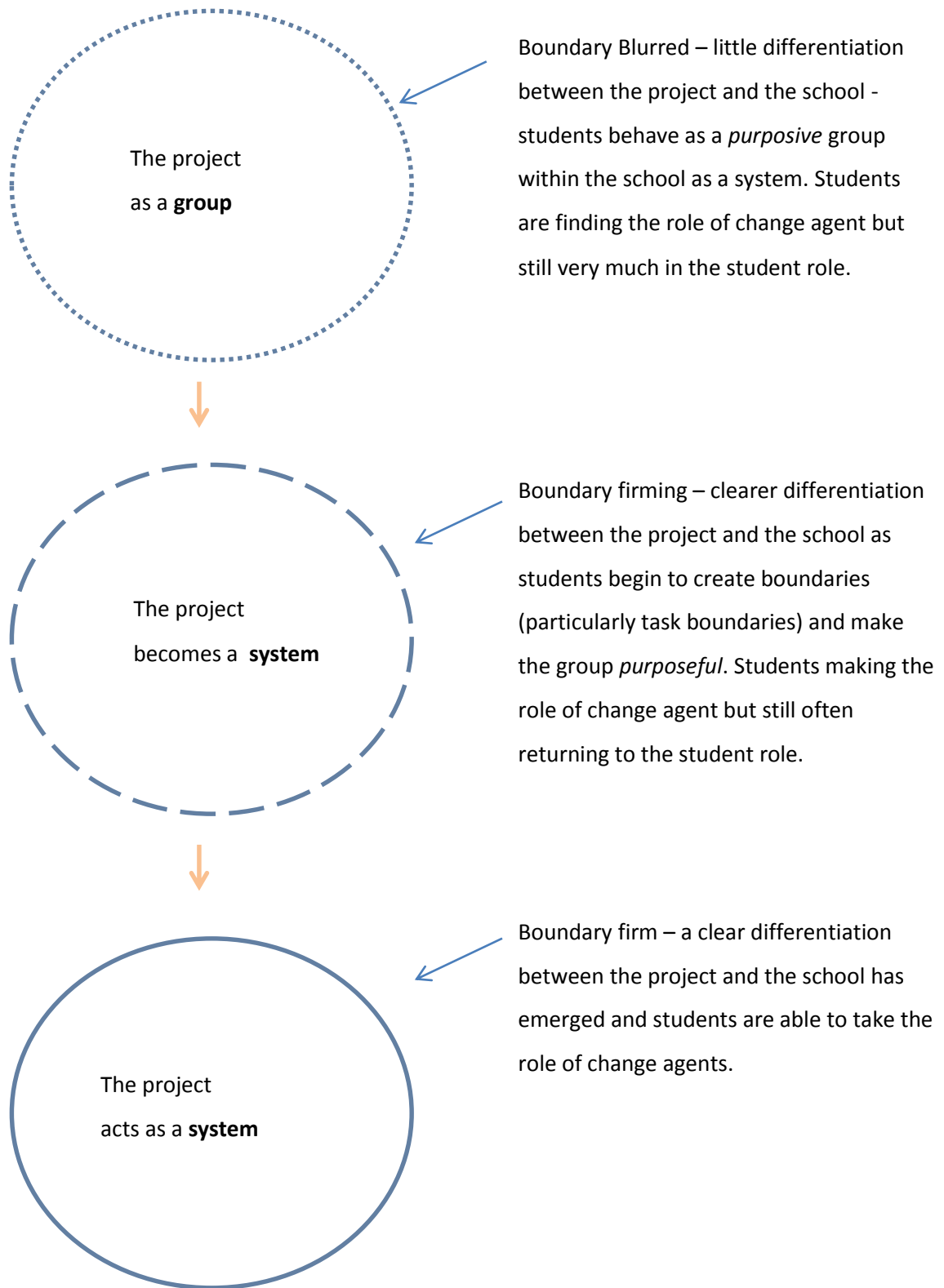


Fig 3.1: The process of boundary development of a system.

It is important to note that this is not a linear process but a dynamic one. Students formed the system and deformed it depending on their anxiety at particular points throughout the process. In other words they often moved between the different circles above at different points rather than moved in a neat process from group to system. What this framework allowed me to do was conceptualise that process of forming and deforming the system and the critical incidents that affected why and how this occurred. It also allowed me to account for the further complexity of sub-systems within that group, particularly as students split the groups towards the end of the project.

Clearly, the Deputy Heads and I played an important role in managing these boundaries, but it was a key factor that the students should also be able to form the system of the project themselves by being enabled to create some of its boundaries. The boundaries of time and the space we used were already formed by the school, however students were given freedom to choose the boundaries of task, membership and leadership. The purpose of allowing them to create the system itself was to enable them to create new roles as they did this, roles which referred to that system for their purpose.

3.2 The Role of Change Agent

It is very important to clarify how the concept of role is being understood as one of the unique contributions this thesis makes is to explore the role of change agent in schools and how it is understood. It is also very important methodologically to be able to distinguish between the roles of student and change agents, to be able to account for the interaction between the two, and to be able to follow the process of moving from the student role to the change agent role. Therefore, the concept of role was a key methodological concept as I was trying to trace their capacity to take a new role within the school system, therefore I needed a clear methodological framework for understanding role taking **as an interactive process**. The concept of 'role' used here is derived from systems theory and systems psychodynamics and differs slightly from how it is generally used in social psychology. Role can only be understood as the interaction of three concepts; 'person', 'system' and 'context' (Reed, 1999). It is this

systemic view of role which guided the second process of the methodology. What follows is a brief explanation of the concepts of person, system, context and role.

- 1. Person:** In this analysis person is used to differentiate from individual, it means an individual interconnected and interdependent with other individuals.
- 2. System:** System is being used in the sense of purposeful activities within a boundary, as it is perceived in-the-mind. As Bazalgette et al. (2005:77) explain;

“human beings naturally interpret their contexts in terms of systems, even if we are unaware of it. We intuitively perceive people grouped to carry out activities together: we discern boundaries around groups and sense ourselves as being in or out of those groupings. Every time we have a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’, we draw a boundary and create in our minds a systemic relatedness.”

To summarise, when a student perceives the school as a system they are creating a mental construct in their minds of activities occurring within a boundary.

- 3. Context:** The context is the environment in which the system is operating.
- 4. Role:** Systems Psychodynamics offers a framework for understanding what taking the role of ‘change agent’ actually means by conceptualising how it forms as the interaction of the key concepts outlined above – the following diagram attempts to represent how we understand the concept of role. Many of the usual articulations of role perceive it as static and related to position, whereas systems psychodynamics defines it as dynamic and a form of behaviour deriving from a person’s dynamic relationship with an organisational system and context (Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006) and sees agency in organisations expressed through role. This is more specific than the perspective of social psychology which focuses on role in terms of different kinds of social roles. In essence role is about how we actually behave in relation to organisational systems. It is not prescribed like a ‘position’ but

found, made and taken in relation to a person's experience and understanding of an organisation.

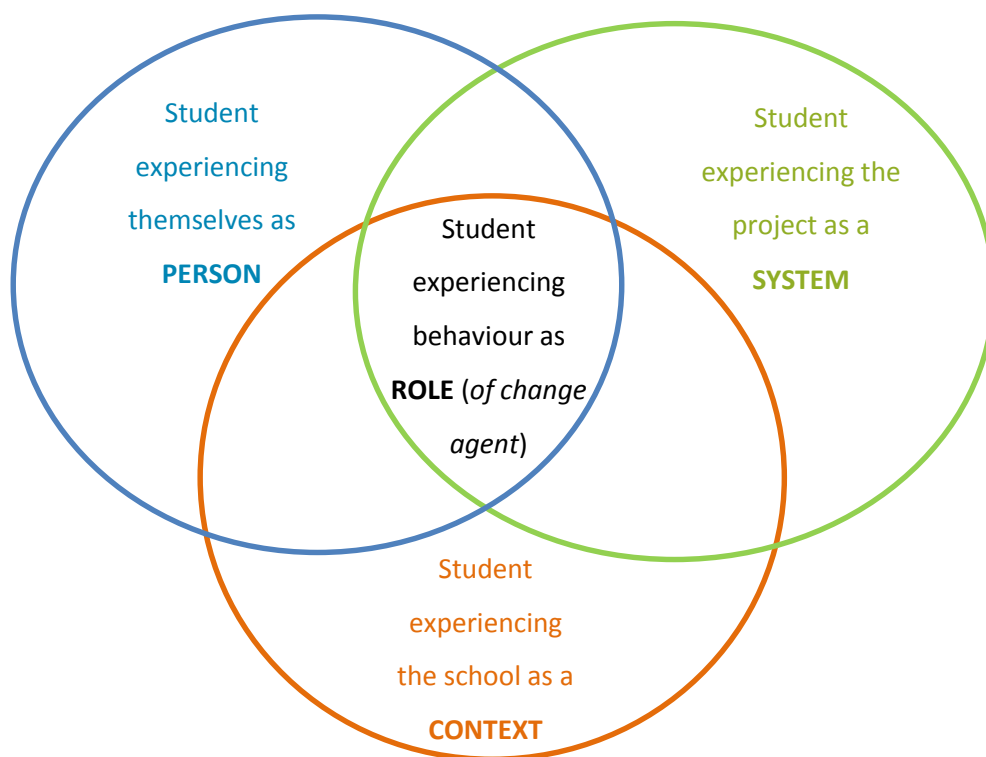


Fig 3.2: Conceptualising the role of change agent: Adapted from Bazalgette et al. (2005:73).

What this model above allowed me to do was clarify that I had to enable the students to experience themselves as interconnected persons, experience the project as a system and experience the school as a context in order to give them the opportunity to find the role of 'change agent'. This then informed the methods I used in the sense that at different points I tried to enable them to experience themselves, the project, and the school in a different way. My hypothesis then might be that students' inability or disinterest in taking the role of change agents would be related to the interaction of one of the systems in the diagram.

Role theory further posits that role taking is a process. In summary, it suggests that a person finds a role by trying to understand the system and its boundaries, they then make the role by deciding how to interact as a person with that system and then take the role by acting in behaviour. Finding a role and making role are both mental processes that lead to taking a role which is behavioural. This analysis allowed me to

breakdown where students might be in the process of finding, making and taking the change agents role at any particular moment.

Ultimately, the important use of this role theory is the idea of relating behaviours to systems. In other words, when the students are acting in the student role they are understood as taking a role in the school as a system, whereas when they take the role of change agent they are taking a role in the project as a sub-system of the school and the school becomes the context of action. On this basis any struggle on their part to take the role of change agent could also be interpreted as a struggle to find the system of the project and its boundaries, and the question becomes why they are struggling to find the system. This would lead back to looking at how the boundaries of the project as a system were being affected.

In other words, students would only ever be able to take the role of change agents in as much as the system of the project was seen as having different boundaries to the school, otherwise they would have no reference points for finding the role. So, as the project went on I became aware that resistance was being directed, not at the role of change agent directly, but at the boundaries of the project itself, which had the outcome of making it often difficult for students to find the role of change agent.

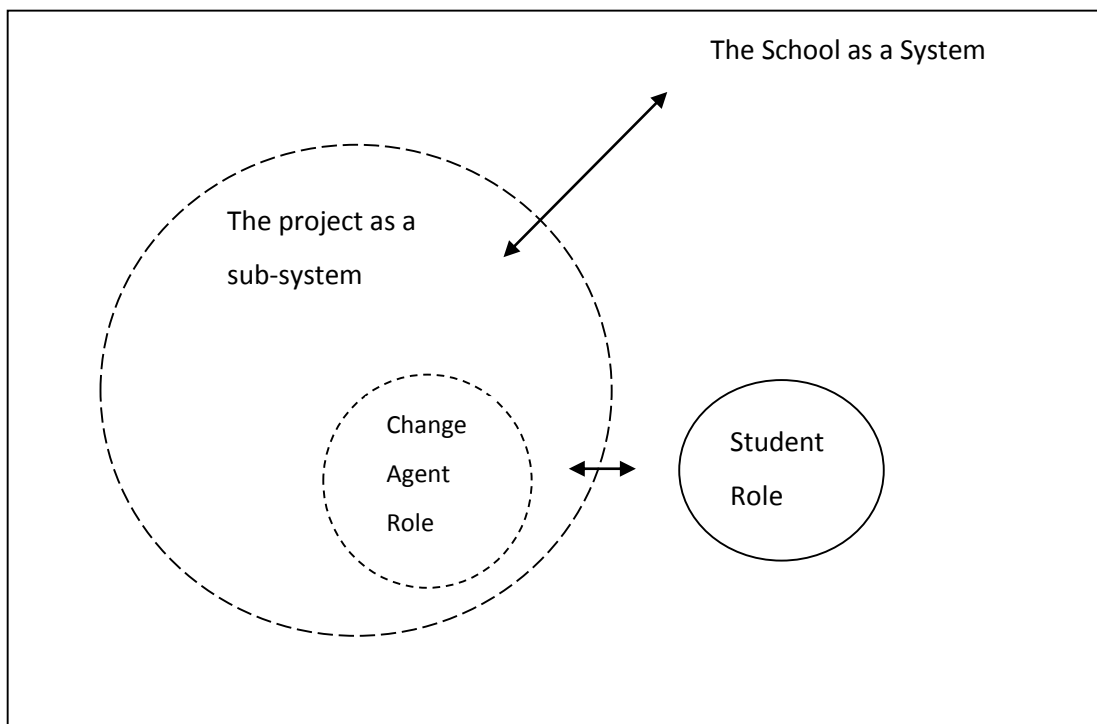


Fig 3.3: Picturing the project's roles in systems terms.

In the diagram above the framework is shown. The project is shown as a sub-system of the school – its boundaries emerging. The students, while in school time, are taking the student role. When the project sessions occurred, students crossed the boundaries from the school to the sub-system of the project. This process of entering the new boundaries of the project could facilitate students taking a new role of change agent. This is based on the conceptualization of role covered in fig: 3.2 where role is taken to be relative to a systems boundaries. The students can take the change agent role as they enter the boundaries of the project, however when those boundaries are unclear or under threat the students may resort to what they perceive as the safer student role. The framework allows us to interpret resistance, not as a located at the change agent role, but as located at the boundaries of the project. In other words, if students struggled with the change agent role this can be conceived as being related to their perception of the boundaries of the project as a sub-system of the school. This perception, I will argue, is informed by their internalisation of the culture of the school.

The value of the concept of role is also that it creates a context where power is potentially transformed into authority. Students acting in the change agent role may experience and be experienced as acting in authority, whereas if they were just acting outside of any system we had created they may be experienced as just using power. As Reed (1999:13) outlines;

“role transforms power into authority. This introduces another function which conditions this transformation, that of authorisation. A person's actions can be 'authorised' by others only if they are considered as working within prescribed limits, limits (boundaries) which enable the actions to be understood as carrying out the aims of the authorising body by accepting accountability for their actions. Hence others also functioning within these limits experience freedom if they can take the role to exercise their own authority. Therefore, within a system, a person-in-role can exercise authority, whereas a person in a network of relations without boundaries can only use power.”

Despite the systems focus here, there are also some sociological uses of role which are implied in the analysis, for example in the sense of how role affects identity. This

is a considerable and complex field in social psychology (eg: Burke & Reitzes, 1981; McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker, 1968) and there is little space to go into this in depth in this thesis. However it is relevant in the sense that symbolic interactionists suggest that role affects identity, as Burke & Reitzes (1981:84) suggest:

“Identities are symbolic and reflexive in character. It is through interaction with others that these self-meanings come to be known and understood by the individual. In role relevant situations others respond to the person as a performer in a particular role. The meanings of the self are learned from responses of others to one's own actions”.

The important point being that role identities, which include organisational roles, affect self-concept which is relevant throughout the thesis in terms of how I imply that the student role affects the identity of the students in the research. Moreover, role identity is legitimised by the culture of a situation, as Burke & Reitzes (1981:85) suggest *“the link between identity and performance is through common meanings. The meanings of the self (as object) are established and assessed in terms of the meanings of the performances generated by that self (as subject) within the culture of the interactional situation.”* So, the students may have experienced their identities as assessed in terms of their role performance which is an important point about valorisation, which I return to in later analyses.

Psychodynamic concepts

Systems psychodynamics adds the complexity of unconscious processes to systems and systemic approaches and focuses on the unconscious life of organisations through splitting, projection, introjection, mirroring, social defence and a number of other psychodynamics concepts applied to organisational behavior (Bazalgette, 2002; Bion, 1968; Miller & Rice, 1967; Rice, 1965; Reed & Palmer, 1972; Reed, 1999). It is important to note that this was not psychological research in the sense of analysing psychological processes in any individual student, nor was I setting out to analyse unconscious process in the school, rather I found some psychodynamic concepts that related to systems processes useful tools in explaining organisational processes. These concepts of ‘projection’, ‘internalisation’ and ‘social defence’ are used widely across

many fields to different levels of depth.

Projection was originally understood as the unconscious process whereby unwanted feelings or thoughts are projected onto persons or objects in the outside world (Halpern, 1977). Here it is used in a loose sense and does not adhere to the strict psychodynamic use which normally relates to intergroup behaviour. It is useful to understand it as how we impose our internal perceptions onto external situations. Clearly this does not conform to the definition which sees projection as a means of managing unwanted feeling and thoughts through others. However, it was felt that 'projection' was nevertheless the best term for the processes I wanted to capture, as students seemed to 'project' onto situations which could be quite revealing of internal expectations. For example, I will say the 'students projected performance onto the situation' – by this I will mean the situation might not have had the outward intention of performance but that I felt that they interpreted and co-created the situation this way based on their internal emotional expectations. By projection here I do not mean they merely perceived a situation in this way but that they also co-created the situation in this way. Projection here is the process through which their internalisation of the school culture was expressed in the project, it could be seen as revealing something of their 'organisation-in-the-mind', the way they perceived the organisation, its culture and its expectations of them.

Internalisation as it used here closely relates to the concept of organisational socialisation as previously outlined and is best understood in the context of that definition. Internalisation is where people assimilate the norms, values and culture of other groups, or in this case, culture of an organisation. Internalisation happens through socialisation (Nash, 1990:433). Here I use it to refer to the outcome of the process of organisational socialisation as outlined in the previous section. I often refer to the students' internalisation of culture, in this case I refer to the process of organisational socialisation.

Another important idea from systems psychodynamics was social defense mechanisms (Menzies, 1960). Social defense is a process whereby members of an organisation project ways they have of managing difficult feelings (anxiety, guilt, shame, envy *etc*), due to the stress of their role in the organisation, onto the

organisation – such that they eventually become perceived as organisational culture or structures themselves. As Ramvi (2008:5) outlines; “*social defence occurs when a group of people unconsciously collude to protect themselves against anxiety and tension at their work place, often at the expense of carrying out their real task*”. So, I was open to what students’ social defenses might be and whether they had become adopted into the culture of structures of the school. Another characteristic of social defence is how people can try to control relationships or situations in order to maintain the role they want to have. In this case I was interested in whether, and how, the students and teachers might try and control situations in order to maintain a particular role, what that role was, and why they sought that role. In many ways, as will be seen, I came to interpret students’ organisational passivity and the student role itself as a social defense which had become culture and structure. In others words the valorised connection of passivity with the student role could be a form of social defence from the problem of what to do with students’ change agency in the school.

Another concept I found useful was that of ‘Primary Task’. This became a very important methodological concept for me throughout the research in terms of understanding purpose. The primary task is a concept used to describe what purpose a system is set up to perform, however the concept is often in practice (in my experience) used to discuss how that purpose is distorted by pressures, which is the main way I have used it here. For example, as Raye & Nichol (undated) outline;

“external pressures can distort the primary task at the highest level. For instance, we might presume that a school system’s primary task is to provide knowledge, skills, and qualifications to young people that expand their options for life and work. However, experiences in Britain led me to wonder if its primary task were to qualify students or to eliminate them from the higher education track.”

It became very important in the methodology to keep trying to understand how the primary task of the project was being distorted by internal pressures from the students and external pressures from the school. In other words was the project as a system doing what we said it was doing, the aim that has been developed, or had another primary task emerged?

Resistance to the role of change agent

Underlying this thesis is an assumption that students developing an inhibited disposition towards acting as change agents is problematic. In chapter one I discussed concerns related to whether schooling is designed to encourage adult passivity in organisations (Apple, 1983; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Chomsky, 2002; Fielding, 2007b; Illich, 1970; Postman & Weingartner, 1969). Collins indicates that the radical position is that “*our school days teach us, not only, how to read and count but are also designed to teach us to be biddable, disciplined workers.*” (1998:157). Hence there is a concern that there may be a relationship with students learning about their change agency in schools and the adult understanding of their change agency in organisations.

That organisational change itself is considered problematic can be witnessed by the fact that it represents a unique field in organisational theory, organisational consultancy, management consultancy, and systems psychodynamics. Major writers in the field include Mintzberg (Mintzberg & Westley, 1992), Burnes (2004), Handy (1996), Collins (1998), Reed & Hughes (1992), Argyris (1993) and Schon (Argyris & Schon, 1994). It also represents a professional field worth millions in the UK alone, with a considerable number of people employed in the business of organisational change, and acting as change agents. It is worth looking at the field of organisational change in context. In many ways it is a field which itself formed out of the need to manage the human consequences of increased pressure for performance. In the early 20th century, in order to improve performance Taylor (1947) indicated that factories needed “*standardization of outputs and methods*” (Collins, 1998:164) which presupposed a degree of worker passivity. Marxists argued that these changes came at a great cost in terms of worker wellbeing because, faced with worker resistance to these changes, managers developed further forms of control and punishment, which further reduced worker agency. This also led to a consistent need for organisational change which tended to have a top-down focus. Nowadays, based on the human relations approach organisational change tends to focus on more distributed forms of leadership.

Many of the debates about organisational change have focussed on the structures that enable employee's agency in organisations. Fox (1985) argued that there are considerable inequalities in adult organisations and that change in this regard is actively discouraged. He argued that even trade unions, for example, are largely themselves forms of tokenism because they cannot actually affect underlying structures. Indeed some parallels can be seen between the arguments about student voice and arguments about employee voice. Pluralist thinkers argue that employees do have a voice because they have certain rights, however radical thinkers argue that the relationship is a dependant relationship and thus a power relationship where employees have a voice, but little capacity to affect structures. The Clegg-Blumberg debate represented a debate about how employees could best have agency in organisations. Clegg (1960) argued that employees need to be able to take an oppositional position in a separate structure whereas Blumberg (1968) argued that, because accountability was necessary for democracy, co-management was the best approach. Blumberg argued that employees needed to be represented in the senior leadership of the organisation.

In the 1990s the field of organisational change was popularised in the media by guru's such as Sir John Harvey Jones, Tom Peters, Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Michael Porter and since then "*the managerial role as change instigator, and manager of change has received more attention, both from specialist literature on management, and from more mainstream forms of communication*" (Collins, 1998: 2). Influential books such as *The expertise of the change agent* by Buchanan and Boddy (1992) raised questions about the competencies needed for people to act as organisational change agents.

Organisational change is considered problematic because of human resistance to change (Piderit, 2000) – resistance to acting as change agents and resistance to adapting to structural changes. The failure of many organisational change projects in adult organisations can be found in employee resistance (Maurer, 1997; Spiker and Lesser, 1995; Regar et al., 1994; Martin, 1975). A longitudinal study by Waldersee and Griffiths (1997) of 500 large organisations from 1993 to 1996 showed that employee resistance was the most frequently cited implementation issue management faced and that more than 50% of the organisations in the study struggled with employee resistance. These findings raised questions about top-down organisational

change. In the late 1990s theory shifted from a focus on this top-down approach to a bottom-up approach and to a focus on creating change leaders to focus on the human side of change (Anderson & Anderson, 2002; Seel, 2000). In this shift from top down organisational change to 'bottom-up' organisational change the role of change agents in the organisation became a central issue. This role has also been explored, for example, in relation to teachers in schools (Bartunek, 2002).

This new focus brought the Human Relations and Systems Psychodynamic approaches into the picture such that one of the dominant theories on organisational change is now best characterised as the Human Relations approach which sees successful change as a process that must involve employees as change agents themselves at some level. This Human Relations approach looked was originally based on the work of Elton Mayo (1933) and Kurt Lewin (1946, 1951) and looks to more recent work by Miller (1997), Reed (1999) and Sher (2012). In this work change agency is related to the concept of role as outlined previously. One of the more influential works in popular literature on organisational change was Peter Senge's (Senge et al., 2000) work on *The Fifth Discipline*. Senge argues that successful organisations in the future will be non-hierarchical, decentralised and learning organisations. He defines a learning organisation as a place where people can discover how they can change or create their reality. This requires employees who are open to taking the role of change agent.

In addition to these concerns some commentators argue that we have a social duty to develop change agents in organisations due to the corrupt organisational cultures they see as developing in major insitutions and corporations. Dunphy et al., (2003:4) argue that "*some traditional organisational values and forms are not sustainable and, unless significantly reshaped, will continue to undermine the sustainability to society and the planet*" and that we need "*change agents to drive the changes faster and faster while there is still time*" (ibid:4).

The field of organisational change is largely dominated by the problems of managing change and developing change agents. One of the key issues is the difficulty of shifting people from a passive to active position in relation to change. For example Zuber-Skerritt (1996:75) argues that one of the most difficult processes is to shift people from "dependent to independent thinking" from "dependency on experts or

seniors” to independence and from an interest mainly in “operational issues” to reflecting on underlying issues (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996:75). These problems are often summarised as ‘resistance to change’ which is worth exploring now in more detail in relation to this research.

The key problem with resistance to change, is that as a theoretical field it tends to focus on subordinates’ resistance to top-down changes, rather than their resistance to enabling change itself. In education the field mentions teachers as potential obstacles to enabling organisational change (Corbett et al., 1987; Handy & Aitken, 1986; Giacuinta, 1973; Owens & Valesky, 2007; Sarason, 1996), but students own resistance to change is not developed from an organisational perspective but only from the wider sociological perspective of resistance theory. In addition to these problems, I had to be open to the fact that resistance to a large extent is ‘in the eye of the beholder’. In other words where I saw resistance, others saw normal behaviour in line with the culture of the school. There was a sense that I had to problematise what others in the schools culture might perceive as normal or commonsense behavior from students. Ideas like ‘the students are apathetic’, or ‘not taking it seriously’ or ‘suspicious’ which could be taken for granted as natural responses had to be critically challenged as potentially revealing something deeper about resistances. Indeed, throughout the project, resistance was never expressed overtly by anyone in the kinds of ways Willis for example experienced, these students already had a well-developed understanding that overt expressions of resistance were potentially damaging to their status, instead resistance tended to be expressed in more sophisticated ways.

Due to its adoption by management theory, resistance often tends to be interpreted as the negative or irrational behaviour of those affected by change based on their misunderstanding and fear of change, rather than a holistic systemic process that everyone is involved in. Indeed, as Dent and Goldberg (1999:2) point out, “*Kurt Lewin introduced the term as a systems concept, as a force affecting managers and employees equally*”. Additionally, as Krantz (2001:42) points out “*the concept of resistance to change has been transformed over the years into a not-so-disguised way of blaming the less powerful for unsatisfactory results of change efforts.*” This perspective also can lead to oversimplification, for example resistance has come to include;

“anything and everything that workers do that managers don’t want them to do, and that workers do not do that managers want them to do... to resort to such residual categories of analysis can easily obscure a multiplicity of different actions and meanings that merit more precise analysis in their own right.” (Davidson, 1994:94).

In management literature resistance to change tends to be interpreted as ‘resistance from subordinates to changes enacted by management’ rather than as a group dynamic or as a dynamic potentially initiated by the less powerful. In the same sense the ‘change agents’ in schools are often seen as adults (Smyth, 2007) and as Klein (1976) shows researchers tend to take the perspective of those in control of implementing change which has led to academics focusing less on the perspectives of those with less power and reinforcing the idea that resistance is located in the psychology of the subordinate. In this way students can become the ‘problem’ which only further reinforces a cultural idea and deflects focus from problems in the system. As Dent and Goldberg (1999:39) point out about change processes; *“supervisors, for example, look to make changes in subordinates when the real need may be for a change within the system.”* However, the same problem could occur the other way around, students could locate a need for change in teachers, or indeed themselves, rather than the system. For example, when faced with a perceived problem with the system (for example; underperforming students feeling undervalued) students may react by locating that problem in a particular teacher rather than in the overall culture of the school, that teacher becomes the representation of the problem and it may be perceived that if that teacher can be *personally* changed then the problem might be changed. Likewise students may locate the problem in themselves rather than the system, if they experience themselves as undervalued because of underperformance they might learn to undervalue themselves, rather than see a problem with a system which values them on those terms.

On this basis it was understood that there was always a danger in perceiving the students’ resistance as irrational or negative behavior that was an obstacle to a change process that was assumed to be ‘clearly to their benefit’. It was important to take students’ resistance seriously, not only on ethical grounds, but because their resistance was also data which would help us all consider new direction in terms of the action research. The research will imply there is negativity to some of this behavior but that

this negativity is due to internalised culture rather than the personal traits of, or ‘deficit’ in, the students. Resistance to change is often used like a mantra without understanding that there is no generalised ‘resistance to change’, people resist aspects of what it will mean for them – as Dent and Goldberg (1999:26) argue, “*people do not resist change, per se. People may resist loss of status, loss of pay, or loss of comfort, but these are not the same as resisting change*”. In other words, it was important to break down, if groups in the process ‘resisted change’, exactly what aspect of that process they were actually resisting.

Interpreting resistance was also complicated by the question of who the change agent really was at any moment in the project. In this project it was clearly intended that the change process was being created by the students and the school would be reacting. In theory the resistance was not going to be the students’ resistance to an externally imposed change but their, and the schools, resistance to the students themselves delivering change. In practice it became far more complicated, however, because in later stages the students, often intentionally, did interpret the project as an external change process despite being given the freedom to develop it, indeed as I will suggest later, creating the idea that the project was something external to them seemed to become a very potent form of resistance to change itself.

This leads to another theoretical complication with analysing students’ behaviour in terms of ‘resistance’. It encourages one to assume that the resistance is located between, subordinates and leadership - in the case of schools, teachers and students. In other words the resistance to change can be legitimately located in familiar limiting structures when in fact the resistance may be internal and shared. The assumption may be that power structures cause resistance which is often the more obvious interpretation offered, but sometimes this interpretation can be offered because neither party actually wants to transform the power structures but feels, because of social desirability, pressure to imply that they do. This again was a process that was explored in this research as it was assumed that power relations between students and teachers would be perceived as an obstacle of change, but may also be used as a justification for resistance to enabling change.

Resistance to change can be far more sophisticated however, it can be resisted by enacting or performing change processes without engaging in actual change. In my

own professional experience I have witnessed how leaders of an organisation can enact change processes while at the same time creating the conditions to guarantee that they will not substantially change anything. They may do this unconsciously but also may be seeking what could be called ‘change without difference’, *ie* to project the appearance of change to satisfy an external desire for ‘progress’ or their own emotional need for progress but without the uncertainty, conflict and anxiety caused by real changes. In this case tokenism and collusion become important interpretive concepts as the process becomes a token to change – an enactment - and those involved (both the change agents and the participants) collude in this, though they may go to some lengths to reinforce the appearance that real change is occurring. Indeed, I would argue, enactment of change processes, is the most sophisticated form of resistance to change as it is not usually interpreted as such and it is difficult to make judgements about it. In this research it became a crucial interpretation and the key form of resistance the project experienced.

This idea also opened up the possibility that students’ resistance could be an acting out of institutional resistance on behalf of the school. For example, Kotter (1995) challenged the prevailing understanding of resistance to change based on research in more than 100 companies over a decade. He showed how there were in fact very few cases of individual resistance being the issue, rather resistance was usually located in the organisations culture in how it promoted a self-interest that supports resistance. In other words the organisation at the same time as apparently seeking organisational change creates the conditions whereby doing that change appears to be against one’s self interest – a process Van Mannen and Schein also explain as down to organisational socialisation (Van Mannen & Schein, 1977). Every organisation creates cultural conditions to discourage change agency in order to maintain its status quo which come into tension with intended acts of change. This self-interest that leads to resistance to change would clearly be an important interpretive framework.

I also worked with the idea from psychodynamics that resistance to change itself is projected in organisations. In practice, this often means that resistance to change is usually voiced and located in individuals on behalf of the group - it can then be useful for a group to perceive them as the ‘problem’ when in fact the whole group is resisting change. This is a kind of splitting where problems are split off by an

individual and projected onto someone else. For example, during the project the school leadership consistently tended to locate the resistance to change in the students rather than seeing the resistance as a wider process they were themselves a part of. Locating the resistance in the students, which was an easy thing to do, reinforced the cultural idea that the students were not able to take responsible leadership and located the problem away from the school's systems and teachings. In the same sense students often supported their resistance by referring to their cultural belief that the school leadership would not change anything despite their own resistance to testing this belief. So, this analysis will have the added complexity of not just being my interpretation of resistance to change but moreover an analysis of how resistance to change itself as an idea was used by different parties to locate responsibility and blame and ultimately led to a kind of unconscious collusion.

Conclusion

Overall the theoretical approach is organisational and this is what distinguishes this research from the approaches generally used in student voice. It is organisational in that it is focused on the emergence of the project as a system with boundaries of task, time, space, membership and leadership and exploring how these boundaries were fostered or inhibited by students and the school, which would affect their capacity to take the role of change agent. It uses systems psychodynamics in how it explores how organisational culture is internalised by students and how this consciously and unconsciously affects their capacity to do change. The organisational approach is deliberate and focused, as the research questions are to understand the factors affecting the organisational role of change agent:

1. What are students learning about acting as organisational change agents from their experience of schooling?
2. How could this learning be affecting their disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations?
3. Are certain groups learning this differently, or to a greater extent, than others? Why?
4. What do these findings mean for the theory and practice of developing student agency in schools?

If we consider question 2, the conceptual framework reveals four sub-questions which the research explored in further depth.

- What aspect of the schools culture affected how the project itself as a system was fostered or inhibited within the schools?
- How was this culture externalised?
- What did the process of (and resistances to) students taking the role of change agent itself reveal?
- What did the students' organisation-in-the-mind', and their organisational socialisation of the schools culture, reveal about what they have learnt about their role in organisational change?

In addition, the concepts of organisational socialisation and organisation-in-the-mind have a more significant conceptual role in the research as they will be used to support the idea that students learning about acting as change agents from schooling can become a disposition which may be reproduced in adult organisations, this is discussed in depth in chapter 6.

Chapter 4: The reflective stage: students' informal learning about their change agency in their school

The aim of this chapter

The main aim of this chapter is to present the participating students' perceptions of the role of change agent in their school and make some preliminary indications of what processes are affecting these perceptions. This is important as the material in this chapter is partly used to interpret their behaviour in the active stage of the project (as covered in the next chapter). This material was developed during the reflective stage of the project, as outlined in this diagram. It is important to note that these were the students' reflections **prior** to us taking any actions.

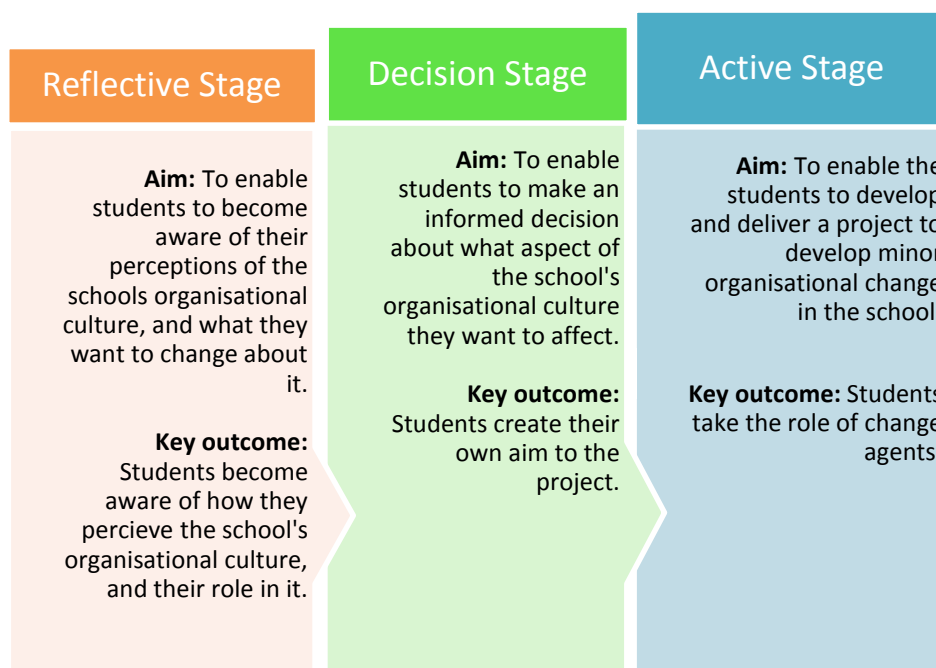


Fig 4.1: The stages of the project, in terms of aims and outcomes.

During this stage of the project my main aim in enabling them to reflect on the organisational culture of their school was not to produce the research data outlined here, but rather to enable the students to make an informed decision about what aspect of school life they wanted to affect within the rest of project. The process of enabling them to explore their perceptions of the organisational culture of the school was prioritised over obtaining specific research data.

Methodological points

The material in this chapter has some limitations. Students were aware that the focus of the project was on change, therefore they were more focused on what they felt needed to be changed and may have emphasised the negative. However, this negativity was not usually based on personal bias, for example it is an important finding itself that few of these students indicated themselves as being overly unhappy in their school, and I did not come across any issues which raised any alarm bells in terms of personal issues. Rather their concerns tended to be directed far more at what they saw as an unjust and selective culture in the school and it is this focus which I link to performance culture. It is also notable that students, though still in the school, were not in their normal classroom situation and in this sense were not being studied in their normal context, however as will be shown later they attempted to recreate many classroom dynamics anyway – which became important data.

4.1 Students' identity and the change agent role

In terms of the thematic analysis this section presents a broad range of material which related to their perceived identity in their school and how it connects to their perception of the role of change agent. In as much as possible I have attempted to show why I interpreted this in relation to performance culture in the way the findings are presented.

Change and being 'prisoners'

It is useful to begin looking at their attitudes to change by understanding the role they perceived themselves as having in school. Initially students were keen to project their perception of schools as 'prison like'. This was done verbally but more often was indicated in their rich pictures (see figs 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). In terms of interpreting pictures I have only offered denotations in a social semiotics sense (Harrison, 2003) in terms of what students might have meant to signify and symbolise in pictures. These denotations were based on the students' comments on the pictures. The students seemed to use 'prison' as a symbol for feeling oppressed – this perception of school as prison-like and oppressive was only indicated at the start of the project, and as students found new ways to express themselves they were able to indicate why they

felt this way. It is also notable that this was a perception mostly held by the year 9 students. As the project progressed it became clear that what students were indicating was something about the student role and being a ‘prisoner’ – and a desire to express a connection between those roles. One of the most prevalent prison-like qualities I experienced was students’ sense of constantly being observed. The students often seemed anxious to create situations where they were not being observed and, during an exercise we did, they indicated that CCTV cameras in the school were a source of anxiety for them.

Most of the data on the prison role they experienced was derived from the picturing methods we used. On commenting on the pictures they had drawn a student from Chippinghouse noted:

Most of the pictures show students in prisons and behind bars and the clocks are very important, they are good and bad, bad because they show when school starts and good because they show when we get out of prison.

Some pictures express this oppression as an imprisonment of time and space:

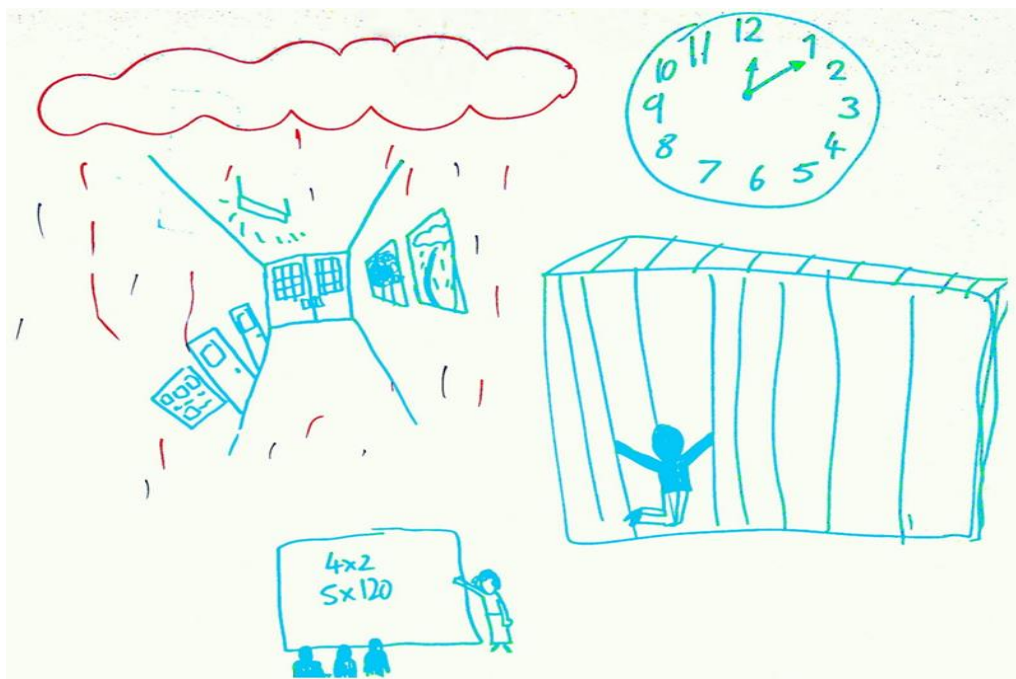


Fig 4.2: Student drawing of school as prison-like.



Fig 4.3: Student drawing of themselves enclosed in bars.

This student, for example, drew a 'prison for kids' and felt so strongly that they drew a 'turd' to indicate how they felt and were anxious that I show this.



Fig 4.4: Student drawing of their school as a 'prison for kids'.

Some students just depicted a generally oppressive atmosphere – note how the sun is far from the school here:



Fig 4.5: Student drawing of school as rained upon.

On looking at all their pictures together students were asked how they made them feel:

It makes me feel like going home because the school is not very good and it is stupid and they make me feel angry.

They make me feel the school isn't good and that people are getting bullied.

Some pictures describe the school as happy, some as rubbish.

These pictures remind me of all the years at this school, depressed, bored.

The rich pictures, as seen as a projection of the students' experience of school, on the whole suggested that these were a group of students who wanted to project the idea that they experienced the schools structures as imprisoning, although not all pictures were so negative. The use of the term 'prison' is important not because it indicates something real about their schools (there was clearly some dramatic exaggeration from particular students because of the nature of the task) but because it indicates their perception of their own role as passive and their lack of control over their situation. This was a perception that was further clarified as the project went on.

Change and Identity

Developing an identity for these groups is in some ways an artificial construct because these groups had been selected based on adult perceptions of average disengagement. Nevertheless group identities did emerge which became very important for the project and in terms of later discussions about identity it is important to look more closely at the students' self-perceptions, particularly of their status in the school. This differed slightly in both schools:

Greenfield: Here a group identity emerged very quickly— one which they saw as representing the 'average' and 'powerless' students of the school. It is also worth noting that the group became dominated by boys, with only two girls involved.

Chippinghouse: A single group identity never emerged in this school, rather the group was very notably split 3 ways and these groups tended to sit together and avoid working together. The group consisted of:

1. A group of girls who were very eloquent, very negative about the school, very concerned with their rights (not their responsibilities) and had quite high levels of agency. These girls led the dynamic of this group, though the boys did not legitimise this leadership.
2. A group of boys who seemed to have some behavioural issues in the school. These boys however were the most consistent attendees of the whole project and seemed to benefit the most from the time and space we created. Their interest in the project seemed to be a means of temporarily disengaging from, what was for them, their difficult relationship with school. They also showed a notable interest in their researcher role.
3. A group of quieter boys who were more engaged with the school and tended to hold the positives when the other two groups were holding the negatives on any issue. However their agency was notably lower than the girls and they consistently gave leadership to the girls. These boys seemed to hold a more conservative line and were most open to formally engaging with the school.

Students were aware they had been selected for the project and it is possible that some of the more engaged students were uncomfortable with having been identified with a group they may have perceived as more 'troublesome' or as having a different cultural or social capital. Two students who seemed very engaged in school left the Chippinghouse group early on clearly because, I felt from their behaviour, they did not want to be identified with the others. This suggested to me that however the students in the project saw themselves, some other students saw them differently.

Overall, in terms of their status in the school, both student groups collectively identified themselves generally as 'average' and as 'powerless' as can be seen in this dialogue from Greenfield:

R: Who do you think are the least powerful students in the school?

Students: Us!

S1: When we're on our own but maybe not now as a group, and we've got you.

S1: Average people in the school,

S2: They don't choose us for things.

S3: That's why they chose us here, because we're...

S4: It's randomly selected!

S2: I don't believe that.

S5: This is not chosen random

S4: It's more average.

S6: It's very mixed – there's loads of different groups in here

S4: And no proper thick and no proper clever

The students in Chippinghouse, on being asked anonymously on paper what kind of identity they had in the school, all replied either:

Ok, average, an all-rounder, a mix.

In both groups students were naturally more concerned with how they were perceived by other students. For example these pictures are from an activity we did on ‘groups in the school’ in Chippinghouse whereby I asked students to indicate what groups there were in the school – in some cases they indicated the group they felt they belonged to with an X. For example, this first picture is by one of the ‘badmans (the name they gave themselves).

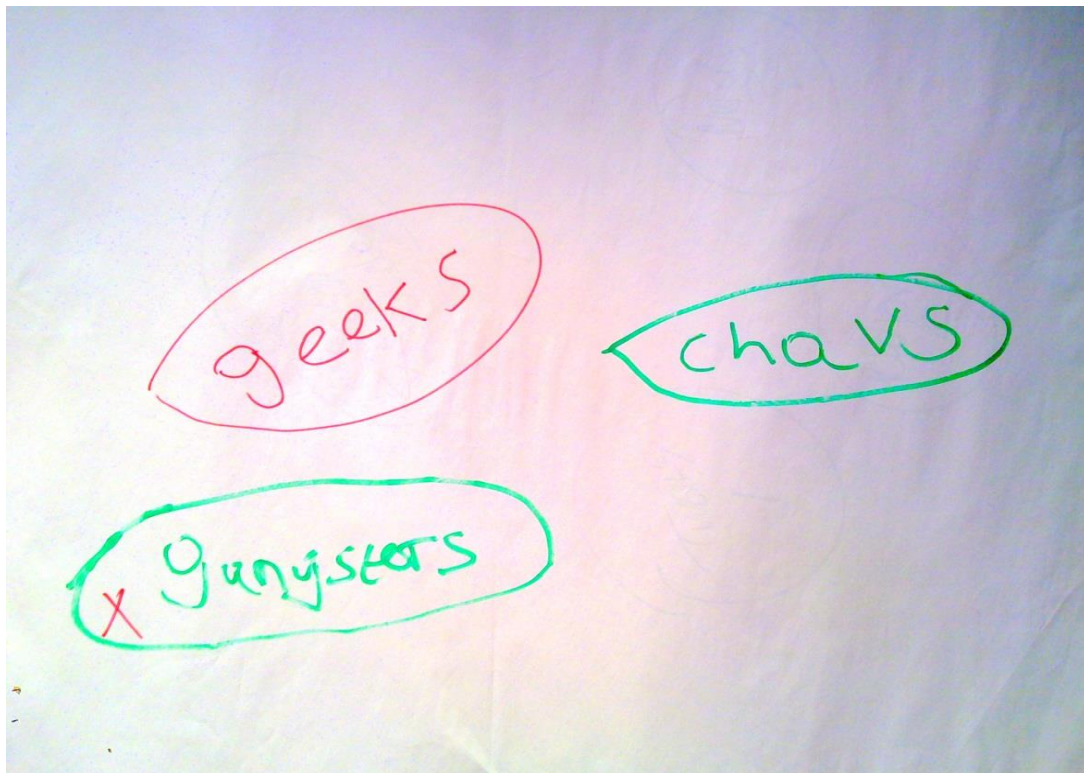


Fig 4.6: Groups in the school.

The ‘badmans’ were the most disengaged of all the students in terms of school but were very engaged in the project until we formally engaged with the school. They often discussed exclusions which was often a very revealing discussion about their identity:

Tom, you haven't been excluded!

I have! (defensively), I got an exclusion for...

R: Would you say you are worse or better behaved than average?

Average I'd say, well I have to admit not recently, I've had three fights and two exclusions and one internal in the last two months – that's quite a lot – normally I don't usually fight, but it's bad luck. I feel cursed...

R: Why do you think the school picked you?

Because we are the trouble affected kids, drug addiction! (laughs)

Me fighting, he doesn't stop talking in class and him, don't get me started on him!

R: What do you think about the students who behave well?

There a bit geeky.

Do you know those well behaved students, they're the worst ones because they just stir it and then sit back.

From the heart we're the good ones.

R: Why do you think you behave differently?

Don't know

R: Are you bored in school?

Yeh, always.

R: Do you think if you were in a different school you'd behave differently?

Depends... well it's the people who are around you that affect you, in it?

R: So, would you prefer to go to this school than any other?

Yeh, probably.

We're badmans! But we don't cause that much trouble.

We're perfectly intelligent, it just gets boring.

R: What do you like?

PSHE, it just tells you about stuff, the birds and the bees, crime, and conflict.

Other students tended to have a more positive perception of their status in the school and saw themselves on the boundaries of ‘popular’ groups and wanted to emphasise their belonging.

This difference between those more engaged and less engaged with the status quo was sometimes held by different members of the group often forming interesting splitting. This dialogue from Chippinghouse occurred when I asked the students what they would tell the public about their school.

Boy: We're a good school and we've tackled down on a lot of the bullying but there's still lots of fights everyday, mostly with the chavs.

Girl 1: Yeh, and you're not a chav!

Boy: I am not!

Boy: We have a good education for those who want to learn.

Girl 2: Which is no one. (laughing)

Girl 1: Nobody likes the teachers, there are lots of unwritten rules made by mean teachers.

Boy: You should say some good things about our school.

Girl 2: I don't know any, well, we don't have to wear a uniform.

Boy: People treat each other with respect.

Girl 2: Hmm... yeh. (laughing)

Despite these differences, overall the students seemed to perceive themselves as representing averages in the school (see p.140). The students use of the term average seemed to be equated with other terms like ‘an all-rounder’ or ‘normal’, which suggests that by average the students meant ‘not unusual’ or representative of norms that they perceived in the school. However, there was a broad range of levels of engagement represented by the students and though they tended to perceive themselves as having similar status in Greenfield, in Chippinghouse they split into sub-groups. A characteristic all the participating students shared was a level of status anxiety which tended to be revealed in their informal conversation and a sense that

they were disempowered students in their schools and that their status was vulnerable. This is important because this became one of their perceptions as to why they could not take the role of change agent.

Initial beliefs about change

Students' desire to change the school tended to be much higher than their belief it could be done. In Chippinghouse, for example, students were asked how much they wanted to change something in the school's culture and then how much they thought they could. In an informal poll done with post-it notes, on average students, on a scale between 1 and 10, put 7 for how much they wanted to change something and 3 for how much they thought we could.

On the whole, at the start of the project students perceived change as something material, and often as involving finding money to achieve something. However it became clear that material change was seen as more desirable because, as the students perceived it (perhaps rightly), it would be much easier, would experience far less resistance and would produce measurable outcomes. In the very first session in Chippinghouse, when they were asked what problems we might have, students replied:

Teachers! The teachers will never let us change anything, we should just try and get a swimming pool or something.

The idea that it might be easier to get a swimming pool than change anything cultural perhaps reveals their doubt quite starkly. It was also clear that material change seemed desirable because of the perceived projections that came with it – for example students talked about doing something public like in 'Red Nose Day' and the subsequent positive attention they might receive. It was also a great source of humour for them;

How are we going to change anything if we don't have any money?

I want a swimming pool – a water park!

But we don't have money.

We could do a make money project.

We could raise money like we did on red nose day.

We should make the school day shorter cause kids find it hard to bond with their parents.

Yeh, for the whole day we could just have lunchtime.

Yeh, it would help with our socialising skills.

Which would help us in the future cause in interviews we could be all nice and everything.

It also became clear over time that material change was more desirable because it led to outcomes that could potentially be measured and valorised – indeed this would become a thematic problem related to their internalisation of performance culture and their struggle with the kind of cultural change we were attempting.

There was additionally a sense that focusing on material change was an understandable form of resistance to the complexity of thinking about cultural change. It was my input on organisational culture that introduced the idea of changing something immaterial and once students began thinking about their relationships with teachers, and I enabled them to think about change in more manageable ways, they became less interested in doing something material.

Being valorised based on performance

Returning to the students' identity, it is interesting to understand, given how they saw themselves as 'average', how they perceived (what they called) 'the smart students'. It is important firstly to understand that the students did not necessarily see the capacity to perform as related to inherent capacities but rather to motivation. A student from Greenfield noted:

We know students who are very clever, but just don't do the work.

In this sense, when they referred to smart students they often seemed to be referring to students who were engaged, *ie* students who 'liked' school rather than students who necessarily achieved very high grades. They seemed to be referring to forms of symbolic, cultural and social capital that certain students had – being a 'smart' student related to how you were recognised by the school. The students understanding of this

valorisation in the school was often expressed through how ‘smart’ pupils were treated differently, not only by teachers, but also by students. In this dialogue from Greenfield the students had been talking about why ‘smart’ students get bullied.

R: why do you think the smart one’s get bullied then?

Cause they’re the ones who want to be at school

I think it’s because they’re jealous of them

They’re like the teacher’s pet

So, are they treated differently?

Oh yeh, the teachers are always there for them.

Yeh, if they need help or anything they (the teachers) go straight away to them

And I think people bully smarter kids because they think they’re better than the ones who can’t get it right

Students who mess a bit are just seen as the dumbest of all – the teachers just reckon they’re the thick ones so they just don’t care about them

I think popular people bully the nerds because they’re jealous of them because teachers like them

Here there is a sense that they felt that being academically valuable to the school also meant you were treated differently.

There’s this kid called X (who they had said was ‘very smart’) who kicked in a window and a door and proper beats up people and if we did what he did... they should treat everyone the same but they don’t.

Their sense that the smart students were valued differently to other students is important, it may be a perception that could be challenged, however given the pressures on these schools to improve their higher grades it is possible that high performing students were treated differently (indeed in one of the schools Ofsted had specifically called for more attention to be given to high performing students in the schools policy). However, it needs to be understood culturally rather than as

individualised cases. In order to promote a culture of high performance the school must indirectly promote a cultural idea that high performing students are more valuable to the school. This cultural idea is played out in a variety of ways and internalised by the students who still resist it at this age but may do less and less. Indeed the year 9 students were far more resistant to it than the year 10s, potentially because they have experienced less organisational socialisation and are further away from their GCSEs. In this way some forms of bullying seemed to be forms of resistance to the valorising processes of performance culture.

4.2 Students' experience of how performance culture affects the change agent role

When we got to the subject of why the students felt they could not act as change agents in their schools, more sophisticated conversations emerged, and the theme of performance culture began to emerge. For example, the students were very conscious of the school's focus on external concerns about performance. Students at Greenfield commented:

The problem is that the school is only worried about its appearance and how it looks to the public but within school there's lots of conflicts and relationships that need to be resolved.

I think they're more worried about results because they're more worried about what the school looks like to others than what they think about it – I don't know, I can't explain – they're just not bothered.

Internally, this focus on performance was indicated in how the students felt that only the 'clever students' or 'right thick' students were given a voice and listened to, they identified these students as people who had the kind of agency where they were able to get what they wanted from the teachers and got away with behaviour they felt that they themselves would not get away with. Indeed, I did an activity at Greenfield where I asked them to write down who they thought the five most powerful people in their year group were and they all named similar students. On being asked why these students were powerful, they replied with, for example;

*X because she always gets her own way with teachers
X, she's a bit sound but she can get whatever she wants
X, he gets everything he wants from teachers!*

R: And why are they powerful?

Well, two of them have problems – they get away with everything and if something goes wrong they never blame them for it. If you're right thick or right clever you get everything.

This supported other findings that suggested that they perceived power as 'given' based on how well one helps, or is inhibiting, the organisation from achieving its performance concerns. They saw the higher performing students as more 'powerful' and felt that power was needed in order to act as a change agent. This then became their reason why they felt they could not change anything in the school, because they were 'average' in terms of performance status and less 'powerful'.

Nobody is going to let us change anything in the school, they don't take us seriously!

We've never tried to change anything because the Headteacher and important teachers only ever listen to the clever kids.

Although they saw themselves as disempowered they had been, and were, involved in established school processes related to developing their voice and agency; however they perceived some of these as processes that were concerned with adult priorities. The students revealed how they were sceptical of the school council's attempts to develop agency in terms of whose interests it served. For example, I asked the students at Greenfield about whether they could change anything in the school through the school council:

We could change bits but they won't let us change it really because we've always tried with the school council and stuff like that but...

The don't give a monkeys

They don't give a toss really

When we went in that time they'd listen to X and like all the smart people and then we were just sat there like.

And I said good ideas at that meeting.

R: So, what does the council do?

Right, well we go to meetings – well, we used to... it was just Mrs. Y and she used to just listen to X and all these smart people like (names). I think we should change that.

If you said something to her she'd be like "anyway – onto the next person."

It's tried to change the canteen and raise money and stuff

R: Do they try to change any cultural things?

No, they just try and change how things appear, not the actual problems.

Yeh, they don't listen anyway

And when Ofsted came in they were like all show and acting and stuff

Yeh, we all had to act

And then we only got 'good'!

And (school council head) said 'I am so proud of what I have done to this school'

(Students laughed)

R: How are the school council chosen?

You have to make a speech about how you would help, how you would get your voice across.

The students seemed to recall this experience quite clearly and it is interesting to consider what they learnt from it. Firstly, the students were aware of how performance culture seemed to undermine the purpose of the student council in terms of performing for Ofsted's idea of 'good' student voice. They were also aware of how this led to a process that was about changing 'how things appear' rather than actual change. Secondly, these students perceived the council as selecting certain kinds of voices by just listening to the 'smart people' and by selecting based on the

ability to make a speech. This is possibly because the ‘smart people’ are less likely to seek cultural change that could be disruptive because the culture already valorises their status and identity. Additionally the ‘smart students’ may have a sophisticated understanding and capacity to accept that the process, in this case, is partly a performance itself, and that the purpose *is* the performance, rather than actually affecting organisational change. This is important as it was the first evidence of an awareness that the desired cultural capital might be the capacity to enact change processes rather than actually do change – an awareness that would offer significant interpretations of the students later behavior.

What the conversation does not reveal is that the comments some of them made at the council might not always have been made seriously. This suggests that these students perhaps struggled to take their own role in the council seriously which seemed to be down to an expectation that they would not be taken seriously – their behaviour here somewhat reminiscent of Willis’s ‘lads’. When I asked how many of them had ever brought an issue to the school council or even talked to them about a problem only one student said they had done so (though others had attended) which reveals that the students did not perceive their council as a structure which worked on their behalf. Rather, for these students, the council seemed to be just an extension of the same performance culture they may have been struggling with, which seems to be supported by their evidence from the previous dialogue.

What is important here however is that the students seemed to perceive these smart students as having more change agency in the school. This was revealed in a number of ways through an awareness that smart students were listened to and knew how to affect teacher behavior but it was more directly revealed in the students feeling that they were not given the same change agency because they were not recognised as having the same capital as those students.

Performance culture and student-teacher relations

The students seemed to be concerned that teachers might not be valuing them in a holistic sense but only in their capacity to perform academically. The students tended to present this as generalised to all students, but it may have been more subjective to their experience. This was often expressed in a complex way, through their concern about teachers appearing to be unhappy and stressed and perhaps not *choosing* to be

with the students, but just there to ‘get paid’ and get results. This concern was consistently reiterated by students and seemed to engender a lot of internal reflection and confusion and sometimes silence when we were talking about it. Whenever challenged about how they might be sometimes adding to the teachers stress students always ended with what became a mantra – that; ‘the teachers chose to be in the job’, which I came to interpret as meaning the ‘teachers chose to be with us’ or *should have* chosen to be with us. The underlying concern seemed to be whether the teachers valued them, and being with them, for *who* they were, or whether the relationship was conditional on their performance. I developed an impression that many of them struggled with the growing conditionality of how they were valorised as they entered the GCSE process. For example, the following excerpt is from a role play at Greenfield where I invited the students to be teachers and explain how they felt. The students are initially speaking in the role of the teacher.

I’m unhappy because I’m teaching children who don’t want to learn.

R: Do you know why they don’t want to learn?

Don’t know... because it’s boring.

I’m Miss X, I’m in the same classroom everyday saying things to children who don’t want to be taught – I’m feeling morbid, unhappy and aggressive – like I want to leave all the time.

I’m Mr X, I’m stressed and fed up with the students as they are being angry and violent towards me, I also feel morbid.

R: What do you mean by ‘morbid’?

Depressed, and stressed... you know, from all the assessment.

R: (Now out of Role Play) What percentage of your teachers would you say feel morbid?

75%

100%

Most of them really.

R: Do you ever feel sorry for them?

No, because they chose to be in the job.

Another excerpt from Chippinghouse shows a concern that the teachers might not be doing the job because they enjoy teaching the students.

The teachers are like 'we get paid no matter what you do'

Yeh, they say they say that all the time.

They say 'it's not my fault if you don't do your work'.

Or 'I don't have to teach you, I still get paid either way'.

And if you ask them for help they just leave you there.

R: Can you understand why they might say things like that?

Well, they have chosen to do the job.

Teachers are always like 'I made the effort to come to school', but they're getting paid!

Students also directly expressed concern over whether the teachers really respected them. A student from Greenfield said:

Lots of teachers here look down on us, they think we're less than them.

Clearly what these students are concerned about is that the teachers might actually be just teaching them because they are being paid, not because they value them as students. Throughout the research this seemed to reveal a concern about their status and a concern that as they moved closer to GCSEs the less conditional valorisation they still remembered from primary school was fading and their status was now far more vulnerable and conditional on performance.

The teachers should control us

In spite of the students feeling they were not empowered and 'imprisoned' they seemed quite concerned that teachers should 'control' them. They seemed quite frustrated about teachers who could not control them and this frustration seemed to be

based on certain teachers inability to strictly embody the teacher role (as they expected it) which seemed to then make them anxious about their student role. As will be seen, these were the teachers students most wanted to meet, however they seemed to only want to meet them so they could challenge them further. This desire for teachers to embody a specific kind of controlling role would later become further revealed in their expectations of me. The desire to be controlled may reveal a desire for their passive role as students to be reinforced. The following conversation from Greenfield illustrates some of that confusion:

Mr. Smith used to cry and walk out of class – because he couldn't control the class – every class

R: Why do you think that happened?

Because he couldn't do anything about it.

He didn't do anything.

You notice stuff about teachers, sometimes they're strict at the start and you're careful but after a while you realise you can get away with things.

R: Ok, let's imagine a new teacher comes in here now to ask your advice, they're afraid – what would you say to help them?

When you introduce yourself in class make it sound like you're really strict but once you've had a few lessons have a bit of a laugh with them – so they think that your strict but you're not actually, but come across that way.

Yeh, a bit strict but having a laugh.

Having a laugh but controlled.

(The main problem) is the teachers who can't control us, how are we going to learn if they can't control us?

These little conversations about being controlled may seem irrelevant to change agency but they revealed a strong desire from these students to be controlled in the sense of having controlling structures reinforced. The students became very animated

about these teachers and were very frustrated by them. The teachers who could not control them may have caused anxiety by not creating the structures from which the students could take the student role as they understood it. It may also have revealed a concern to be more ‘controlled’ by me within the project and given less freedom in terms of the emerging change agent role.

Who should change? Me, or the school?

One of the most important but perhaps complex resistances seemed to be students’ internalisation of the cultural process where individuals were expected to change rather than cultures or structures. In other words that deficiencies and problems were located in individuals and not a product of culture or structures. They seemed to see the solutions to problems in terms of changing people rather than changing cultures or structures which was very important in terms of their attitude to enabling change.

It was clear right from the start that the students related performance culture to how they were classified. We discussed it at Greenfield:

R: Do you feel under a lot of pressure about results?

Of course, yes, I mean we’re all classified like that, aren’t we?

Yes. They make it sound like you will have no life if you don’t get a C.

However, their sense of being classified in terms of performance was more subtle and related to being labeled in various ways based on their behavior. Students also spoke a lot about how they felt they were labeled as problematic and how hard it was to escape this role they were given. It was clearly a source of some anger for them because it was experienced as an act of control – *ie* by publically labeling them in this way also disabled them to some extent. For example, these first comments are from Greenfield and the second from Chippinghouse:

If you get into trouble at the start of the term, they just keep carrying on at you for the rest of the year – like always targeting you.

Like if you say something wrong they compare it to you – like if someone else said something wrong they’d turn around and say ‘that’s like what he said!’.

Or if you do one thing wrong they just blame you for everything.

Sometimes the teacher might pick on you for something you did and just not take you seriously anymore and then you just don't want to listen to them.

We've got a bad reputation

Once bad, always bad.

If you're good for the first term, and do all your homework, the teachers lay off you for a bit but if you do anything, and you're like bad, but you start doing well again, they're going to still have a go at you for missing out at the beginning and your gonna have that bad reputation about you.

Students at Chippinghouse also suggested that being labeled could be directed personally to suggest one's background was connected.

In our school we have a lot of internal exclusions, they're really boring and ask you all these dodgy questions about your family background and stuff like that.

The extent of students' anxiety about this was played out in an activity we did in the 3rd session in Chippinghouse. I had developed this activity, in agreement with the school, in order to enable them to express their anxieties in school more directly. For this activity, I explained that they were going to show me around the school, however they were also going to mark the school. I gave them 3 small coloured removable stickers – which were pink, orange and green and told them to think about which places students felt most anxious and where students felt most relaxed. They were to use pink to indicate that students felt anxious, and green to indicate calm, and were specifically told not to use the stickers on classroom doors (but to tell if they would put one there) and were also told to stay in one group.

The students however began splitting into sub groups and some were using the markers to mark the doors of teachers they liked or disliked. One of the girls had an extremely angry face and said;

I'm going to Miss x's to put a sticker, she is poo, poo to me!

I'm going to get Mr x back.

When I asked them why they had put stickers on a teacher's door, they replied:

We did it because the teachers will see red stickers on their door and think they have to change.

I tried to bring them back on task and we discussed taking the stickers off. Initially some of the students did not want to remove them.

Are you going to make us take all these off? I'll be really offended if you do.

They then chose to remove the stickers after I encouraged them to do so, so that the teachers did not see the stickers. At the time I felt that these students in one way or another seemed to want to vent anger and frustration on their teachers and in a hurtful way if possible – though some of their behaviour was just fun and peer pressure from each other, it also suggested that it was a kind of revenge. It is interesting to reflect on the possibility that this was an expression of a sense that they also felt like they were labelled due to their behaviour, and that it was hurtful for them. My interpretation of this was that the students felt that if they behaved badly they were publically labeled and they may have perceived this as a suggestion they 'had to change'. This is important in terms of potentially explaining their passivity as they may have developed a tendency to locate the need for change in themselves rather than the culture and systems around them.

Difficulty envisioning change

Though students could envision material change they tended to have difficulty envisioning how they would like things to be culturally different. As perhaps has already been shown, the students had clear opinions on what concerned them at school, however strikingly they found it very difficult to envisage alternatives. We drew rich pictures on what they would like to see differently and again they focused on minor material things. Students spoke to a great extent about how issues like teacher and student behaviour and relations concerned them, however when challenged to envisage how these could be different they tended to resort to material differences. Here are some examples of pictures students from Greenfield drew on 'what things would be like if they were changed'. Unlike their other pictures they tended to be very vague and hesitant, and students found it to be a very difficult task at the time.

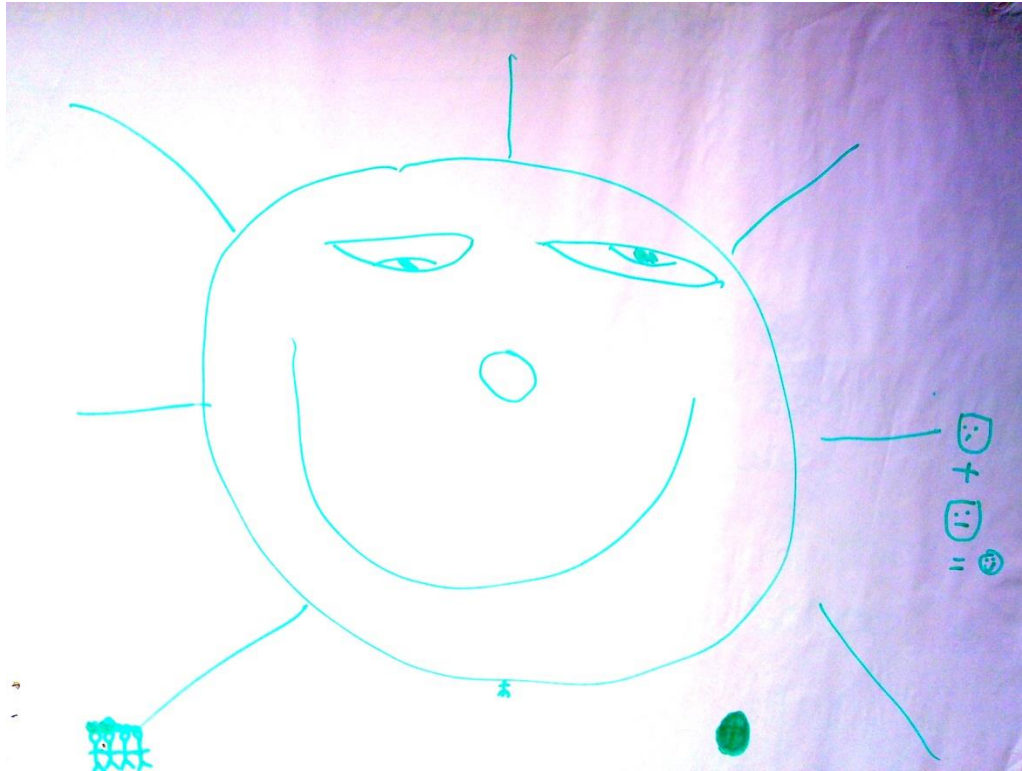


Fig 4.7: Envisioning a more positive culture

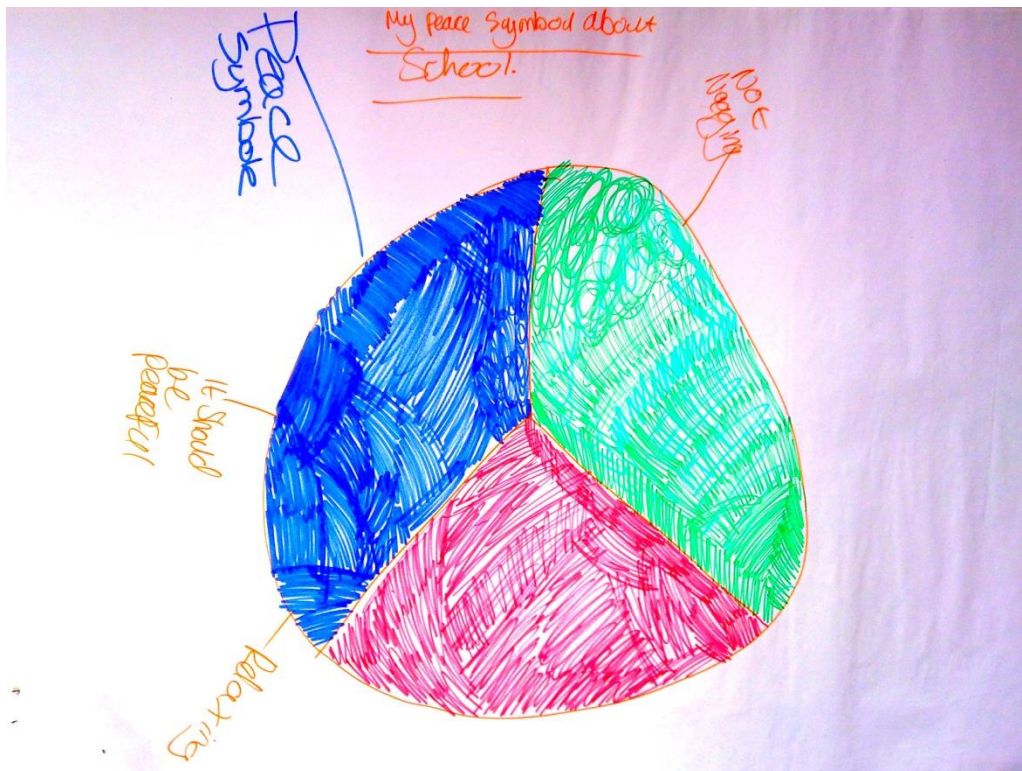


Fig 4.8: Envisioning a more positive culture

While doing this activity I was struck by how difficult students found it to envision a school with a more positive culture when they had little problem identifying problems

with the schools culture. This suggested that, though they perceived these things as problems they also perceived them as ‘norms’ in the schools culture – so much so that they had not considered what it might be like if they were different, which follows from Schein’s theory of organisational socialisation. This perception of these problems as ‘normal’ seemed to be an aspect of organisational culture that they had internalised and one that had formed a powerful resistance to them envisioning change. Their pictures of a better culture expressed emotion but had little concrete content, however more than that, when we did this activity they seemed quite disengaged from it. Most importantly, this also revealed what would become a theme; that students (who were normally very imaginative) found it difficult to legitimate and perceive value in their own suggestions and visions about the school. The students overall may not have perceived themselves as being authorised in re-envisioning culture.

Change is being listened to

Students tended to equate ‘change’ with ‘being listened to’ rather than acting or behaving. This attitude was endemic in both student groups and one of the cultural beliefs they had developed which had most influence on their behaviour. Note in this typical conversation from Greenfield how change keeps being equated to teachers listening.

We’ve tried to change things in the past but teachers never listen to us

Have you ever tried doing something yourselves?

We do, but they won’t listen

We can’t change things because teachers won’t listen

Students also repeated the idea that they did not think those in authority would make any changes.

I think we sometimes don’t take this seriously because we don’t think it (the changes) will happen

This attitude is certainly considered a ‘norm’, not just by students but also, in my experience in the schools, by adults who see ‘student voice’ as just the process of

enabling students to express their opinions on important matters. The prevalence of this mentality cannot be understated and I believe it was one of the main reasons they did not believe they could change anything – because they had learnt to see themselves as ‘the consulted’ rather than actors in the school. They were very used to being consulted and had come to see that as their role and the limit of their agency. This was the first suggestion that the growing use of processes that can involve students in organisational change, like student voice, could be acculturating students to a situation where ‘enabling change’ involves only offering voice while accepting that the actions to create changes themselves are made by authorities. However, their attitude also had a rational basis in terms of who they saw as responsible and the contradictions of being made responsible for something they did not believe they could affect. Students from Chippinghouse commented:

It's not our responsibility to change things, it's the governments, kids can't do anything

How are we going to change the school? Shouldn't the teachers be doing that?

They also felt at one point that they should be paid for their work in changing the school.

My Mom said we should be paid for this, because my Mom and Dad pay a tax.

The idea, clearly introduced by some parents in this case, that the students should be paid for improving the school strongly reinforces the idea that the school is ‘other’ to the students and that the problems are not the students’ problems nor will the benefits be experienced by the students. The school is rather a ‘service’ that the parent and students are consumers of. These insights are complex because, as has been argued, student voice can ‘use’ students to improve the school in terms of adult interests. However, on this occasion they seemed to be using this insight to undermine the role of change agent, a role which could give them considerable freedom to improve the school in their own interests.

Students’ attitudes to anger

Some students expressed considerable anger during the reflective stage, mostly directed at teachers and sometimes directed at me. In Chippinghouse this anger remained up to and during the action stage, however in Greenfield students began

denying they were angry during the action stage. Students' confusion about acting on anger they experienced often made it difficult to get them to consider trying to change anything. Strikingly, the vast majority of the students thought that being angry about things at school was unhealthy. When asked if they expressed their anger half of them said they kept it inside, the other half said they expressed it but mostly by:

'taking it out on other people'

'Punching people after school'

'taking it out at home'

'taking it out at break or after the lesson'

'If I get angry about things I just get on with it'

Only one student said:

'by arguing back with the teachers'.

Most anger was directed at perceived unfairness but some was also directed at how boundaries are managed. For example, this student from Chippinghouse, when drawing this picture, expressed deep resentment at how he couldn't daydream:

"The teachers are just like bla bla bla so I'm always daydreaming about nicer places but MR x always catches me and shouts 'stop day dreaming', I curse at him, not out loud, just inside myself."



Fig 4.9: Student depiction of school

However, despite a few exceptions among the youngest students at Chippinghouse who voiced anger on behalf of the group, most seemed to have internalised that anger. The reflective stage sessions of the project represented a space for students to potentially express anger about issues, however students had great difficulty connecting their anger to positive action, indeed they only seemed to be able to connect anger with negative actions as will be seen later. This may be an attitude they have internalised through the culture of the school. For example, the disconnect between the source of their anger and the use of legitimate agency was exacerbated by a perception that anger was unhealthy, even if based on legitimate concerns. This perception that anger is unhealthy may be learned because much of the anger expressed and dealt with in schools is negative and tends to lead to negative consequences rather than constructive actions. Students seemed to have few models to go on where anger was a resource in achieving something positive.

Discussion

The students' ambivalence about enabling change can be summarised by this diagram.

Fig 4.10: Performance culture's effect on students' perceptions of acting as change agents.



These findings suggested that there were a number of factors inhibiting their change agency before we even considered taking action in the project. I have tried to show how these different points, as expressed in the diagram, all relate to effects of performance culture on the students, as internalised and as an internal experience.

It is worth discussing a number of these in some more detail. Firstly the idea that change agency is given to those who support the status quo. McIntyre et al. (2005:155) argue that voice can end up acting like a “*dividing practice rather than as a way of involving and eliciting those students whose voices are silenced because they feel somehow that they don’t fit the dominant discourse and academic aspirations of their schools*” and this is supported by the students perceptions of how their student council seemed to valorise the ‘smart’ students. Taylor and Robinson (2009:167) found that it “*is often the case that large numbers of students active in student voice projects are students who have a stake in their education and the cultural capital to participate*”. Indeed the participating students in the research made very similar comments about their student council, feeling that only the ‘clever students’ were actually listened to. Some students’ reactions to this married with Willis’s interpretations and it led them to disengaging and devaluing the process and, in Bourdieu’s sense ‘misrecognizing’ the process as owned by, or belonging to, others. More importantly though, the students seemed to perceive the council as just another extension of the performance culture in their school and thus not a process through which any problems related to performance culture could be meaningfully challenged.

The findings also revealed a consciousness that enabling change can be an act to fulfill certain performance concerns. In the dialogue about the student council the ‘smart students’ seemed to have a sophisticated understanding that real change was not necessarily desired but rather the performance (in the sense of acting) of change for the school and Ofsted was desired. This may seem like a minor point, however it is a crucial point in terms of organisational change because if students perceive that the students with the highest status in the school, those who they see as the most valued, do a performance of change rather than actually engage in critical change, they are likely to make a connection. This connection is that the desired cultural capital is the ability to accept the act (which the ‘smart students’ may accept), and that attempting critical change would not be perceived in the same positive way. Performance culture directly affected voice processes here by valorizing voices that

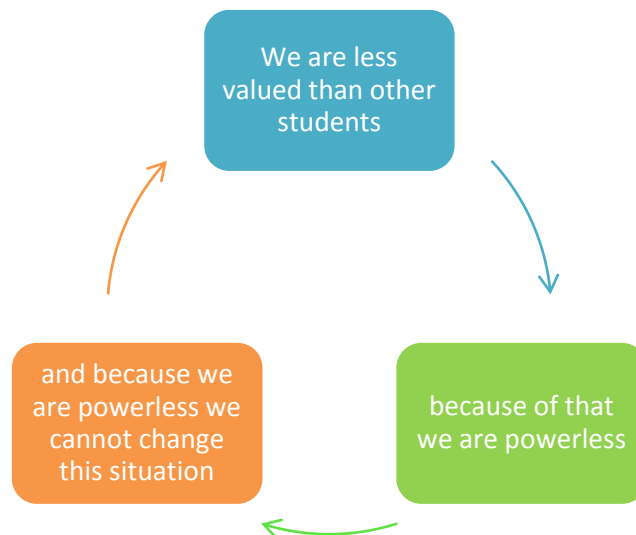
performed in the desired way. Considering the students' learning here is crucially important in terms of interpreting their later behavior in the active stage. This connection of enactment and student voice to the 'smart students' may be highly inhibiting if we also consider issues of identity. These students, as much as they recognise that high performing students are valorised, may not wish to be valorised in the same way and there was consistent evidence that they were still at a stage in the schooling process where they were struggling with the increased conditional performance based valorisation of secondary level schooling. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, for them to perform the desired role in student voice may have been experienced, in terms of their identity, as recognising affiliation with the smart students as a group, which they may not have desired in terms of their peers perceptions of them.

The findings also reveal how these students were concerned about their status - they were concerned about whether they were valued and taken seriously, whether their teachers really wanted to be with them, whether they were valued by other students, whether the school valued them and how they were often labeled negatively. Whether or not these students actually had a lower status, what is important is that they perceived themselves this way. This is important because those with lower status in an organisation are more likely to be concerned about projections onto their identity there. This status anxiety seemed to be connected with the performance culture in their school in how students perceived they were valorised based on how they reinforced or inhibited the schools performance and their anxiety about the conditionality of these valorisation processes.

These perceptions led to a cycle of passivity where their sense of lacking value seemed connected to their perception that they could not change anything. The connection they made was that one needs to be valued by the organisation in order to be empowered, and to be empowered in order to act as a change agent, which, as this diagram suggests, led to a self-defeating mode of thought. If we consider the diagram below, we begin with the idea that the students seemed to perceive themselves as less valued than other students. Then, because they perceived a students' power in the school as related to how a student was valued in the school, they perceived themselves as having less power to change their circumstances – only the powerful students could change their circumstances. This could then mean they perceived

themselves as having less power to change the circumstances (culture and structures) that led to them feeling less valued in the first place. In this way they may enter a cycle of passivity in their thinking.

Fig 4.11: A potential cycle of passivity in students' thinking.



In addition to these processes students seemed to struggle with the idea of enabling change because they had strongly connected change to being consulted, rather than acting. By the time this project was carried out 'student voice', or at least how that was interpreted, had been embedded in both schools for some time. Indeed both schools had a member of senior staff who was responsible for developing student voice in the school. Like any idea adapted into an organisation, over time student voice would have been adapted to fit with the priorities of the school so as to support the organisational culture rather than necessarily challenge it. Performance culture is interested in how voice can improve outcomes but must limit voice's capacity to challenge its own values and structures. The consequence of this is that students have become very used to expressing their voice and being consulted about certain things and have begun to equate that to 'changing things'. This model of voice more closely relates to a consumer model (Lodge, 2005) than a participative one. They are not given the experience of changing things themselves and in this project found the idea of being involved in changing things very foreign.

This also related to the finding that students had developed a very passive relationship to their problems and to solving those problems, they were learning that someone else

would probably solve those problems and could not begin to envision how they might do so themselves. None of these students had ever had a collective experience of solving a formal organisational problem on their own in school. The informal learning here is that when organisational problems are experienced, one expresses the problem to an authority figure and that this equates to dealing with the problem. This could lead to learning what Watson calls ‘the illusion of impotence’ where the person, when faced with an organisational problem comes to think “*it is up to ‘them’... ‘They’ ought to do this or that – it is not in my sphere of influence*” (1971:9). Ultimately, as I will show later, one of the challenging findings of this research is that both students and teachers seemed to collude in this organisational fantasy that consultation leads to change as it engenders positive emotional responses and delivers the appearance of change without actually involving any of the problems of real organisational change.

The idea of enabling change was also difficult because a better culture seemed to be difficult to imagine. This could be seen in their difficulty in drawing rich pictures of what school could be like if that culture was improved – most students could only imagine material differences. Indeed whenever we came upon a social or relational problem students often resorted to familiar ideas about material change. On top of that students often seemed anxious when we tried to imagine cultural improvements. Clearly it is very complex to imagine how to change cultural problems but I was surprised by how difficult it was for them to imagine a better culture. This either indicates that the organisational culture of the school is so powerful that no other alternative is imaginable or, more plausibly, that something in the organisational culture of the school has inhibited their capacity and desire to imagine and name alternatives. This inability to envision a credible alternative to any of their problems represented a significant obstacle to the change process we undertook. This may be due to the current educational focus which sees creativity as individualised expression divorced from action rather than the ability to develop collective creative responses to problems. However, it indicates something deeper, that students may have internalised over time that another culture is not possible through the constant reinforcement of performance culture as natural.

One of the main obstacles to considering change may have been students learnt belief that change was something personal rather than cultural or structural. The students’ sense that they were performance labeled in various ways became a theme in these

findings. Hargreaves (1967) showed that students can develop a self-concept based on how they are labeled which then reinforces the label. However, it is at an organisational level where these behaviours represented a problematic piece of culture. The shift to organisational process was that students who were seen as 'problematic' were then often used as representations of 'the problem'. In other words their behaviours, or more importantly the systemic source of their behaviours were not seen as the problem but over time it was the students themselves who may be perceived as the problem. This leads to the organisational fantasy that somehow 'if the students were different' or 'if the teachers were different' there would be no problems. This leads to two things, the systemic source of the behaviour can be overlooked and thus the locus of change focused on the student.

What struck me most about this was how the students explained their behaviour when we did the activity on labeling spaces in the school. Many had labeled particular teachers and some of them said they did this to show that the teachers '*have to change*'. This suggests that the students felt that being labeled was an indication that one had to change. The informal learning from this is significant as it means that students are often learning to locate problems inside themselves, rather than in the systems or culture around them leading to a depressive position and passivity. This again can be connected to performance culture where deficiencies are seen as personal rather than cultural or structural, *i.e.* the understanding developed is that it is not the narrow and selective pressures of performance culture that are the problem but individuals inability to cope and adapt to those pressures. This then affects the students learning about enabling change, because change becomes about changing people in some way, rather than changing the conditions of those peoples experience.

Finally, the students' attitude to anger was also an important indicator of informal learning. Many of the students admitted to dealing with anger by taking it out on other students or at home, however during the sessions I was aware that a lot of students internalised their anger. It is not surprising that students have learned that anger is negative in a school situation when most of their experiences of anger is of it being expressed through conflict or disruptive behavior, and these behaviours are so problematic to schools that they are consistently labeled as negative behaviours (Millei, 2005) and may be connected to underperforming students. The consequence of this however is that students find it difficult to understand anger as ever being a

positive motivation for action. Indeed a considerable amount of their anger was about what they perceive as injustice, but even so they still thought that anger was unhealthy. This is a significant piece of learning and clearly one that adds to their passivity when faced with problems. This issue may have even more significant implications though. Some argue that students are being taught to manage their anger internally, rather than express it through positive action at primary level, in the name of therapeutic education (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2008). This may have problematic consequences for students as they enter the more complex organisational environment of secondary school. When experiencing situations where students should be locating their anger in the system, students may be containing that anger in themselves. This means that students may begin to perceive themselves as being the problem, rather than the systems around them, leading to further inhibited agency.

All of these findings suggested that moving to the change agent role was going to be a complex process, however, as will be seen, the process challenged some of the students' perceptions in important ways. The next part of the process would behaviourally support many of the hypotheses developed from the reflective stage.

Chapter 5: The decision and active stages: resistance to the role of change agent.

The aim of this chapter is to chart the students' behaviour in the active stage of the project by analysing the critical incidents that led to their resistance to, or adoption of, the role of change agent. The chapter will look at the process of attempting to move from the role of student to that of change agents and the resistances to doing so from the students, the school and the researcher himself. It will be shown that the main form of resistance throughout was to reinforce the schools organisational culture as normative and weaken the project's boundaries and how students' internalisation of performance culture seemed to undermine their change agency.

The methodological use of systems theory to study the emergence of the boundaries of the project also becomes central here because the boundaries of the project were challenged both externally by the school and internally by the students thus making the role of change agent very difficult to differentiate from that of student – which has significant implications for projects of this type.

The reason why the findings in this chapter are dealt with separately to those in the previous chapter is to emphasise the differences that emerged once we moved from a standard consultation process (the reflective stage) to one where students' role as *actors* was considered (the active stage). The thesis in this chapter is that, as the ability to act became available, students internalisation of the performance culture in their schools came to the fore and defined their key decisions and actions.

5.1 The decision stage

Students as researchers – the first struggle to find a new role

One of the methods I used during the decision stage was to give students the opportunity to do some research about issues that concerned them in the school. This involved a number of data gathering activities they undertook around the school, the purpose of this was not to gather data for me but rather for them to have the data to enable them to make an informed decision about how to act in a way that was not just based on their own interests, and give them more authority and an 'honored voice'

(Oldfather et al., 1999). The students were very engaged with being researchers, once they had done it they would regularly ask if they could go out and do it again, this did not appear to be because they were fascinated with the data they were receiving, but rather because the new role legitimised them doing something that seemed immensely exciting for them – roaming the corridors. Although this sounds frivolous, roaming the corridors was, I believe, their own means of doing research, from that boundary they could observe the whole school freely, they could run down corridors staring curiously into each classroom discussing what was going on and it always seemed very important for them to complete a tour of the whole school each time. Students, in a sophisticated way, naturally recognise what systems theory argues - that it is in that boundary that the most meaningful things often happen and that is why they were always so expectant on these journeys. I came away with the realisation that students are always researchers of their schools, it is not a role adults ‘give’ to them. However, being researchers shifted at one point in a way I found very interesting. Up to a point they had been doing research by talking to students and staff outside of classrooms, however they were having difficulty with this as they felt they were not being ‘taken seriously’ that way, the projections they hoped for from the role were not being given (though the data was often interesting). On this basis one of them suggested they should go into classrooms and this was agreed to. I asked whether this would be possible to the Deputy Heads and they suggested classrooms the students could go into. With this in mind the students set off in the next session, however they avoided the classrooms they were supposed to go into on the grounds that ‘the teacher looked scary’ but went into classrooms that seemed less intimidating. On entering the classrooms they found the projections very different. One of them exclaimed;

*‘Going into classes is much better for surveys, it’s almost as if they think they **have to do it**’.*

They went into classrooms again in the next session but with less of the excitement they had had about being researchers of the corridors. I asked myself what they had learnt from this particular process of being researchers. At some level they had recognised that they need to be legitimised by the formal structure of the school and a teacher in order to be taken seriously as researchers and (particularly) by other students. So, the students did not feel they could take a new role with the other

students unless it was authorised by the system, which reinforced for them their dependency on it. They had sought the legitimacy they felt only the classroom structure and its ability to legitimise based on performance could give to them. The data collected within the classroom system was seen as more legitimate than data they had obtained in the corridors, however they were not as close to this data. This was the first evidence of their tendency to seek the legitimisation of the structures of their school.

Making a decision – the first effect on boundaries

The reflective stage and formal research ended essentially once the students had made a decision on what task they were going to set themselves. It's worth starting the narrative there as even at that point the project's boundaries were being affected by the school in significant ways. Before explaining this first critical incident it is important to point out that prior to the project starting at all I had had a number of conversations with the Deputy Heads in both schools and in these conversations I had asked them not to offer any details about a particular *task* for the project to the students before I met them as I wanted students to develop and take ownership of an aim themselves.

During the decision stage in Chippinghouse, conversations around what we could do had often stayed at the level of material change as well as the issues in the previous chapter, however around the fourth session the students began to refer to the idea of 'interviewing teachers' in relation to student teacher relations, this was not something I was aware of having introduced in Chippinghouse, however it did fit with what I imagined would be a 'good task' with potentially good outcomes. For that reason I pursued it with them and tried to surmise why they were thinking in this way. Initially their reasoning referred to wanting to understand the teachers better and in a sense have the kind of personal engagement with them that they were not normally allowed to have, and even 'help them', however there was clearly also an unconscious desire to use the opportunity to de-role the teacher and disempower them in some way by doing so and there was some need to express anger evident here.

R: Why do you want to interview teachers?

S1: Cause we can ask them personal questions

S2: to find out about their life stories

S3: To find out why they're horrible

It was the fact that they wanted to express frustration, and that there might be an opportunity to create a safe (in the sense of bounded) and formal process for doing so, which also interested me in the idea. Eventually however, one of the students revealed that the Deputy Head had told all of them at the start of the project that one of the things they could do was to interview teachers and the idea had stuck in their minds.

Can we interview teachers? Miss X said we could interview the teachers.

In a sense this had affected a boundary of the project, the boundary of task, as already the school leadership had, unintentionally, helped the students to avoid the difficult but creative process of developing their own task and owning and legitimising their own idea, instead the students had clung onto this idea that had been offered to them by the school. Additionally, this task may have reflected adult concerns and be a misunderstanding of student concerns. For example, Ramvi (2008) showed how, in terms of social defence mechanisms, teachers' primary concern seemed to be their relationship with students and how this was perceived, which may explain this focus. I never got the impression this was the students' *primary* concern (though as I have suggested previously it was a significant concern). Rather they were primarily concerned with their relationships with each other and unfairness in the school. However, they may have perceived the issue of student-teacher relationships as related to unfairness in the school, and there is some evidence for this from the previous chapter. I had suggested doing something related to the student-student relationship, however the students had seemed uninterested. The intervention by the school here may mean the students were potentially following a direction that may not have reflected their primary concerns, this is to say that it was not an issue of significant concern to them.

The key issue here is how the boundary of the project had been affected and how the students chose to react to this. This was potentially a significant problem as the project as a sub-system distinct from the school had been affected and the schools interests were in danger of becoming the project's aims, which might have disabled the students from taking a new role. It was crucial that the students owned the

boundary of task as otherwise they would struggle to own the system of the project. However, the idea of improving the teacher-student relationship that this task was based around was clearly one which fitted quite well with performance concerns. I had two choices at that point, I could encourage them to think of something else or run with that idea and develop it, and I knew that how I reacted would further define my own role to myself and to the students. I had to decide if I was just facilitating in the purest sense or if I was going to offer leadership to the students and mould the boundaries of the project myself. I decided to try and stay within the role of facilitator because I did not want to devalue the idea as they had clearly already taken some ownership of it, and at the time I did not feel I had sufficient evidence to significantly question it. I also at that stage started accepting these problems as important evidence and realised that if I reacted against them I would be overly affecting the natural dynamics I was trying to study. This said, in hindsight I believe I potentially colluded in supporting this aim at some level because unconsciously I may also have recognised it as representing potentially 'positive' outcomes, as defined by the school's culture (and indeed educational culture generally). However, what struck me about this process was not that the school had offered ideas, which I had expected they indirectly might, but how easily the students adopted those ideas as a means of avoiding uncertainty and anxiety. Bion argued that learning is getting involved in the unknown (Vince, 2001) and that we often unconsciously act to avoid this new learning. In a sense the culture of the school offered students an easy way of dealing with any fear of the unknown, which developing a task seemed to represent. Additionally, in Chippinghouse, the students looked to me to offer ideas on task. This was perhaps the first evidence of a process emerging which would enable everyone, perhaps including me, to avoid the potential problems of acting as critical change agents.

5.2 The active stage

Choosing a Leader

To start the active stage I wanted to try and pass some responsibility and freedom to the students to work on the task. To do so I felt they should elect a leader, in order to strengthen the boundary of the group.

In Chippinghouse, the attempt to find a leader was transformed into a debacle. As soon as it became clear I wanted to do this, the students became quite animated and very physical. There was much running around from the boys, more intense chatting from the girls and general avoidance and disengagement from me. I attempted to explain that the role of the leader would be up to them, but at the least all they had to do was communicate for the group with teachers *etc* (like a plenipotentiary), and that even if people voted for them, they did not have to take the role. I managed to hand out pieces of paper for them to write a name on and after at least five minutes of acting out, jumping on chairs and asking if they could go to the toilet they eventually wrote down names. On counting the votes, in many cases they had written their own names and there were no majority votes for anyone. At that point I asked if anyone wanted to volunteer and the girls all said they did but then started chatting again and avoiding me so that I could not act on it. Soon after that the session's time was up. This was the most disengaged I had seen them to date and I recall being quite depressed after the session, it was clear no one formally wanted leadership of the group.

In the case of this group I felt it was partly to do with the internal dynamics of the group where even if someone had been voted for, the group was so split they would never have been given any authority. The split in the group between those who felt more positively towards the school and those who were felt negatively led to irreconcilable positions on leadership of the group. Indeed voting for a leader would have been a recognition, for them, that they were a group. The sub-groups within this group almost never spoke to each other and barely recognised each other in a way that was quite striking – their avoidance of each other made working as a group at times almost impossible and moreover made it difficult to establish the project as something different to the school. Each time they came into a session the divisions between them were like something from the school entering the project that I could not counter. I spent some time trying to find out why they avoided each other but never received an answer except for 'the boys like to be with the boys'.

However, it was the behaviour of the two students who initially left the project that indicated what might have been going on. There had been two students who I believe had left because they did not want to be identified with the other students in the group, who they may have perceived as 'badly behaved' and different to them.

Indeed, there was evidence that some members of the group were concerned that they had been selected because they were seen as 'problematic'. In order to avoid internalising this identity students may have projected it onto each other and thus disabled the group from working together. This led me to believe that each sub-group projected 'problem student status' onto the other, which meant they avoided each other. The experience does also suggest something significant though, these were a group of students who felt undervalued and disempowered in the school's culture and now feared that their being selected for this project was a further reinforcement of that, despite me indicating otherwise. This perhaps then disabled them from working together collectively as they were uncomfortable with identifying *with* each other. Though it may not be intended, the school's performance culture may have discouraged any collective action on the part of those who felt disempowered because the identity of 'problem student' was so undesirable.

The situation in Greenfield was slightly different, though with similar results. Many students initially engaged in behaviours like jumping off chairs and play fighting. Ironically, the process very clearly established who the natural leader in the group was, but she was not the one who they chose as leader. Sally had been a very engaged force in the group from the beginning and her engagement was very authentic in that she seemed to derive a lot of hope from what we were doing and I had no sense she needed approval from me or even the Deputy Head. In the first session she had made everyone hold hands and agree to a bond of trust about what they disclosed in the sessions, she had regularly and quite forcefully challenged when she thought other students had been disingenuous, her presence seemed to enable them to gel as a group and the younger boys particularly seemed to look up to her at times, indeed she seemed to have been given an almost maternal role by the group yet the boys seemed to treat her as 'one of the boys' (which they did not do with other girls).

Whilst the boys were climbing over each other and Craig, the person who was to become leader was falling off his chair, she eventually started to try to lead them towards actually voting, handed out sheets of paper and got them to sit down and vote. However, the results of the vote clearly put Craig far in the lead. I was genuinely surprised and disappointed by the vote as I felt had she been voted as leader the potential would have been considerable and I was sure the others were aware of this. Craig was one of the loudest and most confident boys in the group, he had a lot of

personal agency and insight but tended to be resistant to taking action in the school, at some level he may have understood that he had been voted to lead for that reason. The vote for Craig was a vote for more reflective time and keeping the group as the 'secret society' (a label Craig himself had given the project). At that point I suggested that he take on a deputy leader, Sally enthusiastically put herself forward and he accepted her in that role.

Even at the time it was very obvious that Craig was going to offer a particular kind of leadership. As will be seen he did offer leadership at points and, though I tried very hard to support him, he very publically disengaged whenever we had to engage with the school authority in any way, and though he came to all the sessions he never came to any of the meetings with teachers or school leaders and dramatically left the final meeting with the SLT before it began. In a sense his leadership helped permit others to avoid engaging formally with the school, though as will be seen some students overcame this.

It could be argued that their behaviour before voting was an expression of anxiety about having to take leadership, they may have believed the leader might have to take responsibility for perceived failure or punishment if the project ended up in some form of conflict, though I assured them otherwise. However, their desire to avoid leadership also seemed to relate to an anxiety about what the consequences of engaging were, it may have been related to me mentioning that one of the roles of the leader was to communicate on behalf of the group to teachers and school leaders. At the time I had not fully understood their anxiety about dealing with the school leadership, and this fear, as will be shown, was potentially one of the key reasons for their anxiety. It led me to wonder if the leadership role was perceived as being accountable for the *performance* of the group, which helped explain later behaviours.

Becoming the 'teacher'.

My relationship with the students also changed significantly over this period in ways that I found challenging. During the reflective stage in general I had had a good relationship with the students and was not seen as their 'teacher'. For example, I specifically made this clear in the opening session at Greenfield by sitting amongst them and asking them why I had done that, to which they replied;

You are sitting there because you're not teaching us

Yeh, we're teaching you!

You want to show us that you are not the teacher, we are the teachers here.

They also described the project as their 'secret society' that was secretly researching the school. When I began to challenge the 'secrecy' of our society and get us to start engaging with the authority in the school, the students disengaged considerably from me and isolated me from them at times. Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the process was that they began to see the project, not as 'our' secret society, but as 'my' project which was challenging because, though it was a way for them to disengage, of course it contains elements of truth too and it did at times feel like a project I was imposing on them once I suggested engaging with the school. However, it was the constant attempts to reinforce classroom dynamics that struck me and the students' ability to force me into taking teacher like roles that was most striking. It became very clear that by maintaining me in a teacher role they could legitimise their own passive student role.

Additionally it was interesting how the students often referred to me as 'Sir'. They sometimes did this in spite of my discussing other alternatives. It is worth noting that they seemed to refer to most male adults in the school as 'Sir' and in other research situations in schools I have observed students calling researchers 'Sir'. For students this may be a simple fallback term when they are unsure of how to refer to someone. Students sometimes called me Mr. Kehoe and sometimes 'Sir', however I noticed that on occasions when they wanted me to take a more teacher like role some students used 'Sir'. The use of the term could be said to suggest something of how they perceived the power relationship between us, however I felt it was used to try and encourage the teacher role in me and recreate familiar classroom type dynamics at particular moments. In other words I think they may have sometimes emphasised the point because I was *not* behaving enough like a teacher.

Having said this, some students, in Chippinghouse particularly, had interesting perceptions of my role. The students regularly tested boundaries to see how I would react and when I sometimes did not react they would go further and create a situation which forced me to take the role of teacher. This had initially become clear through

the labeling exercise we had done, as described in the previous chapter, which had also clearly been an exercise in testing the projects boundaries and the extent to which I could protect them from the school or would take a teacher role and limit their behavior. The discussion about whether the stickers should be removed from teacher's doors had seemed significant to them at the time. Another incident stands out. In groups they were doing some research in the school when some of the boys informed me that a group of three of the boys had decided to go somewhere they were not supposed to go. When they returned they were clearly curious as to how I would react. I disarmed them by naming the fact that when they did things like that they forced me to behave like a teacher which I said I felt was not fair, to which one of them asked; "*but then whose side are you on?*" The obvious interpretation of these behaviours at the time was that they had good reason to be suspicious. However, I do not believe they were that suspicious of my motives, rather it felt like an attempt to put me in a familiar role so that they could remain in a familiar role. The more the system of the project offered them opportunities to take new roles the more they tried to reinforce the normative roles of the school. This occurred consistently throughout the project, becoming more pronounced the more the project developed. This would suggest that students use their own agency to reinforce the role dynamics in schools and are not just passive receivers of those roles. In other words, the students (very easily) use the culture of the school to find legitimacy for reinforcing their own passivity. I did not stop them trying to do so, but just gently challenged this at times.

The student-teacher negotiation

By session 6 in Greenfield we had a leader and we had framed the task. The students had done some research around the school on what students and teachers would like to see improved about the school's culture, with culture here meaning the non-material processes in the school (as discussed in section 3.1). This issue often became about how students and teachers would like their relationship to be different because students often perceived culture as related to the quality of relationships between people in the school. On this basis, I suggested meeting a group of teachers and instead of just making demands and creating potential conflict, I suggested we could attempt a proper negotiation and get a real agreement that both parties could sign up to. Framing it this way was probably the most effective piece of facilitation I did as they felt not only safer about this format but also empowered and purposeful.

Organising the meeting took a considerable amount of time in terms of the school itself, and though it was initially suggested that the students could invite teachers to come, this was rejected as too difficult and the deputy head was left with finding which teachers were available and would volunteer to come. In addition, the school said the event (if it were to take place soon) would have to take place after school hours because the teachers could not be got together during school hours and though I tried, I could not change these conditions. The justification for doing this after school had been practical but it was also implied, revealingly, that it would be a good 'test' of the students 'engagement' in the process. So, the conditions for having the meeting were made with adult priorities clearly in mind, something that was probably not lost on the students.

The main issue the students had with the meeting was that it was going to be after school and this seemed to offer up countless reasons as to why they would not be able to come, suddenly many of the students had important after school activities that could not be missed. It was interesting that the school had made the meeting only possible after school, framed it to me as a test of the students' engagement, and then that the students had been able to use the fact that it was after school to explain their disengagement. In effect, both parties were able to relinquish any responsibility for the success of the meeting.

Nevertheless, four students turned up for the meeting to represent the group, as well as four teachers. The students who turned up for this meeting seemed to be led by a boy I will call Jason, who though he had been relatively quiet before, from this point on began taking some leadership within the project. The method for the negotiation was that the participants would not initially meet but work in adjoining rooms and communicate through plenipotentiaries in order to limit the effect of historical power dynamics. So, the method involved them being in separate rooms and passing two white boards between them, on the whiteboard they could write ideas that each group could either edit or agree to (this method is presented in detail in the appendix). Their aim was to produce a number of ideas they both agreed on and both groups had completely equal power in the structure. At the end the students and teachers would meet briefly, not to discuss the agreement, but to reflect on the process. The students all said they found the method empowering but teachers were very ambivalent about it and said they would have preferred an open discussion in one room. The session

produced a wealth of material and after over an hour negotiating, without having met in person, the students and teachers produced an agreement.

However, the interesting findings from this event were not in the content but in the process. There was a remarkable lack of conflict between students and teachers over the problems they were working on, on the whole students phrased things in such general ways that they were not very difficult for the teachers to agree with. At the time I was relieved that the event had gone so smoothly but in time I realised that a limited amount of the anger and desire for change that students had expressed had really come through in the event and perhaps the students felt constrained by the knowledge they would meet the teachers at the end.

In order to try and better understand this, it was useful to compare it to Chippinghouse where a different process occurred. In Chippinghouse the event occurred during school time so most of the students were present. The adjoining room was in use so students had to walk across the entrance hall of the school to another room where four participating teachers were. It was clear right from the start that this event was going to be difficult to manage as, in spite of all my attempts, the girls in the group seemed set on using this as an opportunity to confront the teachers. The event was very different to Greenfield as the group split significantly with two girls in particular taking leadership and the boys on the whole avoiding getting involved. The two girls often wrote provocative and challenging statements on their whiteboard and then would strut loudly across the entrance hall to the teachers and present their whiteboard proudly, without showing much interest in dialogue. The teachers were initially quite enthusiastic but very quickly became frustrated as the girls pushed the boundary of the student-teacher dynamic. In spite of all the controls and rules I had put into the process these girls were very difficult to contain and, despite behaving like it was fun, seemed to want to provoke a reaction. After a point I had to intervene and get them to tone down their confrontational behaviour and statements as it was becoming clear that one of the older teachers in the group was becoming quite frustrated. More than this, the teachers, rather than confronting the students, seemed to feel slightly victimised by the situation and ended up later discussing how teachers were generally treated and the pressures on them (I spent some time with the teachers afterwards in case there were any unresolved issues). By taking this role they also effectively disabled the girls' anger and left them frustrated. However, the process

improved and some important agreements were made. There was an emotional reality to this session that there was not in Greenfield, the conflicts between different groups were very clear and what happened felt very true. The students later thanked the teachers and all ended well. The material developed also felt more real and though they came up with an agreement there were a number of points that were never resolved (both agreements are available in the Appendix).

In Chippinghouse the girls had an all or nothing approach; there was no real possibility of discussion, and their behavior meant that the rest of the group could avoid engaging (the boys would later say that they did not agree with the girls positions, but at the time they had engaged less because they did not want to identify themselves with the girls behaviour). In terms of group behavior, at the time it could have been perceived that the girls were acting on behalf of the group in order to avoid the complexity that the negotiation might have involved. Despite the different responses in both schools, the behaviours suggested similar processes at work in the students. In both schools the students used different methods of avoiding the potential outcomes that the process had written in to it. In Greenfield they chose many of their contributions from their research rather than their own experiences, when they met the teachers in the final discussion they were very submissive and unchallenging. In Chippinghouse they avoided negotiation by allocating all the blame to the teachers, managing the time to avoid having a group discussion with the teachers at the end, and creating a situation where the majority of the group could not get involved. So, two extremely different processes appeared to have similar motivations.

However, it would be wrong to suggest the processes were all problematic, they did actually produce two sets of important agreements which represented a valuable outcome. Nevertheless, the students (and teachers) may have felt that these agreements represented a compromise, as evidenced by the low level of interest they seemed to show in the content of the agreements afterwards. It seemed that both teacher and students had co-created the process in such a way that no one had to change their behavior because of it. This is not to say that this was planned and intentional but rather that participants were just reflecting something of the culture of the school – that real change was not desirable, rather the appearance of change was desired. This links back to the students comments about their student council and their sophisticated awareness of how enabling what appears to be change is valorised over

enabling real change. In hindsight I think the idea of an agreement itself was perhaps naïve and colluded with the problematic idea that polite and equitable agreement is possible in this power dynamic.

The SLT meeting



Fig 5.1: Their cover for their PowerPoint presentation (Greenfield).

Though the negotiation previously discussed had been successful in producing something to work with, the turnout for this negotiation had been low in Greenfield as the school claimed they could only organise the event after school hours. Due to this low turnout, students' engagement in the project became questioned and it was suggested by a leadership figure that their lack of engagement might be due to apathy and how students, at this age, were already too institutionalised into passivity. At the time I agreed that this might be the case; however there seemed to be a growing anxiety in the students' behaviour which would suggest another hypothesis. After this agreement had been developed we needed to decide as a group how to act on it. The students felt it needed to be disseminated and read out by form tutors and in order to do so they had to get permission to have this done from the school leadership. They met with a representative of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who suggested they develop a PowerPoint presentation and come to an SLT meeting to present what they wanted to have done with the agreement they had made. A date was given to us for an SLT meeting (one session away) which gave us little time to prepare but we were told

that there were no alternative dates available before a holiday break and I felt a session was adequate to prepare. We were told the meeting was to take place directly after school and the students would have about twenty minutes. Despite having largely created this dynamic, and despite my working with them to prepare them for the meeting, the students seemed anxious about attending the meeting and acted out physically in the session before it and became very disengaged from me.

When it came to the meeting, out of 15 students, only two turned up and they decided not to take part in the meeting. In the next session, when I discussed this with them, they tried to undermine the value of using their agency in the project based on the values of performance culture. This extract from the conversation illustrates their rationale.

R: So, I'm just curious about why you didn't go to the meeting, it was only for twenty minutes?

S1: Sir, To be honest, This isn't really going to affect us, it will for a year but the exams will affect us for our whole life, if you look at it that way

R: I understand but they are working on policy in the school and if you go you might have some of the things you wanted changed. Do you not want to go because you don't think it's important?

S2: I had revision.

S3 and 4: Me too.

R: If you really wanted to go couldn't you skip on revision?

(the students laugh in mock surprise)

S1: But, we've got exams in July. GCSEs are going to affect us for a long time after this, I'm not saying this isn't important, but GCSEs are more important.

S5: Which do you think is more important sir, this meeting or revision?

R: The meeting.

(Students heckle)

S4: Yeh, but from that meeting we're not going to get a good job are we?

S6: And we have revision

R: I don't believe you can't go to the meeting because of revision but I'm not your teacher, you don't have to give me excuses.

S2: You are not going to give in sir until we say this is more important than exams. What are we going to do with this when we leave school?

S3: Does it go on our record that we did this?

S4: You can't get good jobs without GCSEs.

R: Look, I don't mind whether you want to go or not, I'm just interested in why you might not want to go.

S4: It is important to us but we just had a revision test today.

R: You sound like you're talking to a teacher now.

S1: You are a teacher!

S6: You told us you were a teacher.

R: You know I didn't.

S5: Now, can we get on with the planned tasks for the session sir.

The interesting aspect of this conversation is how the students used performance culture to devalue the project – they referred to the project's lack of measureable outcomes as an indication that it had less value. Indeed we continued to talk about whether the project 'went on their record'. To end the conversation they then tried to reinforce classroom dynamics - me as a 'teacher' delivering the 'planned tasks' which is worth comparing with their initial recognition that they were the teachers in this project. The concern about 'revision' could also reveal a fear of being wrong in the meeting and the consequences of this, and the conversation could have been them unconsciously indicating that they felt they needed to do more 'revision' before they could be ready for the meeting.

After this discussion I allowed them to consider other alternatives and clarified that they could do whatever they wanted, however no real discussion followed from this. Later in the session, I reminded them about the things they, and other students, had seemed angry about, but now they denied they had ever been angry. We could have avoided the meeting at this stage but I was concerned they would regret doing so having come this far, so I managed to arrange one more meeting with the Senior Leadership Team and this time five students agreed to represent the group. Four of them turned up, including the leader they had voted for. However their leader (who had developed most of the PowerPoint himself) appeared nervous and two minutes before the meeting handed over the PowerPoint disc to one of the other students and left before I could ask him what was wrong. The meeting took place in the Headteacher's office (which doubled as a school meeting room) and the seating arrangement seemed very significant. The SLT seated themselves around a large main table, while the students were placed in single chairs facing them. It turned out they had no facilities for a PowerPoint presentation (despite the students being told to prepare one) and the students would just have to talk to it through the Head's computer, which was some distance away from their chairs. I did my best to relax the students before the meeting began and reminded them of what they had intended to do. It is important to restate that the students went in with legitimate concerns based not only on research they had done, but on research with other students and an agreement made between teachers and students – the concerns they brought to the meeting were, the Deputy Head admitted, conservative.

The meeting began with senior staff asking me to explain the function of the meeting; however I told them that the students could do that, a response some teachers seemed uncomfortable with. After the Deputy Head decided to explain the purpose of the meeting the students started by reading their PowerPoint. The SLT then offered them an opportunity to suggest future actions on their agreement and asked a series of straightforward questions. However, as the questions went on I became very aware that the students became more and more submissive – rather than responding to questions authentically as they had in our sessions they seemed to pause and consider not only socially desirable answers but 'correct' answers in the situation.

Additionally, they did not initiate any dialogue throughout the entire meeting. The issues that had concerned them and angered them were not brought up and the

students' experience of the meeting ended with vague agreements to further action by both sides. At the end of the meeting members of the SLT praised them for their involvement and the students clearly felt a sense of achievement. Nevertheless, when they came out one of them said; *“that was the scariest thing I have ever done in my life.”*

Clearly the historical relationship the students would have had with the headteacher's office and what it symbolised would have contributed to their anxiety and submissiveness. Additionally the seating did not seem to have been considered in terms of student participation. This may have reinforced to the students that their role in the situation was the student role and partly explained their behaviour. I had expected the SLT to create a more equitable situation and in hindsight I perhaps should have intervened and affected the process to make the situation more conducive to student participation. However at the time I felt I should allow the SLT and students to manage the meeting, because I hoped that the SLT and students would take some ownership of the process at this point. Additionally, I did not want to speculate about the motives of the SLT, or second-guess what the students' experience of power balance in the situation might be. The SLT had some power over how this meeting was conducted, however the students were also encouraged by the SLT to feel empowered and take some leadership of the meeting. These processes certainly affected the students' behavior, however in system terms there was another process occurring which I felt was important.

What occurred seemed to me to be the breakdown of a system, rather than just a reaction to anxiety. The students went into the meeting in the role of change agent as defined by the system boundaries the project had created – it was made very clear to everyone that they were acting in this role. However in reality by the time they entered this meeting the systems boundaries of time, space, membership, task and leadership had already each been weakened and without those boundaries students seemed to fall back further into the student role as the meeting progressed. These boundaries seemed to be further undermined by students' projections onto, and expectations of, the situation. The students' behaviour suggested they had interpreted the meeting as a form of performance evaluation – they seemed to have projected this onto the situation but equally would have found few dynamics to challenge those projections. Teacher behaviours, rightly or wrongly, seemed to be interpreted by the

students as a measurement of their performance, rather than as an attempt to form a working partnership based on shared concerns. This then recreated normal school dynamics where they would perceive their own concerns and ideas as lacking legitimacy and where suggestions of independent or critical action may have been seen as undesirable. In addition the meeting contained an element of enactment, which is perhaps not surprising given that these students may have learnt from previous experiences that acting change is desired over attempting actual change.

Tokenism

The students' projection of performance was further evidenced in how, in the sessions after the meeting, they expressed no interest in the actions that came of it and a holiday like atmosphere took over (based on this I organised a party for both groups for the final session). It became impossible to engage them in any way and they behaved as if the work of the project had now been completed because the 'exam' had been passed. This was how I experienced it, and they seemed to perceive the project as having reached a natural end at this point.

Did the project succeed and for whom? The students did achieve a number of valuable outputs;

1. They both successfully conducted some research, and based on that and a formal negotiation, drew up a formal student-teacher agreement on how that relationship needed to be changed.
2. They met with the school leadership and presented a plan for what they thought should be changed.

These are significant achievements given how foreign and anxiety provoking the process was for them. However, towards the end of the project my suspicion that we were just going through the motions to some extent were backed up, not by the behaviour of the students but by the schools themselves.

One of the students' core arguments against trying to achieve change is that they did not believe the school would do anything regardless of what they did. However, the students showed no expectation that anything would be changed and never asked the leadership team about the process. Neither group seemed to have expected real

changes to have occurred, but rather put the value on the process of engaging with each other. This may indicate that the real change they both sought is in fact in how they engaged with each other, *i.e.* that the process of the project was the content. However, it may also simply indicate that both groups sought the appearance of change without the reality of it in order to maintain beliefs about the culture of the school, and because real change for both groups would have led to dissonance in the performance culture that they had to take roles in. The situations that emerged suggests that there are clearly significant problems with developing agency in performance culture.

The difficulties of internal school generated change became clear too on the subject of continuation. The schools at the end of the project were anxious to see the students take some leadership and maintain the process themselves, indeed in both schools the students were offered the possibility of continuing the project but on an after school basis or as part of the school council and only after having presented a clear formal plan of action. It was very clear to me at the time that the students would not continue under those terms, however the project was only seen as worth continuing if the students showed due leadership and had ‘proved their engagement’. From the schools’ point of view, this was perhaps a reasonable expectation, however the framing of it to the students seemed to place all the responsibility for continuation onto the students. This was a responsibility the students did not seem concerned about and they seemed quite content for the project not to continue. It seemed as if this could have been an internal ritual for ending something challenging, it could not continue because the students were not engaged enough, the students agreed and thus things continued as before and everyone’s roles were reinforced.

The project was never designed to embed something permanent in the schools, I hoped that it would be continued in some form and tried to enable this to happen, but I did not have the resources to guarantee that it would. What was interesting was that the schools and the students seemed to have colluded in making sure the project would not have to continue any further, whilst engaging with the fantasy that it would. So, all the verbal communication towards the end was about how to move on, whilst in reality the conditions were being created to make continuation impossible – it had felt quite unreal. In these moments in the rooms, when leadership staff and students were together, I felt strongly as if I were now the outsider being presented with as

much positivity as possible so that my break from the system could be as clean as possible, the narrative of continuation was in fact an acting out for me. At times like this I could almost feel the boundaries of the project being forgotten by both the students and the school and my role being made obsolete. Of course the truth was that I was leaving and they had to manage that, however it clarified that maintaining the boundaries of the project had always relied on my presence, and that without an external facilitator continuation of a project like this would have been difficult.

Discussion

Analysis of recurring themes in the active stage suggested that the main resistance to the process was systemic. This was mainly seen through the undermining of the boundaries of the project in apparently subtle ways at key moments. Boundaries were affected by the school; boundaries of time and space were regularly broken through changing session times and spaces, at one point new members were attempted to be introduced well into the project, and at times teachers would walk straight into the space we worked in. All these episodes seem minor, however in the middle of a session when students were engaged in liberated discussions, these episodes reminded the students of the schools culture and often affected their behavior. All these happened despite my demands for clear boundaries and each time they happened the boundaries between the project and the school became less clear and the schools culture of performance would further seep into the group dynamics and anxieties rise. However, the more important point is that as we moved from reflection to potential action, boundaries were also affected by the students, for example, boundaries of task were undermined by reinforcing the school's aims and structures and trying to reinforce classroom dynamics and roles. The outcome of the weakening of the projects boundaries was to undermine the conditions from which the students could have acted more effectively as change agents.

Resistance was also experienced by reinforcing dependent relationships. Students' dependency meant that they often referred to authority when seeking ways forward – my authority or the school's authority. Despite having analysed in depth some of the issues they faced in the school (as outlined in chapter 4) they chose not to work on some of these problems but on their 'relationships with teachers' - an idea that was of interest to them but one which also seemed to interest the schools (and me).

Envisioning solutions or even considering alternative solutions based on their own experience and their own ideas seemed to provoke either disengagement or anxiety, it always seemed as if they saw their complaints as legitimate but not their solutions, they did not seem to trust their capacity to consider solutions. Solutions were only legitimate if legitimised by someone in authority in the school, not in the sense that permission was needed but that the solution was only of value if it came from an authority figure. In other words, their own solutions to organisational problems may have been perceived as having less legitimacy and value than solutions offered by authority figures. They also seem to have learnt, based on their experience that ‘real’ solutions are only ever able to be implemented by authority figures in the school – that the role of students is just to express their opinions. This also meant that students found it difficult to consider their own evaluations of success or failure for the project. In performance culture the students became used to adults and adult criteria being the only way of evaluating success or failure. The consequence of this is that students found it very difficult to run a project semi-independently of adults because they felt that only the adults could validate its success – so the more independent we might have attempted to make the project from the school the less likely it might have seemed it was going to be ‘successful’ to the students.

This leads directly to the core issue of performance culture and how it affected the students. The students’ behavior during the final meeting with the SLT suggested that they may have interpreted much of the project through the lens of performance. As we have seen in the review, research about the effects of performance culture on student voice processes has argued that performance culture can affect how adults interpret student voice in schools. As Thomson and Gunter (2006: 852) remind us; “*pupil voice is neither neutral nor 'authentic', but is produced by/within dominant discourses*” and the culture of performance is, arguably, the dominant discourse at this time. Bragg (2007) argues that the interest to adapt student voice to performance concerns can, rather than reflect an understanding, produce new understandings about the purpose of student involvement in change. Based on research from the “Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning” initiative (2001-2003) she indicated how assumptions about how student voice fitted into performance culture produced often unquestioned understandings. For example, she quotes one of the Deputy Heads from her research; “*you involve the students more in schools, do they therefore become more positive*

towards school? Yes they do. Do they therefore perform better? Most probably they do, I don't think you need a research project to say that" (Bragg, 2007:348). The assumption alone that student voice is going to 'improve' the school in ways which meet adult concerns may encourage, and even coerce, those kind of behaviours from students, rather than reflect their interests and concerns.

These assumptions, internalised as culture, may also be leading students to their own particular understandings. Clearly it would be naive to expect that young students would necessarily engage in overtly critical positions in a students as change agents project, however their behaviours during the SLT meeting in this project were more than just an avoidance of critical activity, they appeared to be active projections of performance onto a situation which had been intended to offer an alternative.

Thompson (2010:428) argues that "*students understand themselves in hierarchical positionalities... this means that they are encouraged, through their experiences, to measure their performativity*", and throughout the project there was evidence of their need to reproduce this. They may have assumed that all the *time* and *work* on the project must eventually be performance measured in order to valorise it, indeed their concern that the project was not performance evaluated suggests that they may have sought that valorisation. This would have been reinforced by their recognition that the 'smart students' – those students they perceived as most valued, did not seem to act as change agents on real issues of concern but rather, as they perceived it, *performed* like an actor. Indeed, as a student in Thompson's (2010:416) research on perceptions of the 'good student' noted; "*the good student is a good actor*". This may be because, if we return to Van Maanen & Schein's (1977) idea of culture as a socialising process, the students have internalised performance culture and, because of that, project it back onto situations which may represent a counter discourse.

The students also seemed to reinforce the student role and how it is valorised because they interpreted the change agent role as a potential risk to their belonging and status. This may be due to performance culture in that, if it is unconsciously perceived that the aim of the process is to improve student engagement with performance culture, then those who do not participate in accepted ways may believe they will be seen as "*defiant, deviant or in denial*" (Bragg, 2007:355) and so the change agent role is seen as a risk to status. This led students to reinforce the student role, which appeared to

me to be a social defence mechanism - reinforcing the school's structures and the student role meant their own passivity, belonging and dependency were legitimised, and their status safer.

Osterman (2000) argued that students have a notable psychological need to belong in school but that schools can neglect and undermine this need. Belonging means safety, particularly in performance based organisations where forms of exclusion are often a threat connected to failure. The students may have prioritised their need to belong and feel safe over their desire to face external problems or issues that concerned them at school, as Giroux argues;

“some students are able to see through the lies and promises of the dominant school ideology but decide not to translate this insight into extreme forms of rebelliousness ...in some cases the reason for this decision may be an understanding that overt rebelliousness may result in powerlessness now and in the future” (1983:32).

This is perhaps a valuable interpretation of the students' behaviour – despite the fact that this was a relatively conservative formal process. In other words they may have felt that using their change agency may have undermined their belonging and status, and their power to control their situation.

This also implies that certain students may be learning different dispositions towards using their change agency in schools than others. Bauman (2004) argues that the extent of control over identity is related to the resources held by the person, including their status. These students perceived themselves as having only an 'average' status in the school which means they may have been more dependent on the schools positive projections on their identity [or like in Willis's research (1977) positive projection from their peers to resist engagement]. Lumby (2009) suggests that longing for the security of status may be a powerful shaper of identity, so as these students struggled to secure their status in the school, they may have been less likely to adopt critical positions in terms of acting as organisational change agents. This could have led them to develop a mental construct of organisational life where acting as organisational change agents was a risk to status.

This may then have led students, in terms of their concerns, to locate the need for change in themselves or in teachers rather than in the structures and values that may be the source of their problems. There was evidence that this occurred in terms of students' self-perception in the reflective stage and how they interpreted their problems in the school as an expectation *they* should change. Additionally, during the decision stage, the students initial idea about cultural change had been to confront, and evaluate, teachers they saw as underperforming so as to 'change' them in some way. Youdell (2004:420) argues that one of the values of performance culture is that responsibility for educational success and failure are "*located in the person of the individual and individualised student*". This suggests that their internalisation of performance culture could lead them to being disposed to interpreting organisational problems as deficiencies in particular people rather than as systems issues – which is significant learning in terms of enabling organisational change and a significant inhibitor to acting as a change agent.

There may also be another way performativity affected their behavior during the SLT meeting and that that the students may have felt pushing for any changes may have been negatively experienced because it detracted from teachers' core concerns. As Thompson (2010:424) has noted in research, students who were valorised were those who;

“made the life of the teacher easier, and allowed the teacher to spend more time on other pedagogical tasks. In one school, a student argued that teachers like to be able to go about their core business (surveillance) rather than taking an active role in engaging students”.

In general he also notes that "*the good student avoided getting noticed in overt ways, either by staff or students because 'it's bad to be noticed' (ibid:424)*". Bearing in mind students' awareness in this project of teachers stress in terms of performativity it is possible that this awareness would have affected their behaviour and desire to not get in the way of the performativity which dominates teachers concerns (Ball, 2003; Pring, 1996).

Conclusion

The methodology revealed that offering the students a different role in the school was not only rendered difficult by the school but by the students themselves in how they projected the schools performance culture onto the project's boundaries and thus undermined the project's capacity to enable them to work on their own concerns through new roles. They did not struggle to find the conditions to do this and had a sophisticated capacity to devalue acting as change agents at particular points because it did not seem to measure performance or provide desired projections. Their reasons for doing this seemed to be as a social defence mechanism - reinforcing the school's purpose meant their own passivity and dependency were legitimised, and their status safer. They perceived themselves as having a lower status in the school, and because of this seemed to be more dependent on the school's projections on their identity and thus less likely to take critical organisational change roles – even though they had legitimate concerns. This could have lead them to developing a mental construct of organisational life where acting as organisational change agents is a risk to status. Van Maanen & Schein (1977:5) suggest that “*learning the organisational culture may always be immediately adjustive for an individual in that such learning will reduce the tension associated with entering an unfamiliar situation, (however) such learning, in the long run, may not always be adaptive*”. The learning that students go through to adapt and belong in schools may function for schools but may negatively affect some students' capacity to consider acting, and act, as change agents in organisations, indeed, what they may learn is that what is valorised in organisations is the *enactment* of change processes that maintain the status quo rather than forms of actual critical or structural change.

Student voice type projects will, potentially, be the closest experience most students will have of being involved in organisational change or acting as change agents in some way. This chapter argued that the pressures of performance culture can severely limit, if not transform, those experiences. At a simple level the fact that performance culture itself is so difficult to challenge means that organisational change focused on culture or structures or purpose becomes problematic. The fact that it is difficult to work on concerns related to performance culture may be leading students to accept

enabling change as a tokenistic form of enactment to please adults. Performance concerns may also mean that some students are more likely to be involved in change processes, ironically because they least need to do change, teaching them that positive affiliation with the organisation is necessary before attempting to do change.

Ultimately all these problems raise the question of whether the structures of schooling and the performance based organisational culture they have can authentically do student voice at all, or whether the actual structure of schooling would have to be changed in order for authentic student voice to occur. Fielding raises the question about what kinds of organisational culture need to be developed in order to enable student voice to thrive, in his (2001b) framework for evaluating the conditions for student voice, a question I return to in the next chapter.

It is useful to conclude by returning to the systems approach outlined in the methodology. Referring back to fig 3.1, if we picture this project as a system (see below), in the action stage the boundaries of the project became blurred because the boundaries were affected by the school's culture as well as the students' internalisation and expectation of that culture.

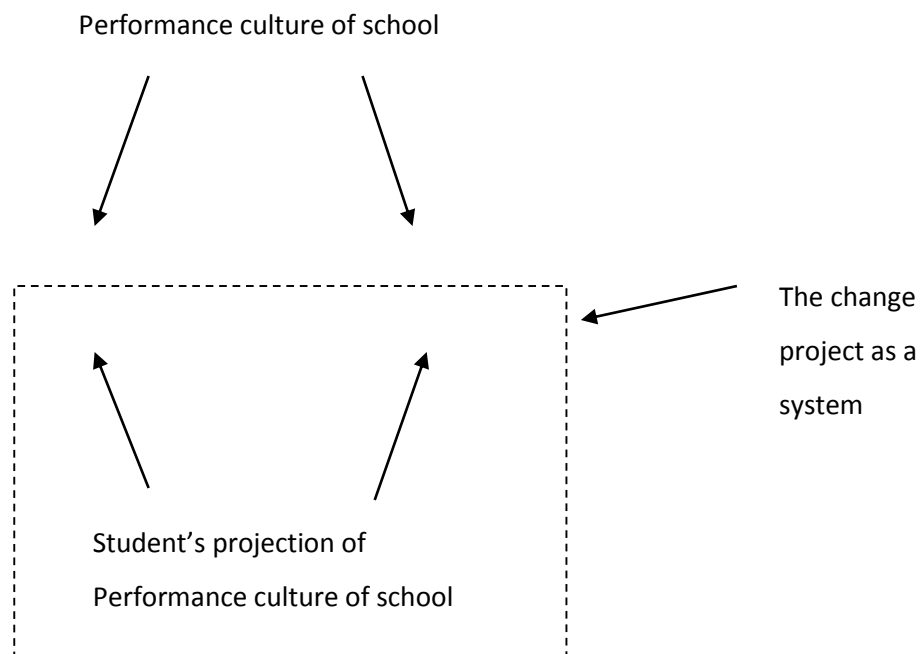


Fig 5.2: Systems view of effects of performance culture on project boundaries.

This means that the role of change agent becomes difficult to find and the students resort to the familiar role of student – this is a process they themselves colluded with and reinforced. These processes seem to be due to how performance culture has no means of allowing for a sub-system which may potentially challenge its value system, in other words performance culture requires a certain amount of passivity and acceptance of the status quo of dependency to function. This suggests that any internal school project, over time, would likely either end up supporting the interests of performance culture or be rejected. The important finding here is that this rejection is not just a product of adult concerns about performance in the school but is due to how **students themselves internalise performance culture and struggle to valorise their ideas, concerns and behaviour on any other terms but those of performance culture**. It is this internalisation of performance culture and how students reinforce it, and legitimise the status quo by reinforcing it, which suggests that this is a learning process that may, over time, become a mindset – to what extent this may be the case is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Students ‘organisation-in-mind’ as a learnt disposition towards organisational passivity

The aim of this chapter is to explore to what extent the findings suggest that the students may be developing a particular mindset and disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations, and whether this is likely to be reproduced in adulthood. In other words, are the behaviours we have seen in the findings just behaviours related to their particular school experience, or do the findings suggest a form of learning about organisational life is taking place? There are a number of theories on reproduction; functionalist, conflict theory and Bourdieu’s theory of habitus which all make some indication about how schooling as an organisational experience relates with the social background of the student. What these theories focus on is *social* reproduction, *i.e.* that schooling affects, or more accurately, maintains, wider social structures by valorising the ideology or capital of the dominant classes. It is not within the scope of this research to focus on the social background of the students but rather I focused on their perceived status in the performance culture of their school. This status may be affected by their social background and cultural capital to some extent, however it is worth noting that the students themselves did not even once refer to class status differences between them and others in the school (though they did between them and other schools).

This chapter seeks to focus on another form of reproduction, which may have social status implications, but is more focused on how perceptions of roles in organisational life may be reproduced. This is not a simple determinist model like that of social functionalists but one where a range of different learning experiences about change agency may combine, under particular conditions, to reproduce significant inhibitions towards taking change agent roles. The selective aspect of this is that some students, particularly those who struggle in adapting to the performance culture of their school (which I would argue may occur for a vast variety of reasons and not just the dominant social and cultural capital) may learn these dispositions more intensely. This chapter will suggest this based on the idea that the students, based on these experiences form an ‘organisation-in-the-mind’ – a mental construct of organisations and their role in them which marries with their identity formation in this period of

adolescence. However, the chapter will also argue that this organisation-in-the-mind does not determine adult behaviour in easily predictable ways that could be seen as forming a structural correspondence between schooling and society, rather it will argue that this creates a *disposition* towards certain organisational behaviours, which is reproduced depending on how it is reinforced or inhibited by adult organisations.

6.1 The development of the students' organisation-in-the-mind

The concept of organisation-in-the-mind was introduced in chapter 3 as part of the methodology, in this section it is useful to reflect further on the concept in terms of the idea of the hidden curriculum. Indeed the question is whether the students' learning revealed in the previous two chapters could be said to be forming a hidden curriculum in how it affects the organisation-in-the-mind. The hidden curriculum is not directly taught by the school as such but arises out of how the student tries to mediate their relationship with the school as a system. In this sense the hidden curriculum is a process of organisational socialisation, it is understood here as the role a student finds, makes and takes which leads to them forming a particular mental construct of organisational life and their change agency. The use of the term hidden curriculum here is deliberate in order to open up the idea that the students' learning about organisational change might not be an accidental consequence of schooling but that this learning could be unconsciously intended. The organisational distinctions here are important because it has been suggested that the social roles students learn at school in terms of their identity are not necessarily carried into later life (Kinney, 1993), however the same processes may not be true for organisational roles.

As has previously been outlined, organisation-in-the-mind has been used to help us understand how people view organisations as a system, how people bring together their experiences of the organisation and organise them into a mental construct (Bazalgette et al., 2005). It is generally used in systems psychodynamics as a conceptual tool rather than as a basis for a developmental theory. However, there is a clear basis for using the concept in developmental terms, and Bazalgette et al., (2005) have already suggested this basis in Kleinian psychoanalytic theories of development. The purpose of the following section is to offer as concise a summary of the concept as possible in order to form the basis for discussion of the implications of the findings.

In its simplest sense organisation-in-the-mind is the mental construct we develop of an organisation we have a role in. We create this mental construct because no one can ever experience or perceive an organisation in its totality, however in order to function in one we need to develop an understanding of it in its totality. Every student in a school has a limited experience of the whole school as an organisation, nevertheless, based on their experiences will develop a very complex, and emotional, internal construct of the whole school as an organisation. This construct is referred to as their 'organisation-in-the-mind'. As Hutton (1997a:2) explains, 'organisation-in-the-mind' is; *“the idea of the organisation which, through experiencing and imagining, forms in my inner psychic space and which then influences how I interact with my environment.”* So, though we experience ourselves as constantly relating to a real organisation, our relationship with that organisation is actually mediated through our organisation-in-the-mind.

Organisation-in-the-mind is created through my experiences of the organisation as well as my projections onto the organisation. We can imagine our organisation-in-the-mind is the construct we have developed of how everything, and everyone, in the organisation is connected, and the form and value of those connections – as well as our place in those connections. This will be derived from our limited experiences, but also on how we feel about our place in the organisation and what qualities we project onto different relationships and connections.

However, organisation-in-the-mind is not just a construct of how we perceive how the organisation works, it is more importantly a means of managing our emotional relationship with the organisation, or a 'transitional object' as Donald Winnicott (1965) would define it. It is in this sense that it is also a developmental construct. A transitional object is an object, real or imagined, which we use to mediate our relationship with a difficult reality, or as Klein (1959) observed in children a 'persecutory anxiety'. In Kleinian psychoanalysis children use transitional objects to manage the transition from dependence on their mother. As adults we use transitional objects to manage the relationship between our inner and outer worlds, and between thought and action. The complexity of this object is that it is formed by repressed feelings and thoughts about the organisation – a process that is necessary to allow one to function in the organisation (Hutton, 1997a). The complexity of this transitional object then is that it is both created by me in that sense it is formed internally, and

discovered, by me as if it were independent to me. In Kleinian terms the organisation is introjected and projected; so as Hutton (1997b) explains organisation-in-the-mind is then a transitional object we use to enable us to function in the organisation, and manage what is often a conflict between our internal needs and desires and our external realities. So, for these students, the school as an organisation has been internalised and is then projected. What we see in the findings is largely their projections onto the organisation, but these are based on their internalisation of the organisation.

At their age (13/14) the tension between their inner needs and their external reality suggests the organisation-in-the-mind must represent a powerful transitional object. Their inner needs are highly intense and the organisation-in-the-mind becomes their mental means of managing how those needs will be met by the organisation. Will my needs be best met by fight, flight, collusion, adaptation, *etc*? The method they find most successful can then become a pattern, what Watson defines as ‘primacy’, and he suggests that; “*the way in which an organism first copes successfully with a situation sets an unusually persistent pattern* (Watson, 1971:8). The organisation-in-the-mind the students develop is a construct based on their solutions to the problem of belonging and developing status in an organisation. For example, in this research many of the students appeared to have developed forms of collusion with the devaluing of the change agent role as a means of solving the problem of belonging in an organisational culture they experience negatively, which may have future implications for them.

The process of a student developing an organisation-in-the-mind is further illuminated by Schein’s theory of organisational socialisation in how the student adapts to the school’s culture by internalising it. This internalised culture also informs the organisation-in-the-mind the student develops, and when it is considered that organisational culture can cover an array of unconscious beliefs and values about valued behavior in an organisation this represents a significant internalisation. The important point about both the processes of organisation-in-the-mind and organisational socialisation is that they also involve unconscious processes – they are adaptive processes that enter the unconscious and as such can affect behavior. However, organisation-in-the-mind is not just based on experience and internalized organisational culture, it is also composed of a persons’ imagining of the organisation.

Developing an organisation-in-the-mind, a systemic construct of the organisation, is then a necessary part of the process of finding a role in the organisation. In order to find a role the person must understand “*the boundaries of the system and its aim and purpose*” and “*the system becomes an ‘organisation-in-the-mind’ and the role emerges as a mental-construct*” (Reed, 2001:4).

So, to what extent does the organisation-in-the-mind developed during school form a pattern in adult behavior? Organisation-in-the-mind develops out of the process of finding an organisational role and organisational socialisation and for 12 years of a child’s life the primary organisational system this process occurs in is the school. This is not to suggest that they do not experience other important systems but rather to suggest that the school is the organisational system they experienced as most valorised in society, that it is their dominant experience of a prescribed organisational role.

The fact that the experience of this role occurs in the same kind of organisational culture, for such a long period, when identity is at its most formative, strongly suggests that by the age of 18 any student will have developed a very particular organisation-in-the-mind. When they enter adult organisations they are unlikely to see them, or their role in them, as blank canvases but will see them through the lens of their organisation-in-the-mind.

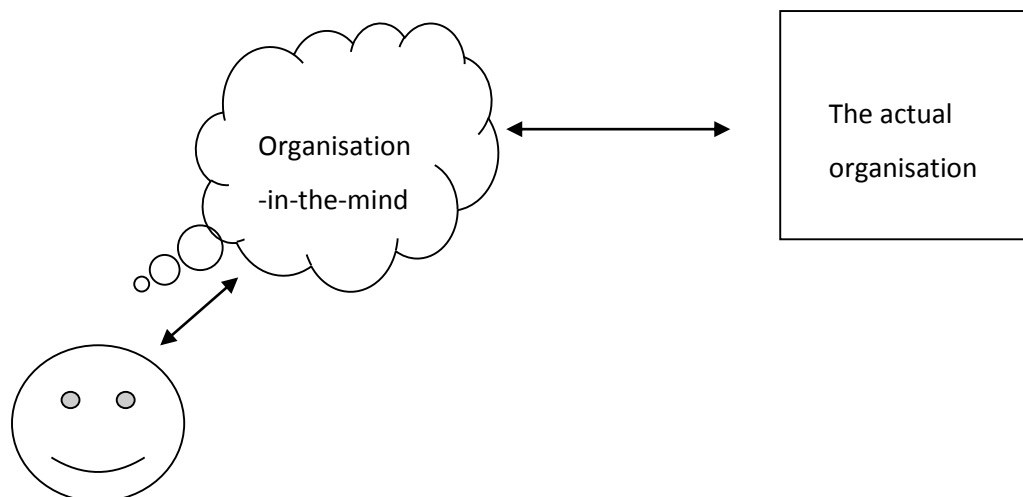
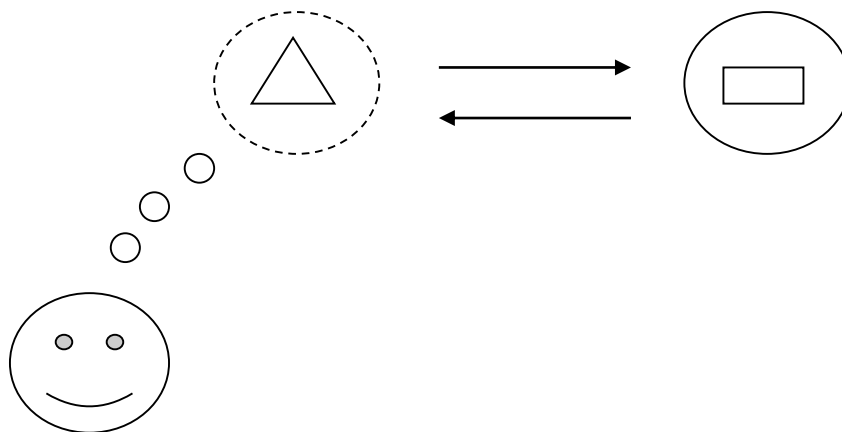


Fig 6.1: Seeing the organisation through the lens of the organisation-in-the-mind.

This may lead to acceptance of, for example, certain behaviours; if bullying has been tolerated throughout their schooling experience, when they enter into an adult

organisation they are likely to project this onto the system, it may also lead to projections of dependency onto leadership, or acceptance of low change agency as a desired behavior. This process of people projecting historical organisational constructs onto the current organisation they have a role in is well known to those who work in organisational consultancy (though not well accounted for in the literature). A person's historical organisation-in-the-mind will affect how they behave in future organisations, but their behavior will not be wholly determined by it. Rather, it will depend on how that person manages those projections themselves. So, these students, in for example their perceptions of organisational passivity as desired, when they enter adult organisations may seek a role that reinforces this perception, but that does not mean that the organisation will accept their projection. If, for example, the students enter an organisation that is very different to school then they may remake their organisation-in-the-mind, however if they enter one which is in any way similar, they are unlikely to – which may explain why working class students often reproduce passive roles in factory settings as in Willis's work. In other words, cultural production occurs in how the organisation-in-the-mind of the student relates with the actual organisational structures of the new organisation they find a role in. The process is best illustrated diagrammatically.

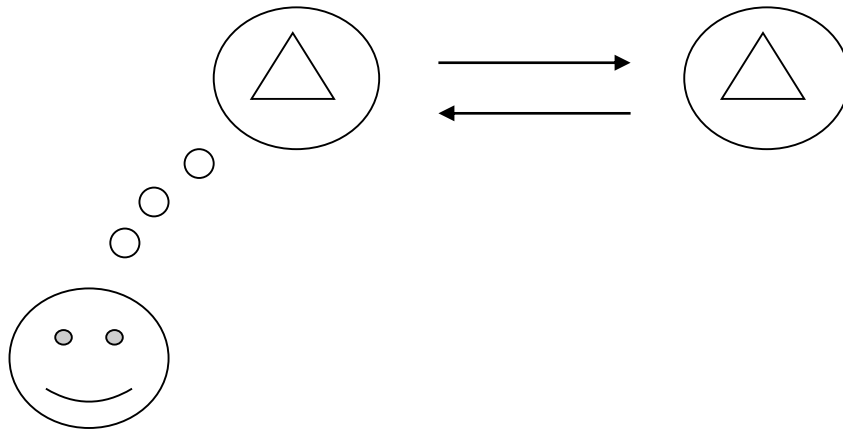
Fig 6.2: Mediating the organisation-in-the-mind with a different organisational structure.



Let us imagine in the above diagram that the triangle represents the students' organisation-in-the-mind, and the rectangle the organisational culture and structures of the new organisation. The communication and mediation occurs between the organisation-in-the-mind of the students and the structures of the organisation. If the organisation's structures are very different, as represented by the rectangle, the

student's organisation-in-mind may eventually change due to a new process of organisational socialisation (though they may also reject the organisation or be rejected by it). However, if the structures of the organisation and the organisation-in-the-mind are similar, as shown below in figure 6.3, the students' organisation-in-the-mind will likely remain the same.

Fig 6.3: Mediating the organisation-in-the-mind with a similar organisational structure.



It is tempting to suggest then that, for example, a student who leaves school at 18 and goes straight into factory work is going to face a situation similar to figure 6.3 because the hierarchical structures might seem similar to school whilst a student who goes to University will face a situation more similar to figure 6.2 as the organisational structure seems different. However, no simple generalisations can be made as someone's experience of factory culture could be very different to school and someone's experience of university could be very similar to school. Rather than saying that the schooling process leads to deterministic cultural production, it may be more accurate to say that it produces **dispositions** – a tendency towards particular organisational perceptions and roles whose continuation depends on adult organisational experience. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that for the students in this research, the disposition is *towards passivity and low change agency* and perhaps most students will end up in organisations where their organisation-in-the-mind is not significantly challenged, and may even be reinforced to suit dominant interests in those organisations. Those who end up in factory type work might experience similar organisational structures to school and thus be more likely to reproduce organisational passivity.

The issue however has added complexity because, although I did not study them directly, there was evidence that those students with a high status in the performance culture were also learning inhibited change agency in the sense that they accepted enacting and performing change processes over enabling critical change. So, even though they may learn that they are more authorised in acting as change agents, they may also learn that the role of change agent is not always intended to achieve organisational transformation, but rather the appearance of transformation. This learning, depending on one's point of view, may be of great value to them in terms of adopting successful organisational roles as adults but it may not be of social value to a society concerned to transform its organisations.

6.2 Mapping the students' organisation-in-the-mind

In the next section we will discuss each of the learning processes the students appeared to be going through in their mediation with the school as an organisation. It will be shown how each of these may be affecting the formation of their organisation-in-the-mind. The diagram maps how this learning interconnects in forming an organisation-in-the-mind.



Fig 6.4: A representation of students' potential learning about organisational change.

It is important to note that every students' organisation-in-the-mind is necessarily different and elucidating that organisation-in-the-mind would normally involve very particular processes. Here I am just using the concept as a tool to frame themes the findings suggest would be affecting their organisation-in-the-mind.

Learning that change agency is 'given' by the organisation based on one's value to it

The idea that agency is given selectively in school, particularly in student voice processes has been forwarded by a number of commentators (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Fielding, 2004a; Manefield et al., 2007; McIntyre et al., 2005; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Silva, 2001). In this research students seemed to believe that agency and power are 'given' based on how well one helps the organisation achieve its performance. This indicates their sophisticated learning about agency, values and power – that if the school valued you, in the sense that you contributed to the status quo being sought, then you were given change agency and power. This is a situation even recognised by students with a higher status, as students in Elena Silva's (2001:98) research argued;

“the students who are getting things changed are all the students who are going to college anyway. How much change do I really need? I'm already going to college. But we talk - we're expected to talk - about the problems as if we know what it's like for the rest of the students who don't really like school. It doesn't make much sense, in terms of reform at least”.

As previously suggested, this is significant because students with lower status in the school, who are struggling with performance culture (as many of these students were) may be learning that they are less legitimised in using their change agency than other students. So, the students who have most interest in change in the system may also be the ones who learn the most inhibition towards acting as change agents. These processes also connect to the work of Bourdieu. The students who find it easiest to take roles in the status quo of the school and produce exam results – the 'smart people' may have a habitus that adapts well with the habitus of the school, therefore having the 'right' habitus may also lead to learning to have more change agency in

organisations. Consequently having the ‘wrong’ habitus may lead to learning you have less agency in organisations or ‘misrecognising’ who owns the change agency in the school. If this is the case then there is a hidden selection process occurring in schools whereby those who already have the cultural capital to succeed in schools also have positive learning experience of having change agency in organisations, whilst those with a different cultural capital may develop negative perceptions of their change agency (even if those negative perceptions are self-produced).

Learning that the desired capital is the ability to perform change processes without enabling actual change

Arguably, a large part of the change agent behavior in this project was performance of change rather than organisational change. This is a complex issue because clearly the research revealed that the structures of the school and the students’ internalisation of performance culture led to situations where enactment was far easier for everyone than attempting real change. However, there was also evidence that this performance was highly valorised and indeed that it may be seen as evidence of cultural capital. Indeed as students themselves have noted, “*the good student is a good actor. You don’t notice it, but you are putting up a shield around what you say and what you do*” (Thompson, 2010:416). It would be too limiting to suggest that enactment occurred just because real change was too anxiety provoking for everyone – the students were well aware that the ‘smart students’ enacted change for the student council and were well able to identify that this was just ‘changing the appearance of things’ rather than enabling real change. It is unlikely that this was isolated learning, schools are awash with enactment behaviours and the students may have learnt that the capacity to enact change processes *is* the desired cultural capital. This is highly significant learning in terms of organisational life because enactment of change is a process that also occurs consistently in adult organisations.

Learning that disempowering oneself can feel empowering – exploring Neo-Marxist perspectives

In the literature review Giroux suggested Neo-Marxist educators should be trying to understand how “*un-freedom reproduces itself*”. In other words how, and why,

students might accept a submissive role even in a situation they may desire to resist. This research provides some indications as to why this might happen in this case.

The complexity of this issue is that it needs to be recognized that there is a formal and informal life in the school, as Cusick (1973) had pointed out. Students may feel free in the schools informal life but less so in its formal life. The formal life tends to refer to formal engagement with the organisation, whilst informal life refers to the groups and subcultures students create, often in response to this but sometimes independently of it. When Giroux speaks of 'un-freedom' I want to apply the idea to the formal life of the school because there is little evidence to suggest that students have limited freedom in their informal associations, although these associations may form in relation to their experience of the organisation.

However, there are situations where the formal and informal world overlap that are worth discussing. When students cannot empower themselves formally they may seek to empower themselves informally but in ways which formally add to their 'unfreedom'. This relates particularly to the work of Willis. My evidence for this comes from a minor conversation about their involvement with the student council. Two of the students at Greenfield had been invited to be involved and give suggestions on a matter. In both cases the students told me they had given mock suggestions and that the teachers response had been to ignore them from then on and only listen to the 'clever students'. Knowing these students I would suggest that their behavior had been boundary testing, on being invited they wanted to check to what extent they would be taken seriously and by doing so had reconfirmed for themselves that they could not be taken seriously – perhaps what they wanted was the teacher to take the time to prove they would take them seriously. So, the students' resistance to taking the student council role seriously was, as in Willis's work, a form of cultural production whereby they saw through the contradictions of the student council and thus experienced their resistance to it as true learning and affirmation, however at the same time they damned themselves to a powerless role and to accepting low agency. So, the unfairness they saw had some basis in reality but was also something they themselves reinforced, they saw through the system but their reaction to its apparent hypocrisy was not to want to change it but to use that insight to justify their passivity. This may be learning a role itself, an acceptance of the role of passive commentator

who does not participate, and thus when their interests are not met can justify a further lack of participation based on being ‘unrepresented’.

These processes were also observed towards the end of the project. I have spoken a lot about those students at Greenfield who came to the SLT meeting and their fear of it as an exam, but not about those who did not, who were in the majority. In theory they were being represented by the others but I came to understand that they might not have been motivated in the same way as those who attended. Those students who chose not to come to the final SLT meeting were perhaps expressing resistance, not at the project, but at what they perceived as an examination of their role in the project. More importantly they may have experienced an anxiety that they had not ‘performed’ in the project - that perhaps the role they had taken in the project was not one that would be valorised by the school. To break from academic terminology, perhaps they felt they had been ‘messaging around’ too much and that what we had done at times had not felt like ‘work’, as they were used to having it defined. At the time I did not see this, but in hindsight it is a useful explanation for their resistance towards the SLT meeting. So, in some sense denying the project became affirming the project. Those students who resisted coming to the SLT meeting could also be seen as using the opportunity to deny the sense that they were being examined, something they would not normally have the opportunity to do. They experienced this as affirming and personally empowering, however just as in Willis’s work it was a form of resistance that was actually disengaging them from formal organisational empowerment.

To summarise, in terms of their organisation-in-the-mind, some students may be developing some of the mindset where resistance to engaging is experienced as empowering because it reaffirms, and provides reasoned justification for, their passivity. This may be based on their evidence-based insight that engaging will not provide them with an authentic form of agency.

Learning that expressing your voice is enough

At the time this research was conducted, an interest in consulting students informed practice in many schools and these students had experienced having their opinions sought on school issues. They were very aware of their right to have a voice and did use it. I did not find that they were inhibited in expressing their opinions about

unfairness, bullying and selection in their schools and they were able to do so in quite eloquent, adult-orientated and often ironic ways. They would also often make very funny statements about what they thought they were expected to say, showing a deep understanding of social desirability as a process in voice. It was the chasm between voice and action that really struck me and I came to the conclusion that from all the emphasis on voice as a process that leads to change, the students had in fact come to accept that their role was to express an opinion while it was someone else's to act on it. Most of the time they seemed unconcerned or unaware of whether any action had occurred, rather the projections they received from being consulted seemed to placate them from any focus on whether their concerns had been acted on. Additionally, expressing voice involved no responsibility from them, so if nothing changed, it just reinforced their projection that nothing could be changed. To some extent they perceived the process of voice as a pleasant game where they received positive projections from adults. The game could sometimes be thought-provoking and even critical but it was never assumed that the game led to change, or was indeed even about change.

This was a process that defined the overall project as shown and became clear in many of the activities we undertook, as well as students own comments on the school. However, it was most clearly seen in the remarkable resistances that occurred when the project shifted from consulting the students to handing them an opportunity to act on their concerns as shown in chapter 4. One of the first things that struck me was simply how foreign it felt to the students to have to act on any of their concerns, rather they continuously tried to recreate a situation whereby I or the teachers would be the actors, and indeed overall one could argue they did succeed in recreating this dynamic. It was not difficult for them to do so as the culture shared their interest in maintaining their consultative role. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of this process was in how students struggled to envision a better culture. It was one of the tasks they engaged with least, which surprised me at the time. Despite being able to identify a host of cultural issues that concerned them, the idea of envisioning a school with a better culture was very difficult for them and in fact difficult for them to attribute meaning to as if they simply saw the culture as a given that could not and should not be re-envisioned.

There were a number of important learning processes here which may affect their organisation-in-the-mind. From their reinforced experience that expressing voice was equated with action, expressing your voice becomes the sufficient act of change. *ie* when organisational problems are faced the desired response is to express voice on the issue, and accept that acting on it is done by *others*. The expression of voice felt as if it could verge on narcissism at times. In the same way as someone expressing an opinion on Twitter about pollution, the expression of voice can become more about projecting identity and appearance rather than taking actual responsibility. Being concerned and having an eloquent opinion becomes a desirable trait, but there are strict boundaries to acting on this. Being able to express complex opinions about the problem *is* the desired indication of cultural capital, whereas acting on those problems could show a misunderstanding of what cultural capital is valorised. Additionally, voice becomes a kind of consumer role, where the object you were being consulted on was a kind of product you had no part in co-creating. Indeed it only emphasized students' perception of school as something they did not co-create everyday through their own behavior, rather school was a service being offered to them which someone else has a responsibility to improve on their behalf. Action on voice was carried out by 'the other' or by 'authority' or 'the powerful'.

The outcome of this learning is powerful. First of all, voice, though intended to increase students' sense of ownership of their school, in this case only seemed to have increased their sense of perceiving of it as an 'other', not their ownership of it as something they are co-creating. Without feeling that they co-created the school as an organisation students felt little responsibility to improve it or change it, that was the role of whoever owned the organisation – the teachers, the government – as they very reasonably said themselves. In other words, in terms of their organisation-in-the-mind, responsibility for change was related to ownership.

The more students are consulted without they themselves having a responsibility to act on the problem the more the idea of acting may become foreign to them. Perhaps the most important part of this process is the *acceptance* though, i.e. that students come to accept that organisational change is done by invisible actors, that they have a consultative role which will give them sufficient positive projections to maintain status.

Learning that the person is the problem, not the system

Rather than locate the need for change in the structures and values that may be the source of their problems, in order to adapt, they may learn to locate the need for change in themselves and in teachers and adopt a kind of deficit model. There was consistent evidence that this occurred in terms of students' self-perception and how they interpreted their problems in the school as an expectation *they* should change. Additionally, during the decision stage, the students initial idea about cultural change had been to confront, and evaluate, teachers they saw as underperforming so as to 'change them' in some way. This suggests that their internalisation of performance culture could be leading them to being disposed to seeing organisational problems as deficiencies in particular people rather than as systems issues – which is significant learning in terms of acting as organisational change agents and a significant inhibitor to enabling organisational change.

Learning that anger is an unhealthy motivation for change

One of the more interesting questions is whether students who have difficulty adapting to the status quo blame themselves for this difficulty or blame the school. In terms of answering this question I think it is interesting to look further at the students' attitudes to anger. There seemed to be three reasons why the students may have learned that anger is unhealthy and felt uncomfortable with it.

1. The first is that anger as it is expressed in schools may be perceived as unhealthy as it may not be experienced as leading to positive outcomes. Within performance culture there is no place for anger, there is no meaning or value that can be attributed to anger or conflict except as something problematic, and no framework to interpret anger and conflict as anything except something disruptive to the status quo. In my experience in the schools the students' daily experience of anger seemed to be mostly of 'problem students' and 'problem teachers' who were struggling to fit into this performance culture, or of authority figures using anger to control pupils. They had almost no experience of anger being used as a positive resource, hence they saw it as a sign of 'unhealth' in others and themselves. Because

there is no mechanism or meaning to expressing anger in schools, when it needs to be expressed it is often done so dysfunctionally (like loss of temper, personal attacks or bullying) which constantly reinforces the idea of anger being dangerous, unhealthy and uncontrolled, or indeed all about control.

2. The second issue is that it seems to suit the system for students to believe anger is unhealthy. For example, the students may have developed two different means of managing their anger, either they externalized it on another less threatening subject, often through bullying, or they internalised it into forms of passive aggression or by locating the problem in themselves. Few reacted, or seemed to be supported to react, by trying to challenge or change the circumstances causing their anger, and this may be precisely what is desired as this behavior could be interpreted as very disruptive and problematic in an exam focused culture where there are simply no processes or motivation for teachers to constructively work with conflict. The students regularly reported the teachers as saying “I am not paid to be fair” on issues that made them angry. Perhaps more worrying is that those who experience anger in school are often those who are struggling to belong, or working class students and other minorities who are struggling with how the dominant culture of schooling relates to their own culture or self. For them their anger may be a very rational response to their situation, but in having no way to express it formally through the organisation they internalise it and it can become a form of dysfunctional resistance, self-hate or even self-exclusion from education. The idea that anger could relate to a person’s legitimate struggle, that schools are places where legitimate struggles occur, and that those struggles are valuable and important for everyone is undermined.
3. The third is that admitting you are angry means you might have to justify your anger and take some responsibility for resolving the situation and this seemed to be an uncomfortable, if not at times impossible, role for the students. For example, in school students may be made aware of the unfairness or injustice that exists outside of their school experience but they may not be encouraged to become aware of unfairness or injustice that may exist in the context of their own experience. Students’ anger can be treated as if it were a disruption

to 'normal' institutional life rather than a feeling that might motivate them to try and improve their own and others lot in life. So, by learning to avoid their anger students are also learning that they have no responsibility for the issues that concern them. These pupils seemed to believe that their anger was something unhealthy to be hidden away in the name of a manufactured consensus, that the difference of their views was "*something to be resolved within relevant forms of exchange and class discussions*" (Giroux, 1986:6). However, in this process difference can lose its unique voice and ultimately be seen as a problem to be resolved, in the name of "*polite civic humanism*" (Corrigan, 1985:7). This can lead to a situation where children are learning that all social change is somehow achieved politely through consensus and the reality, and that the pain and difficulty of human struggles are undesirable.

Learning that organisational change is dangerous

It seems that for the teachers and the students the idea that school structures could be affected was hard to entertain and represented a kind of taboo where "*all the demons may be let loose if a taboo were to be violated*" and so social changes come to be viewed as likely to result in "*utter chaos*" (Watson, 1971:10). This is not some deficiency on their part but rather that there simply is no safe way for either teachers or students to do this within the performance culture they have which would not undermine how they themselves are valorised in that culture. The safeguarding of students from involvement in organisational change for such a long, and developmental period of their lives may make them averse to it and perceive it as a door to chaos. This may not be accidental. Rather than develop in students a disposition towards delivering constant but minor changes from a young age, they develop a disposition towards their own stasis and become so institutionalised by this stasis that delivering change comes to be symbolised by dysfunctional levels of fear, chaos and exclusion. In that this becomes part of the organisation-in-the-mind they develop as adults they may come to fear their own involvement in organisational change as potentially leading to chaos or exclusion.

Processes and roles which are performance evaluated have more value

This was a sub-theme that ran throughout the project in terms of valorising the project and the role of change agent. There was evidence the students struggled to valorise the project and its roles because they were not performance measured by the school. Additionally, some of the students may have sought performance measurement of the project and their role in it. This is perhaps not surprising in a performance culture where performance measurement needs to be projected as a form of objective valorisation. That which is not measured comes to be seen as having less value because it was not deemed worth measuring by the organisation. This means that an array of organisational behaviours may come to be seen as having less value. It also means that the authoritative ‘objective’ measurements can become the accepted means of valorisation, as alluded to by Ball (2003) in discussing performativity. It is worth saying that, in my role as facilitator, the students’ struggle to valorise the role of change agent was the lowest point of the process for me because it represented significant learning on their behalf. They *personally* valued the project and enjoyed it but from their organisational role as *student* they seemed to struggle to valorise the role of change agent. Carrying this learning into adult organisational life may be quite limiting, not just for them but also for organisations as they may be disposed towards seeking objective performance measurement to pre-valorise their actions which may inhibit innovation, change agency, intrapreneurship and even leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how the key findings may indicate something of the organisation-in-the mind (in terms of enabling change) students are developing through schooling.

It is important to reiterate that this learning is not necessarily always a negative process. At its base there is a process of learning to use ones agency to fulfill the purpose of an organisation which is valuable learning for any society to function, and for their own future roles. Additionally, many of the processes outlined are positive in terms of enabling students to learn how to adapt to organisational life. However, what is missing is learning the ability to re-imagine, transform and lead in an organisation.

In other words what is being learnt is the ability to maintain organisational stasis, which is important, but it is not being balanced with learning the ability to develop organisational change. The limitations of this research, *i.e.* that it was carried out in averagely performing state schools raises intriguing questions as to whether the disposition towards acting as change agents would be different in more elite schools, or high performing students in state schools. However, the students own comments about high performing students suggests that the particular students in this research may be learning more inhibited change agency than higher status students, although this has to be balanced with the finding that what higher status students may be learning is enactment rather than organisational change.

The key aim of this chapter has been to indicate that these students may be developing a very particular kind of organisation-in-the-mind. As has been shown, the development of the organisation-in-the-mind is not a simple process whereby students just internalise the organisational culture and structures of the school, rather it is created out of the role they find in the school, their resistance to the school and their emotional experience of the school so, in that sense, it is not like functionalist or structuralist accounts as in the early work of Jackson, Dreeben or Bowles & Gintis. It is perhaps easier to see organisation-in-the-mind as co-created by the student and the school – it is the outcome of that co-creative process of making the school as a system-in-the-mind. The student finds the system of the school by trying to understand boundaries, roles, values and aims but at the same time makes that system in their minds in how they react to those realities – in other words they are not just passive receivers of the structures of the school but also co-creators of those structures. Of course that process of co-creation is, as I have tried to show, skewed by how the value system students experience in school relates to their personal need to belong and be valued. Students are not simply made passive by structures, it is not a simple dialectic, rather they co-create those structures but **learn that it is in their interest to do so in a way that supports the status quo.** In other words their change agency is co-opted by the organisation to suit its interests and the students learn that it is in their interests to reinforce this process. Students do seem to have agency. The problem is that they seem to be learning to use that agency to co-create the conditions that will in fact enable their passivity.

This organisation-in-the-mind, however, is not deterministic in any sense but because it is formed by the student as a means of coping with organisational culture it may become a **disposition**. The extent to which this disposition affects their adult behavior is likely to depend on how it is inhibited or reinforced by the structures and cultures of adult organisations and whether they are experienced as significantly different, or similar, to school.

The question this thesis raises is what students are learning about their agency and its legitimate use through schooling. As has been argued, the question is important because in the future these students face, their capacity to use their agency critically in existing organisations, and their ability to imagine, create and lead new organisational structures, may be as important as what they learn for exams. This is especially true given the new social, economic, ethical and environmental problems they are likely to face. This chapter suggests, not only that they seem to be learning to accept passive roles, but that they appear to be internalising these roles as a cultural and valorised norm to the extent that they believe that acting on issues that concern them is not worth the potential consequences for their status in the organisation. Their organisation-in-the-mind may be one that not only accepts passive roles but reinforces a culture where organisational passivity is legitimised and enabling organisational change, even when it is needed, is not worth the imagined cost.

Chapter 7: Reflexivity and the researcher role

A number of interesting issues emerged in terms of reflexivity in this research and these issues warranted a micro-chapter. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the effect of the researcher role on the project and the issues potentially faced by a researcher in the context of this kind of action research in schools.

Mason (1996:6) stated that reflexive research means that *“the researcher should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their data”*. It is important to begin this section by reiterating that this project was strongly influenced by an action research tradition. In that sense my role and behavior, was a part of that action research process. I was not a passive observer and my subjectivity will necessarily have affected the process I was studying. I have attempted to account for my own role in the project and make myself an object of study for the purposes of self-reflexivity.

“Self-reflexivity acknowledges the researcher’s role(s) in the construction of the research problem, the research setting, and research findings, and highlights the importance of the researcher becoming consciously aware of these factors and thinking through the implications of these factors for her/his research. In this way, the problematics of doing fieldwork and representation are no longer viewed as incidental but can become an object of study themselves (Pillow, 2003:179)”.

In this project the problems I faced are discussed as an object of study because much of the research findings themselves derive from the problems I faced in facilitating and researching this project, the aim here is to see those problems as important research findings in and of themselves.

Despite the fact that exploring reflexivity is now an accepted part of qualitative research there are important critiques of reflexivity, especially from those concerned with emancipatory research (Pillow, 1994). As Pillow (2003:184) points out; *“self-reflexivity that is predicated upon the ability of the researcher to know her/his own subjectivity and to make this subjectivity known to the reader through disclosure is limited and limiting because such usages are necessarily dependent on a knowable subject”* and the knowable subject itself is problematised by post-modernist

perspectives. The problem, as Pillow outlines, is that most reflexivity actually is based on modernist assumptions, while attempting to appear otherwise. Patei (1994) points out that “*we do not escape from the consequences of our positions by talking about them endlessly*” (ibid, 70). In addition Namenwirth (1986:29) argues that researchers believe that as long as they are “*not conscious of any bias or political agenda, they are neutral and objective, when in fact they are only unconscious*”. So, even the best attempts at reflexivity cannot bring to light unconscious motivations. In terms of motivation Patai (1991:147) also suggests that the researcher’s interest to “*relinquish control, and involve the researched in all stages of the project runs the risk, however, of subtly translating into the researcher’s own demand for affirmation and validation*”. In other words, practices of reflexivity, even when mutual, can become used as ways of artificially emphasising the validity of research and representing ‘truths’. Ultimately Pillow (2003:193) argues that

“the qualitative research arena would benefit from more “messy” examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research”.

In action research the researcher’s role is complex and multifaceted, “*the outside researcher’s role is to implement the Action Research method in such a manner as to produce a mutually agreeable outcome for all participants*” (O’Brien, 2001:18). In order to do so “*it may necessitate the adoption of many different roles at various stages of the process, including those of planner-leader, catalyser-facilitator, teacher-designer, listener-observer, synthesizer-reporter*” (ibid:18). With the complexity of roles an action researcher may take reflexivity clearly becomes complex.

Despite the complexity of reflexivity it is a fundamental and valuable part of qualitative research. This research is written based on the perceptions of the researcher. In this research there are a number of ways my subjectivity affected the research participants:

The effects of holding leadership boundaries

In terms of reflexivity the focus tends to be on how the researcher affects the process – however in action research the researcher is affected by the process and on this basis then goes on to further affect the process. For example, I am aware that I would have

been affected by unconscious group processes in that the group can evoke more primitive feelings in the individual, such as those “*in the areas of dependency aggression and hope. The individual is usually unaware of this process: these basic emotions slip under the guard, as it were, of his ego function*” (Miller, 1993:19) and as Fraher (80) points out “*even though these primitive feelings and defenses might go undetected by the individual, they often have an impact on the group*” (Fraher, 80). It has been reiterated a number of times how this project was designed as a bounded sub-system in the school, this was done in order to create opportunities for the students to take a new role and provide them with boundaries to work within and it is worth discussing how this might have affected them.

In systems psychodynamics creating systems boundaries demands management – therefore I had to initially take a role to manage those boundaries. This role was not taken in order to direct the project, rather it was taken in order to provide safe boundaries for the students to work within. It was an ethical decision to create a bounded structure. This was not a simple process and indeed how these boundaries were affected by the school and particularly the students is one of the key findings of the project, which has been discussed a number of times. It could be argued that my taking this role was my taking a position of power which would have then affected students own understanding of their power or powerlessness. However this is not what boundary management entails, nor the concept of management it relates to. Boundary management here meant managing the relationship between the school and the students in the project, largely on an administrative level, which was a practical necessity. It did not indicate an intention to lead the direction of the internal sub-system.

Nevertheless, taking this boundary management role meant I was an integral part of the sub-system I was studying and that I would have affected the process. It is worth asking whether the students perceived themselves as powerless in relationship to the school or powerless in relationship to this project. The students did speak of themselves as powerless in relationship to having a voice in the school, based on prior experience and *before* we took any action in this project. The aim of the project had been to empower them in relation to issues that concerned them.

It is important to state that in conceiving of my management role, I experienced my power as limited in the school culture. At times in the project I experienced myself as being consciously affected by the school and the students and in many cases being pressured into offering leadership when my intention was to develop the students' leadership. Indeed this is one of the central points I have sought to make – that my attempts at distance or neutrality were not often desired by either the school or the students and a more directive teacher like role was preferred. What I have tried to reiterate in this research is that at a number of critical points the students' behaviour changed and they tried to press me into taking a more teacher-like leadership role, this tended to occur when we were considering engaging with the school. My experience was that they did this so that they could remain in the student role and, given that I was attempting to empower them, this was confusing at times. In order to clarify this it is necessary to reflect on the students' power within the project.

The students chose if they wanted to attend (and regularly used this choice), they chose if they wanted to be involved in activities, and they chose if they wanted to use methods (for example none of them wanted to work with diaries, so these were shelved). Generally if they did not want to do something that I suggested, they did not do it, they recognised the limits of my role and I regularly clarified that I was not like their teachers. In addition, their behaviour during sessions was not passive and they generally engaged in whatever they wished, with some choosing not to engage at all at times. Having said this, we were working in the culture of a school and my attempts at clarifying my role does not guarantee that some students may not have connected me to the school, or a teacher-like role, and there was some evidence of some students trying to clarify my connection to the school. Despite my consistent attempts at clarification it is likely that at times I was perceived by some as working on behalf of the school, and it may have been easier for the students at times to perceive my role in this way. For example, some students called me 'Sir' even when I sometimes asked them not to.

The students were clear they felt they had little formal power within the school, however this does not mean they had no personal power, as Willis's work suggests (1977). This personal power was something I experienced throughout the project and I experienced preconceptions I had about their disempowerment as idealised, the students had very real capacities and agency, and power to affect my behaviour.

However, what I have tried to distinguish between is their formal power and personal power, indeed the thesis here is partly that in the absence of formal power they use their personal power in ways that may not benefit them. This personal power was, as I have reiterated, used at particular points to reinforce a teacher role in me, despite their earlier recognition (p175) that I was not in a teacher like role. In addition students requested leadership from me over the direction of the project, seeking a more classroom like process. At times I may have unconsciously colluded with this teacher like role in an attempt to maintain a positive relationship with the students.

I was also self-reflexive about my power when it came to how the school may have attempted to communicate through me or I may have colluded with the school's interests. Towards the end of the project, it is possible that some of the students may have got involved in some activities because of a perception they had that the school was expecting some outcomes (because they are used to the school expecting outcomes). This is a complex issue, because even if I did not consciously express it, the students would have been unconsciously aware that I hoped for some outcomes too, and I did encourage them to attend the SLT meeting. Regardless of my behaviour, due to the performance culture of the school, they could have perceived me as seeking some outcomes and to suggest otherwise would be naïve, however I never prescribed what those outcomes were. At the time my motivation was for the students to feel their previous work would have some meaning by engaging with the school. However, this was a complex issue for me as a researcher because at one level I had to make sure they were fully given the opportunity to act, but on the other hand I had to ensure they felt free and equally valorised to not act. They were aware they did not have to attend the SLT meeting, a minority of them did attend. Did I collude in the pressure from the school for some outcomes and thus reinforce the performance culture affecting the students in this meeting? I was very conscious of this at the time and was careful to distinguish my role from that of other adults in the school. Once the meeting began I seemed to be largely invisible to the process and I did not have a sense the students equated my interests to those of the schools. Nevertheless, because I was an adult in a school context, some of the students could have interpreted my role as linked to the performance culture of the school.

External boundaries

The project took place within a school which already had its own culture and structures. For practical reasons the school had control over certain boundaries and it is important to understand how this may have affected the research participants. The project was done within school time and had to be staggered which meant the school had control over when sessions took place. As the project went on I experienced that the school affected the boundaries in a number of ways I could not always control. For example, the school had control over the space the sessions took place in, and it was my experience that boundaries between these spaces and the school were not always respected. In addition, whenever we chose to engage with the school in extra activities, the school had considerable control over time and space boundaries in this regard. The students would have become aware of the school's control over these boundaries and this would have affected how bounded they perceived the project as a sub-system. The students may have become aware of the limitations of my ability to affect the school's behaviour when, for example, spaces might have been changed, or the school chose times for student-teacher engagement. This is something I tried to manage as best as possible, however I am aware that it may have affected the students' perception of how bounded the project as a sub-system was.

Personal bias

Another issue related to reflexivity was the students' perception of my bias within the schools. From the project design and problem identification my subjectivity in terms of my belief that students acting as change agents is valuable is clear. This was something the students themselves sought to understand as some of them may have been curious as to whether I was attempting to benefit them, the school or myself. It was quite challenging to sufficiently answer this in ways they found fulfilling because in its design the research was attempting to benefit everyone involved. However, I became aware that this was a somewhat naïve position and as the research went on there were obvious tensions and decisions to be made as to whose needs to prioritise. This is a sub-theme that runs throughout the findings and I have tried to account for all the decisions I made. Another position that was difficult during the research process was my own interest in producing some outcomes – this translated as an interest in making sure the opportunities for the students to take the role of change

agent were as real as possible and that they understood this. I was open to the possibility that the whole process could have lost momentum and the students disengaged, a desire to avoid this may have affected my behaviour. I was conscious of this at the time and was careful not to put pressure on the students towards the end of the project, nevertheless I encouraged them to engage with the school and voice their concerns. I believe that to have appeared apathetic or unsupportive in this regard would have confused the students and been disingenuous. It would also have hidden my belief in them, in the sense that I believed that they had the capacity to engage with the SLT.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe the key issue in terms of self-reflexivity is how the students' experience of performance culture was reinforced or inhibited by my role in the project, as this goes to the heart of the core argument of the thesis. I made considerable efforts to make sure the students did not feel any pressure from me throughout the project but also that they experienced support, encouragement and real opportunities. Nevertheless because of the context of the research they may have at times perceived me in a teacher-like role which affected their perception of their power, however as I have tried to show this was something I felt they often created in order to reinforce the student role. Additionally my critical position – that acting as change agents itself was something valuable, could potentially have been perceived as a kind of pressure itself. I also affected power in simply designing the project and identifying student voicelessness as an issue – the project's design itself, though attempting to empower the students, through the reflective stage may have made students more conscious of their powerlessness. Many of these issues indicate the complexity of doing research of this type in a school culture and in the next chapter I want to discuss potential new ways of dealing with that complexity.

Chapter 8: The implications of the research for leading students as change agents processes

The focus in this chapter is on the practical implications of the findings for further research in this field. This was a project that attempted to offer, valorise and authorise the change agent role by creating a sub-system in the school. Clearly many obstacles exist to this process and the obvious solution would be to create schools where these sub-systems are not needed and the role of change agent is valorised and authorised in the *whole* system and culture of the school. However, radical organisational change may be unlikely to happen and the compromise may be creating more clearly bounded and led students as change agent's structures in schools. This means that the key practical issue the project raises is that of leadership, indeed I want to argue that the leadership of student voice/students as change agents processes in schools requires its own theoretical framework.

There is a dearth of research into the actual leadership practice of student voice processes in schools which is perhaps surprising given how complex a role this research suggests it may be. Smyth describes the issue of leadership that fosters student voice and agency as “*a controversial topic that has been kept off the official agenda for far too long in educational circles (2006:1)*”. The reason why it may be controversial is not immediately evident as in most schools now leadership roles exist which aim to foster student voice. However, there may be a core structural problem with these existing leadership roles in how they are accountable to the increasing pressures of performance culture on schools and there is growing evidence, supported by this research, that these pressures of performance may undermine the aims of student agency projects. One of the key implications of this research is that managerial leadership of voice and agency by established school staff, and especially teachers, may inevitably lead to forms of tokenism or co-option and thus new forms of leadership need to be explored.

The argument in this chapter is not based on direct research of those who lead student agency processes in school (though I had regular contact with those in these roles in the two schools) but rather on the pressures I experienced in the role of leading this initiative which, I will argue, are likely to be even more intensely felt by school staff. The benefit of taking that role, rather than observing someone else in that role, is that

I got to experience firsthand the pressures on it. The unique argument I want to forward is that the leadership role in this project, or any of its type, relates to managing the boundaries of the project in order to create the conditions for students to take a new role. If a project were not focused on managing these boundaries it would be working with the students entirely in the 'student role' – which clearly has some problems.

Leadership of boundaries

My leadership role was understood as managing the boundaries of time, space, membership, leadership and task for the project in order to establish it as a unique system with unique roles and more importantly protect students, inasmuch as possible, from particular cultural pressures of the school. This is the systems theory of leadership which sees leadership as managing boundaries. The *“issue facing leaders and managers is to be clear enough in their own heads about the boundaries, resources and structures of the system they are charged with so that they can convey them to others”* (Bazalgette et al., 2005:77). For those leading student voice processes the crucial point may be their ability firstly to understand the boundaries of the process and secondly convey the boundaries of the process to others, particularly the students and school leadership. This is an ongoing role, as (Reed, 1999:9) points out *“boundary as a concept in-the-mind is not static, but dynamic; its value is always changing, everyday”*. So, setting up a structure is not sufficient, that structure needs to be constantly monitored, which involves considerable management by the leader in role.

As has been shown, those boundaries were weakened in a number of different ways in this project. Although the processes that weakened the boundaries of the project came from the schools and the students my management role still made a difference in how this occurred. The main problem throughout was managing the need to enable the students and the school to experience some outcomes, produce research outcomes myself, and still work authentically with the direction the students gave to the project. The problem I want to raise is that the need to produce outcomes of some kind for all parties may have reinforced the influence of performance culture in the project. In other words the students were aware (or believed) the school wanted some outcomes, the students themselves wanted outcomes which would deliver some positive

projections on their performance, and I wanted outcomes for the students, so it was the schools model for an outcome that may have become the dominant aim at times.

I was in the unique position of being external and to some extent being able to challenge the school on a number of issues and form and control the boundaries of the project, even so, it was a huge challenge to avoid allowing the project be subsumed into the schools natural processes and culture. If it is this problematic for someone external whose status and position is not affected by the school then it must be significantly more difficult for internal school staff. It is reasonable to infer that those leading student agency in schools must face difficult issues in this process. As McIntyre et al., (2005:167) recognised in their own research with teachers; “*given current pressures, teachers can easily feel that they have to choose between professional compliance and responding to their pupils*”. For this reason these roles may need to be reconsidered in structural terms because internal staff may be best placed to take forward this work (because of the level of time and engagement they can offer) but only if they have roles that have new structural accountabilities.

The key question for researchers, leaders and policy-makers in the future may not be how do we enable student agency but, given the practicalities, **how do we enable, and allow, school leaders to enable student agency?** The findings from this research make an important contribution to this question as they suggest that the current structures may never be adequate for systemic reasons and that an external body (outside of the school) may need to be set up in order to enable a new leadership role for student agency in schools.

In order to do so it is important to summarise the key problems this research suggests leadership of student agency faces. These problems are all interrelated as consequences of the narrow form of performance culture in schools and how it limits thinking and behaviours related to organisational agency.

8.1 The leadership problems of working in performance culture

The most significant impact on the leadership of the project was the performance culture of the school. This has already been shown in how the school and students

affected the boundaries of the project. There are a number of distinct research problems this raised:

Students concerns about change can be co-opted by the school

The issue of co-option is covered in the literature as how the pressures of performance can lead voice projects to focus on reengaging students in performance culture (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003a; Thomson & Gunter, 2005; Whitty & Wisby, 2007), which by implication may disable them from working on issues that may challenge performance culture. The methodology of this project revealed that performance affected it by weakening the boundaries that kept it distinct from the performance pressures of the school. This process was not a directed intentional process from any particular person or group but rather a consequence of an organisational culture which is totalising in the sense that it cannot allow for alternative sub-cultures within it. The performance culture in the school could be said to represent a kind of hegemony where alternative systems, in order to maintain their legitimacy, validity and not undermine the status of those involved in them, inevitably end up re-conforming to that hegemony.

Students can challenge the role of facilitator

As has previously been outlined, a number of processes challenged my capacity to take the role of facilitator. One of these was the aspects of control the school had over the boundaries of time and space of the project. The second was the students' ability to force me into taking a teacher-like role through low level misbehavior. This behavior was not accidental and tended to occur at times when I put them under some pressure. Their reaction was very effective because by behaving in certain ways they forced me into having to take some control over them in the same way a teacher would. I become most aware of this process when I found myself, on one occasion, giving them a very didactic research task just to reinstate a classroom structure and my control. Most of the time I resisted this, however I was very aware of projections from the school that I was expected to 'manage their behaviour' like a teacher would, and had their behavior ever got out of control it may have had implications for the project. This relates in interesting ways back to the students comments about wanting to be controlled by teachers. My attempts to offer them opportunities to take

leadership were very effectively resisted by forcing me to reinforce my leadership and within the school culture there seemed to be no means of transforming this process.

The facilitator can themselves feel under pressure to produce *acceptable* outcomes.

In the literature review I referred to the problem of evaluating projects of this type, *i.e.* does one define success and failure on the students' terms, the schools terms or the researcher's terms? What does failure mean in a project of this type? If students produce something that produces positive outcomes from the schools perspective but does not seem to be based on student concerns, is it successful? If it does work on student concerns but produces few outcomes or clashes with the school in some way and dissipates, is it a failure? In this project, the students and the school appeared to perceive it as a success in terms of having engaged with each other towards the end. So, success for them seemed to be process based, rather than in the content of specific concrete changes that could have been achieved. This raises some questions in terms of what is understood by success, for example does success lie in the process of engaging, or does it lie in achieving specific changes? The answer to this question may depend on one's ontological and epistemological position, when working on cultural change the process that is introduced can be the change itself. If the change desired by the students was a change in how students and teachers engage with each other formally in terms of voice then a certain amount was achieved in this project.

Howard et al., (2002) drew up principles for working with students as researchers, one of these is that "*professional co-researchers have the responsibility to ensure children are not set up to fail*". The term 'set up to fail' suggests it will be intended, however it is unlikely any researcher is going to intentionally set up children to fail, what can happen however is that the organisational culture of the school creates a situation where the only kind of success that can be achieved is one which has questionable authenticity in terms of the children's real concerns. The reality is that everyone involved, even the students, feels under pressure to provide some acceptable outcomes but as a researcher this project revealed for me that the outcomes reveal little about the success or failure of a project like this. Indeed, the whole notion of qualitatively evaluating these processes is problematic because once that becomes an issue it will affect the outcomes. If the participants feel outcomes are expected they

will be likely to produce outcomes that fit with the expectations of the dominant cultural values in the organisational context, especially if their own status is vulnerable.

It could also be perceived that the focus on both process and action may have affected students' perceptions of the aim of the project and thus its failure or success. This is discussed further in the limitations on p251.

The very selective processes one is trying to avoid can be unavoidable

It has already been argued how the pressures of performance can also have a significant impact on whose voice and agency is valorised. Within this project students' responses suggested that these processes might occur with the student council in terms of whose voice was listened to and acted on. This project had intentionally set out to avoid working with students with a higher status in the school who were more likely to produce attractive outcomes, however even so, the pressures of this dynamic were at play even within the groups I had. This became particularly evident in which students engaged in the active stage and which engaged in the reflective stage. On the whole disengaged students, who perhaps perceived themselves as having a lower status in the school engaged more with the reflective stage but disengaged with the active stage. Whereas the students who seemed more engaged with the school were more likely to be engaged in the active stage. One particular student is a good example of this. John expressed considerable, but thoughtful, frustration during the reflective stage, as an example, in conversation with him he had said:

The teachers think I'm a mug, they look at you like you're an idiot.

They bully me, they think they're better than the kids, the way they look at you.

Miss x, she tells me I'm never going to get nowhere in life.

Despite the different frustrations John expressed during the reflective stage, and though he continued to attend, he disengaged considerably during the active stage. This was despite my attempts to keep him involved and the concerns we were working on being related to those he had voiced. It was students like John whose voice I most wanted to act on, however they were often also the students who most wanted to express voice without acting on it. On many occasions I was faced with a

reality that if I followed their lead no actions would be taken within the initiative. This was not a perception but a reality that emerged throughout many sessions where I did give these students leadership and their interest was to remain at the level of reflection. In this case I would have had to accept a project with no outcomes other than the voices of disengaged students, which I felt would provide less benefit to the students overall. On this basis I chose to engage with some of the more engaged students in the project, and those who engaged with the student-teacher negotiation and SLT meeting tended to be more engaged (relative to these groups). Even within a project designed to avoid selection, I had to ultimately follow the more engaged students in the group in order to produce any outcomes at all for the overall student group.

Having said that, there was no evidence that the students did not feel that those who attended the events were of a different status to them or could not represent their positions. For students like John, my experience suggested that they chose not to engage as an act of resistance itself, that for them, like with Willis's 'lads', even negotiating with the teachers was going to be disempowering and legitimise the teachers power over them in the organisation. The problem in the case of students like John is that no process is likely to affect their behavior because their position has meaning to them. Thus, the problem remains that, within the organisation, the behavior John had learnt to be comfortable with was voicing his frustration in indirect passive aggressive ways rather than acting on it in constructive ways. In John's case I felt this was an organisational role that had already become deeply internalised.

The Implications for leadership of voice and agency projects

The difficult question is what happens if, on expressing student voice, students' develop ideas that do not fit with the priorities of the school but seek to prioritise something else? When a student voice project enters the school as a system it eventually become subject to that culture, such that student voice projects can be expected to 'perform' in some way in order to sustain themselves. This is illustrated very well in Dana Mitra's (2006) account of a student voice initiative in the US. Mitra found that the projects, in order to succeed and survive, ended up attaching themselves to school's performance interests but in doing so lost the initial meaning

the students had attributed to them. Additionally, schools, and teachers, are faced with the difficult position of asking what issues the students can actually work on and may often end up choosing very minor issues because larger issues may challenge the ‘teacher voice’ or produce conflict that there is simply no framework for managing given the expectation on teachers in terms of performance. This may lead to very particular learning about the processes, meaning and purpose of acting as organisational change agents.

The implications are that the pressures outlined above may be occurring at some level in every student agency project in schools whether it be students as researchers, student voice, democratic education initiatives or citizenship initiatives. The values and culture of performance are not only external in creating pressure for outcomes that meet adult concerns but also internal in how students may put pressure on a project to meet what they have come to believe are valorised outcomes and dynamics that secure their status. Regardless of what form of leadership the project might have, as long as it is perceived as a sub-system of the school it is perceived as subject to the schools concerns and culture. The project may begin with its own purpose but eventually it will take on the schools purposes, otherwise it may be rejected as without value, not only by the school but even by the students. This is illustrated very well in Dana Mitra’s account of the ‘Student Forum’ project. Mitra (2006:320) found that student agency projects which were led internally in the school and where leadership was distributed and focused on formal partnerships with teachers tended to lead to inhibited student agency - similarly to this research. Projects moved towards adapting to the organisation in order to sustain and maintain their value to the organisation, but this had a cost;

“participation in teacher activities helped to institutionalize the role of the group, but becoming a part of the formal reform process diminished the student-driven, grassroots nature of the group. Student Forum did not engage teachers and administrators in controversial issues where discord might exist between youth and adults.”

However, perhaps the most revealing situation is how, in order for the project to be sustained, it was connected directly to the performance culture in the school. The

group was turned into “*a traditional class that students could take for credit*”. This she adds;

“helped to sustain the group and to preserve momentum for their activities, but it further situated the group’s activities within the traditional school structure. It diluted the ‘edginess’ of the group as something different than traditional student responsibilities. The group continued to assert the right of students to have a role in decisions affecting teaching and learning and the overall climate at Whitman, but these same students received a letter grade from Jackson at the end of the term”(Mitra, 2006:320).

This example again illustrates the contradictions faced by student agency projects, as in order to be accepted and sustained they may lose all capacity to offer students authentic means of using their agency based on their own concerns, especially if those concerns are related to performance culture in some way, which is going to be likely. The very idea that voice or agency could be accredited within performance culture surely illuminates the extent of the problem. Similar issues arose with the sustainability of this ‘students as change agents’ project. Once the project ended, in terms of potentially continuing something similar, no way was seen of fitting it in with the existing school structure so it was considered as an optional after school activity. I felt that there was an awareness that it would not be maintained as an after-school activity but it enabled us to maintain the appearance that something might be sustained. There may have been an awareness amongst teachers and students of the difficulties of sustaining a project like this within the existing structure – but it is an awareness that was difficult for them, and me, to name.

Is an alternative structure possible? A number of alternative ideas have been offered in radical schools but this analysis suggests that if these were translated into the public school system they would be affected by the same performance pressures. Other alternatives (Mitra, 2006) suggest working from outside the school and trying to support student agency through external leadership, however if students do not recognise them as internal school initiatives, they may perceive them as offering a kind of artificially supported agency thus reinforcing a form of dependency rather than agency. The key issue that this project reveals then is a leadership problem and how this is revealed may be an indication of the value of the systems approach taken

in the research. As has been indicated the project suggests that clearer boundaries need to be made and the only way to do this is to create a leadership role that is recognised by both teachers and students as **having the structural authority to protect those boundaries**. External figures, as I was, have the advantage of being able to be independent from the performance pressures of the school (though they will still be affected by them). However, their authority and power to protect the boundaries of a project of this type is perhaps rightly not always recognised by students because they are in temporary roles and may not always be in a position to authorise change agent behaviours. Even if students experience those boundaries as safe while the external facilitator is present they may be well aware that the facilitator will eventually not be present and as the students themselves pointed out, ‘questionable’ behavior is not quickly forgotten in schools. Students in the project often tested my capacity to protect them. For example in the labeling exercise I had a strong sense that the students wanted to understand to what extent I could protect them if there were negative consequences to them using their change agency. This is a crucial point and though I was in a position to protect them, and no students experienced any problems, they would nevertheless have been aware that my role was temporary. If there was someone in the school with a formalized capacity, in a specially created role (see section 8.2), to support them in the long term this could represent something very enabling – the role would not be to protect students from the consequences of destructive behavior but at least be in a position to patiently work through those boundary testing behaviours so that other more creative behaviours could emerge. Additionally, and crucially, this needs to be someone the students do not feel they need to *perform for* and is not connected to student assessment in any sense.

So, the findings of this project in terms of the structural issues around the change agent role suggest that further work of this type in schools should ask three questions. These are the questions a systems model suggests every new process should be able to answer, as this diagram illustrates.

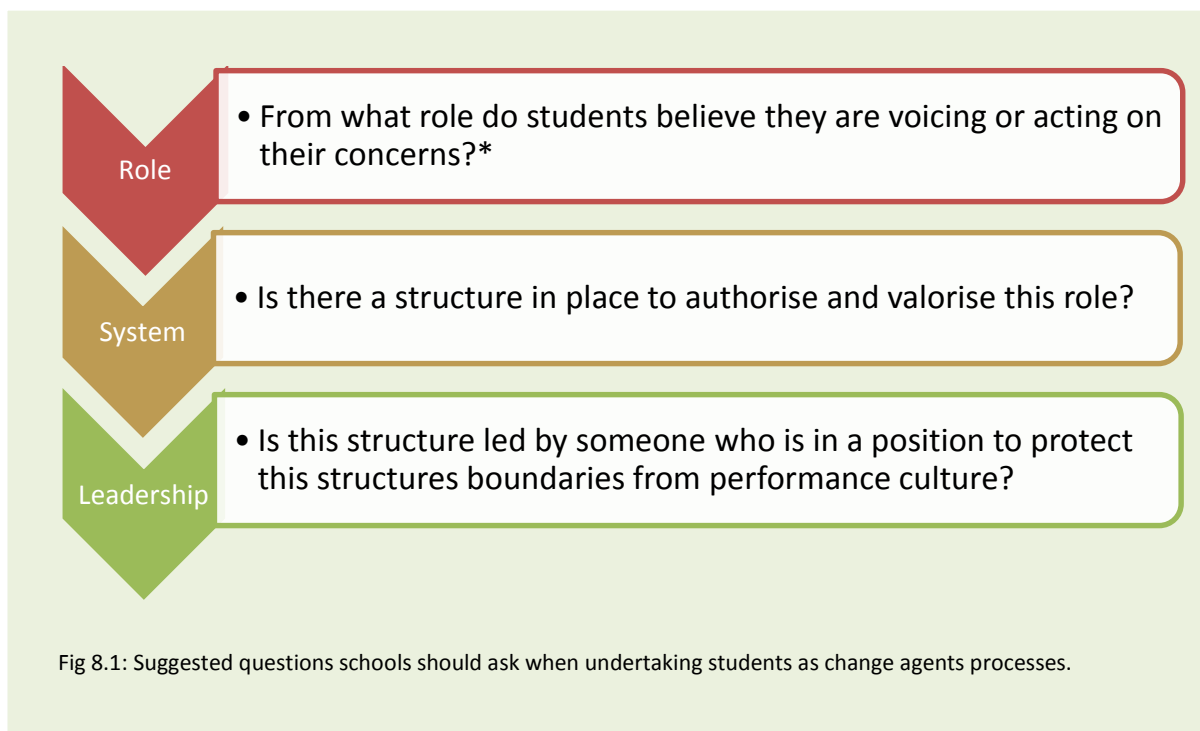


Fig 8.1: Suggested questions schools should ask when undertaking students as change agents processes.

The diagram indicates some of the learning from this project that forms questions facilitators of projects of this type could explore. Firstly, at the level of role, teachers or facilitators of student voice type projects should be asking what systems role the students believe they are acting from. If this is the ‘student’ role, have the effects of performance culture been discussed with the students and a means developed to avoid co-opting students or tokenistic practices? On what basis is it assumed that students will not perceive it as related to normal valorised expectations of the student role? If it another role, is there a sub-system that authorizes that role and has work been done on enabling a culture that valorises that role. Finally, a sub-system requires leadership, is the leadership role of the sub-system recognized by the students as having a degree of independence and separateness from the school performance culture? Overcoming these problems is difficult, however I hope to contribute some indications as to how this could be done in the next sections.

8.2 The praxis of the student agency leader role

These questions have significant implications for leadership practice. Due to the way schools are structured the only figure students may recognise as having the authority to give them the freedom to use their change agency would be an authority figure established in the school. The student recognition of this is revealed in how they

consistently sought legitimacy for their decisions and actions from what they saw as the ‘important teachers’. However, these ‘important teachers’ are not in a position to enable the students to develop their agency, not because they do not want to, but because their roles are seen by the students as roles which valorise students on the basis of performance, which as we have seen can be a direct inhibitor of agency.

Schools often attempt to overcome this by having a distinct leadership role for student agency or voice in schools, however they are normally senior teachers who the students do not recognise as being in substantively different roles to any other senior teacher, even if adults see it that way. It is important to note that both of the schools in this research had adults in these roles, however they did not seem to be recognised as anything but ‘other teachers’ by the students. Students made no reference to them and certainly did not seem to see them as in a position to support their change agency.

This has less to do with the behavior or competence of these staff members but is due to how their role is understood by pupils as connected to an existing hierarchy which is performance-centered. The pupils will be used to seeing this staff member in relationship with other senior leadership figures and may perceive them as having similar interests to those senior leadership figures in terms of students’ performance.

The key to developing student agency may lie in creating a leadership role in schools which students do recognise as presenting something different, and most importantly as having a different accountability. In other words students have a sophisticated awareness that senior staff are under external pressure to increase student performance, they need to have a leadership figure in the school who they are confident does not experience those pressures. This cannot be created artificially but must have a structural reality, in other words schools need to be enabled to create a student agency role which has authentic independence from the pressures of performance and is subject to a different system of accountability.

There is a tendency to think that if a role is named in a certain way and students are told certain things it will have some reality for them, what this research has shown is that they have a sophisticated understanding of who really has power and independence and what the structural priorities of each role are because they themselves need to understand these things in order to maintain their own status. Naming teachers in the role of ‘student voice leaders’ of some kind, and providing

them with all the guidance they might need does not mean that students will perceive this new role any differently from just another teacher role.

It would be very tempting at this point to offer an exciting ideal school structure that would never be applied; however what I will outline here is based on what I think is possible. Leadership in schools, rather than being distributed, is tending to be further centralised in headteachers roles and students tend to recognise that everyone seems to be accountable to the headteacher. This tendency towards reinforcing the independence of schools from outside bodies (which is clearly prioritised in the current governments' policies) undermines the ability of actors within the school to derive authority and vision from anything beyond the school's core performance concerns (which is perhaps the intention). There remains a largely unchallenged idea that headteachers can reinforce performance pressure in schools whilst also promoting student voice and agency and that there is no tension in these aims. However, as we have seen, in order to solve the contradictions school leaders will often find themselves valorizing voice and agency in work in reference to how it might improve performance, often because this is the only way they can justify doing that work (Bragg, 2007).

However, this is not say that school leaders do not recognise the need for organisational change agency. In both schools the deputy heads seemed to have a developed awareness of how performance culture (and for them the political and policy pressures on the school) was inhibiting developing students change agency but felt their hands were tied in terms of offering students authentic alternatives. For this reason a new role, which they could support, but which they did not feel accountable for would offer school leaders the freedom to express their interest in student agency without having to feel they need to justify the value of that work in terms of the performance expectations on the school. Indeed the very fact that they enthusiastically supported this project suggests that they recognise the value of such a role and I experienced the feeling that they felt liberated about being able to discuss these issues with me and not feel they had to enforce certain expectations on me.

The question then becomes how does one create a role with recognised authority in the school which is not directly responsible to the headteacher? The first process would be to distribute their accountability in such a way that they are partly

accountable to the Head but also accountable to an external body that would allow them some independence. In the past creating a body connected to the local authority might have been ideal as this external body, however that may no longer be viable. The recommended solution is setting up a governmental body (like the National College for Teaching and Leadership) focused on student voice, leadership and agency which allows 'student agency' leaders in school a certain amount of independence from performance culture, supports them (and potentially trains them), and allows school leaders the freedom to enable them to develop that work independently. Student agency leaders would then have dual accountability, which if genuinely adopted in the structures of the school, would come to be recognised by students as offering them a new structure to explore their agency within. It is important to restate that this structure would be created, not to undermine the current leadership in school, but in recognition of students needs to experience an alternative leadership structure in order to experience their agency.

Leading a 'change agency school' within a school

The authority of the student agency leader would give the change agency processes boundaries a structural reality which would be far clearer than what was experienced in this project. The boundaries could even form a kind of 'school within a school'. This would not be to avoid doing holistic work on the school but in order to create a distinct system for students to work within. The idea of a 'school within a school' has already been very successfully used in some very large schools, particularly in the US (Deweese, 2013; Jacobson, 2013; Lee, 1995; Raywid, 1995) to give students a more manageable organisational experience and more personal attention. This idea is significant and worth working with because schools have been able to structurally achieve it which means it is a model that can be structurally replicated for other uses.

What I am suggesting is a school initially structured around two sub-systems. If we consider the following two diagrams they illustrate in systems terms the distinctiveness of the approach. Diagram A shows how most approaches are currently run – they are sub-systems within the overall performance culture. They initially have some independence but are ultimately subsumed within the larger system, as happened with this project. Sub-systems with stronger boundaries and leadership may sustain difference for longer but it may never be sustainable or capable of being

sustained internally by the school. School councils, for example, could be seen as falling within the structure of diagram A. The **arrows indicate the actual direction of the pressure to transform** within the overall system, in other words they indicate the pressure on the sub-system to perform in line with the priorities of the schools performance culture.

Diagram A

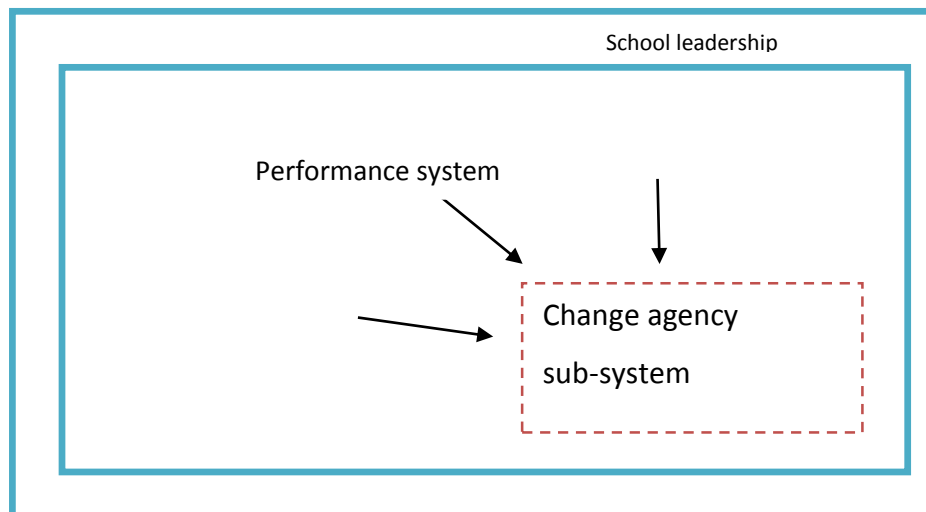


Fig 8.2: How current sub-systems can be affected by performance culture.

However in Diagram B, we see the sub-system as within the school system but having an external relationship to a body which would give it some independent authority. This authority could enable it to distinguish itself from the performance system of the school and, conceptually speaking, act outside that system (though it would still be physically part of the school). The person leading the organisational agency sub-system could have different accountability to those in the performance system thus giving the sub-system more independence and enabling the students to perceive it differently.

Diagram B

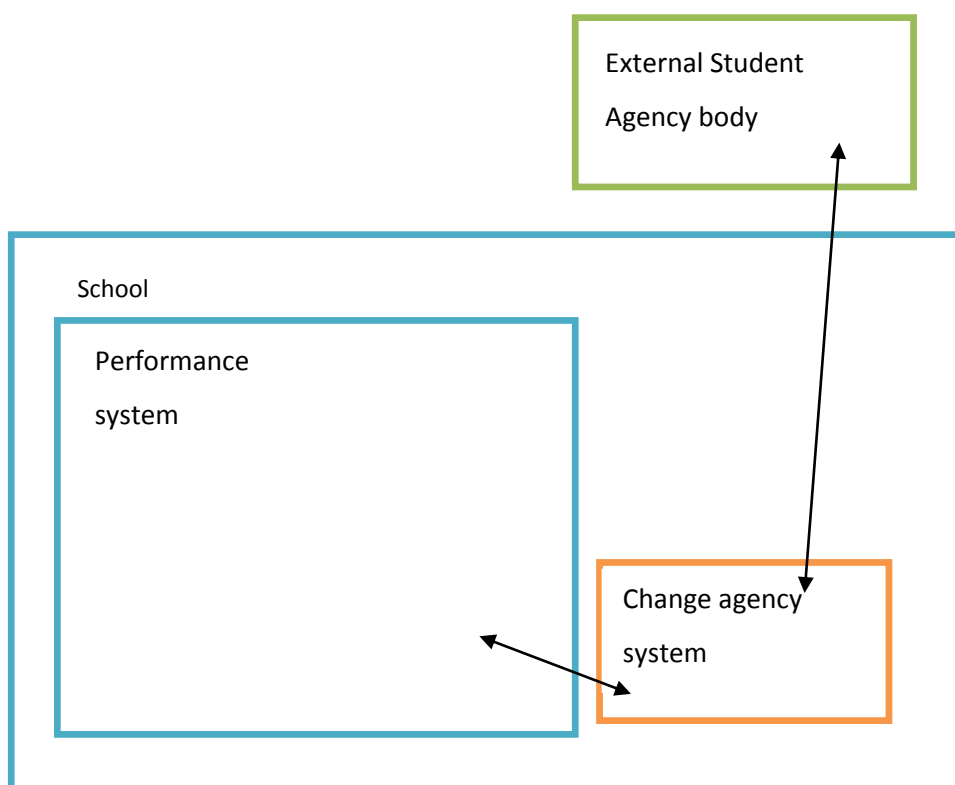


Fig 8.3: A systems model of an independent change agency system.

The crucial point is that the integrity of this systemic distinction would only have reality inasmuch as each system had different leadership and as much as students were able to recognize the different systems as being led differently. Clearly there might then be tension at times between the two systems, therefore it would be crucial that this tension was held in the role-relatedness between those two leaders, rather than allowed to affect the school experience. The important point from the diagrams is that in diagram B the new sub-system is still part of the school, it is not seen as external (though it derives some its authority externally) but as a natural part of the overall school experience. The performance system is not seen as the only structure and culture in the school but is balanced with an alternative structure and culture.

A whole experience

The holism of the students experience then would not be created by trying to implement the ideas of student agency and voice in all aspects of the schools processes. This model offers a whole school approach in a very different way – that is through the students’ experience itself. In other words the teaching and learning

systems and change agency systems would connect through the students' experience of them. This idea is based on the finding that in this research it became clear that students need the safety and familiarity of the teaching and learning system, to an extent, but that they also need this experience to be regularly balanced by its opposite – if it is not, they will try and create that opposite anyway. In the same sense if they experience too much free agency they can attempt to recreate the teaching and learning system. The students, just like adults, need to experience a reasonable balance between independence and dependence. In other words, it is not one whole experience they need, but two different experiences that they can move between. The ability to move between them means that neither experience will become overwhelming or oppressive, and both can be freely explored as learning experiences and opted out of at will.

I describe this as a kind of oscillation between states where **the knowledge that they can oscillate may enable them to experience each state more fully**. This is not an artificially constructed process but, as some thinkers have argued, a natural human mode of development. Bruce Reed, in his theory of oscillation (1978) argued that humans oscillate between intra-dependence (dependence on the people within a system) and extra-dependence (dependence on something external). He argued that being able to oscillate means one can experience each state more fully. What I am suggesting is a school with two sub-systems – one (the teaching and learning system) where children are extra-dependent and one (the change agency system) where children are intra-dependent. The process of school dynamics would enable students to oscillate between these two states. In the diagram below, for example, above the line is the experience of the teaching and learning sub-system and below the line the experience of the change agency sub-system. The diagram shows the oscillation of a student's experience over, for example, a day.

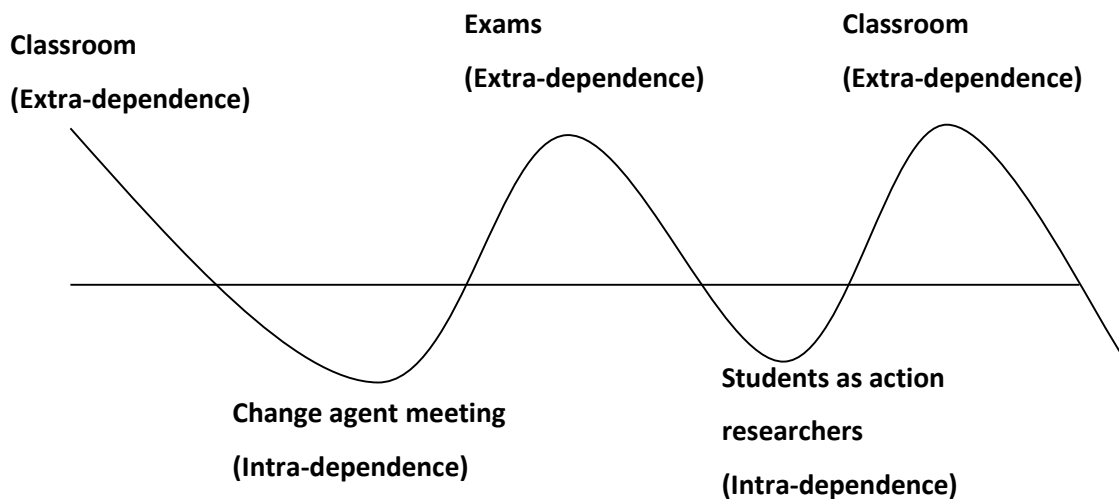


Fig 8.4: The oscillation of a student's experience between two systems.

The move from intra-dependence to extra-dependence – *ie* from working on organisational change back to the classroom culture, which is a kind of regression, will be experienced by many students as moving from feeling uncontained to feeling contained, from feeling free but at risk to feeling unfree but safe, from collective responsibility to a more personal responsibility. On the other hand, the move from extra-dependence to intra-dependence, from the classroom to organisational agency, may be experienced as a move from feeling contained to feeling liberated, from feeling passive to feeling creative, from feeling responsible for one's personal performance to feeling responsible for more collective issues of concern.

The point is that students may benefit from experiencing the two states of intra-dependence and extra-dependence – if they remain in either state for too long it may begin to be experienced as oppressive. They may not want to experience teaching and learning culture all the time but neither do they want the anxiety of managing the freedom and responsibility of organisational change agency all the time. By oscillating between the two each comes to meet a different need and represent a meaningful relief from the other – as well as a meaningful challenge to the other. If the oscillation is managed well, and the organisational agency students experience is authentic, students will welcome each shift, and indeed after a while will welcome returning to the classroom space and value the containment it offers, which could improve classroom engagement. The compromise in this model means that aspects of school culture may remain unchallenged, on the upside it means that students may be

more likely to challenge those aspects they believe they can challenge and have some experience of their organisational agency.

Ultimately the model is about achieving some **balance** in the students' experience, between the passivity required by performance culture which can also teach valuable processes about adapting to, and maintaining organisational performance and the capacity to do change based on legitimate concerns learnt from organisational agency.

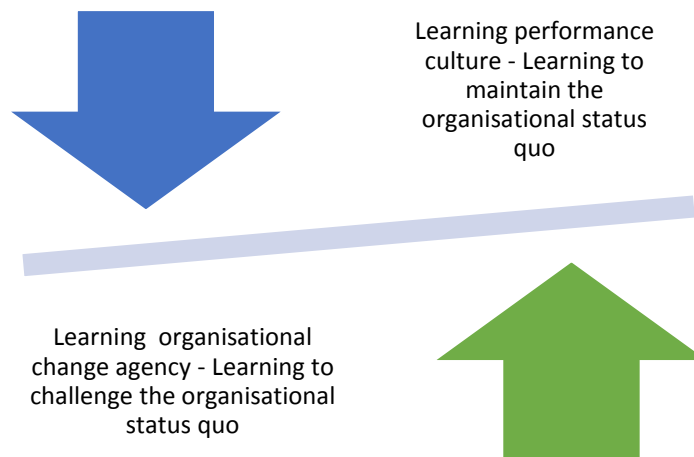


Fig 8.5: Picturing the need to balance learning organisational change agency with learning performance culture.

Again the success of this model would depend on the systemic relationship between the headteacher and the student agency leader in how they managed how the two systems interact. It would be crucial that students were aware of when they were moving between systems, indeed some kind of ritual or change would be useful to frame this transition, such as a whole school meeting or a change in physical spaces.

From transforming structure to transforming culture

Michael Fielding has argued that new organisational structures are needed in order to enable more authentic student voice. However, these organisational structures that have been discussed may not be sufficient in and of themselves. Research suggests that making structural changes in schools without changes in culture have tended to be unsuccessful in the past (Sarason, 1996). This project represented an attempt to initiate a new bounded organisational structure itself. The key contribution this research suggests is that the pressure on a student voice structure can come, not only from the school, but from the students themselves due to their internalisation of the

school's culture. What this means is that even if a new structure is created students may attempt to reinforce a more familiar school structure. The students may do this for a number of reasons but the main reason, I would argue, is that they are unused to a structure that attempts to valorise their roles without performance measurement. Due to this they may believe they are being performance measured anyway, seek to be performance measured, or struggle to see value in the process, all of which would affect their capacity to see themselves as change agents. On this basis new organisational structures in and of themselves may not be sufficient. What this research suggests is that **students' internalisation of the school's performance culture is a problem for student voice** and that on this basis it is culture itself we need to consider. What may be needed is a cultural shift in schools which valorises the role of change agent itself.

Transforming culture is, as all organisational consultants know, a very difficult and complex process. Culture is a set of assumptions, often unconsciously held, which has derived from what has worked for that organisation in the past. This does not mean that that culture is healthy, there is considerable evidence that organisational cultures that 'work' can be very unhealthy for their members (Hoy & Tarter, 1997). The problem with transforming organisational culture is that the intended transformation needs to work for people without creating considerable anxiety. Clearly with student voice this is difficult because it is difficult to argue how student voice makes a school 'work better' without resorting to moral arguments about its necessity. The core argument to support it is that it may increase students' sense of wellbeing and belonging in school, which may help schools 'work' better as a community. However, it may also be very disruptive if undertaken authentically, so a long term view on its benefits would have to be adopted.

Transforming culture is a leadership issue in schools. Indeed, theorists argue that the Headteacher's main influence on a school is not direct but indirect in terms of culture. *"Leadership is no longer proposed as having a direct influence on learning outcomes but as having an indirect influence through the way it has an impact on school organisation and school culture"* (Witziers et al., 2003). Additionally there is considerable evidence in the literature that in order to change a school's culture a school leader must first *understand* that culture (Bazalgette et al., 2005; Bulach, 2001;

Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Kytte & Bogotch, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; MacNeil et al., 2009).

On this basis then, one of the key processes in terms of changing culture in schools in terms of students' change agency is enabling school leaders themselves to understand how school culture affects students' change agency. However, different schools have different cultures, so each school leader needs to attempt to understand the culture of their own school and students behaviour based on their internalisation of that culture. Based on this understanding, school leaders may be able to focus their attempts at cultural change.

When it comes to transforming culture the key may be a slow adaptation process that increases with intensity overtime. The success of this process would depend on the behaviour of leadership figures in the school and a conscious effort on their part to valorise students' change agency. This requires a message that belonging in the school does not have to be a passive activity, but can be an active one which can be critical. Based on my own experience of this research and my understanding of organisational culture I have developed some examples of processes that could be adopted. It must be noted that every school is different and that interventions would need to be tailored to a school, this is why I am not prescribing how these processes should be carried out in detail. What is important here is naming a few areas which schools could focus on. My recommendation would be that schools work with an external consultant who has a background in organisational change on these ideas.

1. Develop a clear mission statement agreed by all the SLT as to if, and why, you want to value students' change agency.
2. Develop a leadership process which explores how culture and values are communicated and understood in the school and based on this, develop a vision for *how* new cultural ideas could be communicated and valorised. This may involve research into students' perceptions of the current school culture and how students adopted those perceptions.
3. Normalise acting as a change agent: making acting as change agents a normal part of school life, even in small ways and enable this to happen from the moment students enter the school by prioritising active student voice work with early age groups.

4. Identify when students are already attempting to use their change agency in normal school life and build on this behavior.
5. Suggest that teachers make a special effort to give positive projections when students do act as change agents and enable teachers to have the time and support to follow through with these processes.
6. Send clear messages from leadership, through assemblies that acting as a change agent is a valuable role in the school.
7. Clarify the limitations of this role in terms of motivation rather than action: *i.e.* that acting as a change agent is a valuable role if it is being done for the benefit of others (and oneself) based on concerns within the school. Clarify that students are allowed to make mistakes as long as their motivations and aims are clear.
8. Clarify that acting as change agents is a right but also a choice. This means accepting that not all students will want to act as change agents but ensuring that their reasons for not doing so are not related to their beliefs about the schools culture.
9. Make special provision for the possibility that students who perceive themselves as having a lower status, or a more vulnerable status, in the school may be more concerned about the process of acting as a change agents, but also may be the ones who need the process most.
10. Be open to how power differences, and how performance culture, could be affecting the process.
11. Undertake these processes in tandem with working on creating new organisational structures for student voice work.

It must be noted that given the pressures schools face these changes would be challenging and require considerable leadership vision. I think it also must be noted that politically speaking it cannot and should not be assumed that everyone in a school agrees with the value of doing this work. The idea of student voice is not value free and is not a technical process, it is built on a set of values and political positions. Bearing this is in mind people need to be allowed to voice their opinions about it and these would need to be taken into account.

The key point here is that structural change itself is not sufficient. Indeed this research itself suggests that the introduction of new structures is not sufficient. What is needed,

and what may be more important, is cultural change, particularly in how culture communicates to students how change agency is valorised. This research suggests that new structures for projects and sub-systems in student voice that do not first explore the larger issue of school culture may have limited impact.

Conclusion

One of the realisations that stuck with me throughout this research is that schools contain a considerable amount of anxiety and dissonance on behalf of society. They are organisations that are forced to internally manage very significant ethical tensions, and often contradictory expectations. The means they often find of doing so causes enormous stress on teachers and students who often end up managing these anxieties within, and between, themselves. The ethical problems this project revealed were not caused by this project but may be inherent in students' experience in schools. The most important contribution of this new model is that it would potentially force a situation where those tensions have to be externalised by schools, *i.e.* that teachers and students in partnership would project back many of the tensions they are forced to contain on behalf of parents, governments and wider society. The difficult tensions this research has revealed are not issues 13 and 14 years old should have to contain within themselves, they are issues we as adults should be containing so that we can create schools where young people have the freedom to experience using their agency, which is part of their full expression of their humanity.

In this new school-within-a-school model students would have to be free to work on issues that concerned them in relation to shared concerns in the school, however the success of the model might be revealed by the extent to which they feel free to discuss the consequences of performance culture. In this case the student agency leader would come into direct conflict with the headteacher. If this happened the headteacher and student agency leader would be forced to develop formal means for working through these conflicts, whilst enabling the student agency leader to protect the students' voice. However, it could be a mistake if they held the tension within the school, especially when schools themselves may not have the power to actually act on some of the student's interests. The dynamics of this process would allow a situation to emerge where students and staff agreed on a number of issues (and this project suggests they do – issues it is again important to note are not radical in any sense) and

together allow them to develop the authority to challenge the wider pressures on their school. Rather than student voice being an internal process in schools it becomes an *external* process for schools as a whole. In a sense student voice becomes an aspect of a whole school's *voice in society*.

The benefits could be considerable as even if they were successful in challenging something minor the consequences for relationships and students sense of ownership and agency in the school would be powerful. This is the potential of the model - that it may ultimately lead the issues outside of the school and raise awareness about any issues amongst parents and government. The true pressures on students and teachers are based on government and parental anxieties and if voice and agency were to run their course they would inevitably lead to facing those anxieties. The advantage of having an external organisation focused on student voice, agency and leadership is that this organisation could help schools cooperate on allowing these issues to emerge into the public domain. This would potentially redirect student voice to where it should be heard and force parents and governments to reimagine new structures for schooling, which should be a focus of their relationship with schools.

Ultimately the purpose of the model presented in this chapter is to give every child some experience of being involved in a process where they used their agency to change something that genuinely concerned them, and recognise that, in as much as possible, as their own achievement. This recognition of it as a process they themselves achieved without undue dependence on adults is crucial because this is the only experience that will affect their disposition. The focus should not be on the outcomes but on whether the students perceived this as a process they authentically created so that in the future they will be more disposed to recreating these behaviours. The transformative potential of this experience cannot be overestimated and as a child goes through school, regardless of all the pressures on them to take passive roles due to performance they are unlikely to forget that they can, and did, use their agency purposefully and that when they did, the world did not fall apart.

The exciting aspect of this approach is that my experience suggests that adults in schools would support it and are exhausted with being placed in oppressive or confrontational roles with students, they seek an opportunity to enable students to discover their unique concerns, their own solutions and their ability to act but cannot

find any way of doing so within the current structure. It was clear in this research that the Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers, regardless of how much they were personally committed to developing student agency, felt constrained by the expectations on them in terms of increasing performance. In the overall system, if policy makers and Ofsted intend to develop student agency that does not suffer from the problems outlined previously new allowances need to be made for Senior Leadership to allow for alternative leadership systems in their schools.

These allowances need to be structural, because the problem is structural, in other words senior leadership need to be enabled to make structural divisions between school activity related to performance and school activity related to student agency and these divisions need to be recognised by students in such a way that they feel different roles are available to them. The purpose of developing this framework of organisational change agency has been to argue that this should be considered legitimate educational activity rather than ‘extra-curricular’ – the argument is that this should be part of the core work of schools. The advantage of this model is that, primarily it allows schools to maintain their current teaching structures and classroom processes. However, changing structures is not enough. I believe the key finding from this research is that school culture itself is a problem in terms of how it is internalized by students. In this sense work needs to be done on creating a culture where students internalize the idea that acting as a change agent is a valuable role.

Ultimately the key to all these changes would be the ability of school leaders to communicate an alternative vision. To help them do so, the argument for developing students’ change agency needs to be made, something I have attempted to do in this thesis. The capacity to act as change agents may be critical in terms of the roles these young people will later take in organisations, being able to reproduce information is no longer an adequate goal, students need to be able to use information to legitimise taking active, creative and critical roles in organisations. It could be argued that by framing voice and agency this way one is just falling back into the same need to valorise school processes in terms of how they reflect the needs of the market, however organisational agency is not about producing passive uncritical employee roles in organisations but rather the opposite, it is about enabling change agents who will focus on solutions to organisational and societal problems. This new vision takes the focus off voice and agency as being about student rights or school improvement

and places the focus externally – change agency becomes then an *educational* process that does not need to derive its value from performance processes in the school or higher ideals about emancipation but from the real issues students will face in organisational life in their future.

Conclusions

To conclude, I want to return to the research questions and evaluate the originality of the findings the thesis offers in regards to those questions.

1. What are students learning about acting as organisational change agents from their experience of schooling?
2. How could this learning be affecting their disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations?
3. Are certain groups learning this differently, or to a greater extent, than others? Why?
4. What do these findings mean for the theory and practice of developing student agency in schools?

The research found a number of ways schooling affects students' disposition to act as change agents. Many of these have previously been accounted for in terms of the external effects of the school structure on students in terms of power relations. What this research offered that was distinct was the organisational focus on the role of change agent and the systems dynamics affecting that role. This revealed that one of the key inhibitors to students taking the change agent role was their own learnt 'organisation-in-the-mind' developed through organisational socialisation. This organisation-in-the-mind seemed to be characterised by the student's internalisation of performance culture which was seen in a number of ways:

- They saw power as given, based on the extent to which one was enabling the organisation to meet its performance concerns, and saw power as a prerequisite to legitimately acting as a change agent.
- Their internalisation of performance culture seemed to affect their ability to give value to the change agent role because it was not performance evaluated.
- The students seemed to project performance culture onto processes and sought and expected to have their performance valorised.

- Some students may have disengaged from meeting teachers because they perceived they might have their performance evaluated.
- The students appeared to have learnt that acting change is valorised over creating real change. They have learnt that this is what the ‘powerful’ students (the students they perceived as most valued) do.
- They have learnt how to reinforce the conditions where their organisational passivity is legitimised by recreating school structures.
- They have learnt to equate acting as change agents with offering voice rather than taking active roles.

These students appeared to have status anxiety which may have affected their behavior. They may have perceived acting as change agents as a risk to their belonging and status because they have learnt that challenging aspects of performance culture (which aspects of the student-teacher relationship represented) is not valorised and not a behavior carried out by valorised students. This may mean that students who feel they have a lower status in performance culture may learn a lower disposition to act as change agents in organisations. There are a number of implications derived from these:

- ▶ When faced with concerns which relate to the performance culture in their school students may conclude that they need to change to adapt to that culture rather than attempt to work on those concerns. The learning from this is that when problems with organisational culture emerge the focus for change is the person rather than the system.
- ▶ Other students, on recognising that they cannot challenge aspects of performance culture may disengage from the school.
- ▶ The consequence of this is that students may be learning that taking critical positions, even through legitimate formal processes, is not a behavior associated with the successful adoption of the student role. Success can only be achieved within the given structures and critical action is the behavior of

the student who does not understand how cultural and social capital are recognised and valorised in the school.

The question then is whether this is just a temporal experience or whether it has long term effects on students' disposition towards acting as change agents in organisations. Based on the models of organisational socialisation and organisation-in-the-mind I showed how this learning may at least indicate the development of a disposition that could be carried into adult life.

The overall conclusion is that some students may be learning an inhibited disposition towards taking the role of change agent in organisations from schooling. The main cause of this may be performance culture, and addressing this would be a structural and cultural concern rather than anything based around individual volition. In practical terms, the key contribution this thesis makes is to suggest that this is an organisational issue related to role taking; how roles are valued, communicated and understood in a school culture and particularly how the student and change agent roles are understood and learnt about. This is a significant finding as school is most people's primary experience of taking a role in organisational life during the most formative twelve years of their lives, and thus may be significantly shaping how they perceive and value the role of change agent.

Limitations of the research and further research

There were some important methodological findings and limitations worth discussing. One of the main limitations of this study is that I am attempting to make wider generalisations about students' learning from the schooling process through their experience of a project that was not a normal part of their school experience. This is an issue I brought up in the methodology and I mentioned how I chose an action research approach because attempting to observe students' learning about change agency in schooling ethnographically would involve considerable longitudinal research. A short intense experience like this project is limited because it is possible that if these students were involved in this same a project a number of times their resistances would soften and the evidence about performance culture might be less notable. If they were repeatedly involved in this kind of experience the outcomes

could improve, however I would argue that the pressures in terms of performance culture would still be present.

There were a number of problems faced with using action research in a school, even when it was mediated with systemic action research to take account of issues related to power and ethics. The limitations of this methodology in this context may not necessarily be a weakness of the methodology but rather further indicate how, as Fielding outlines, in schools “*there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together*” (2004b:309), and even when one tries to create these spaces the projective processes of students may reinforce normal school structures. Ultimately students seem to find it difficult to trust that adults are not recreating a performance structure of some kind and that they are not being performance evaluated. The suspicion that they may be being performance evaluated significantly affects their ability to work as genuine partners with school staff or even researchers. This raises considerable ethical issues for the field because many of these processes that adults may perceive as developing students’ agency or engagement with the school may be experienced by students as evaluative and thus as pressure to co-opt and enact processes.

For example, when creating opportunities in the active stage to take the role of change agent, because many students were resistant to this, my attempts to direct them forward may have been perceived as akin to performance pressures themselves. In other words, unwittingly I may have introduced elements of performance myself by creating conditions for action when many students may have wanted to keep the project as a limited reflective student voice process – a ‘secret society’. So, their perceptions of certain activities towards the end of the project as related to performance may have been reinforced by my own facilitation. However it is important not to overstate this as I was conscious of it at the time, and students were constantly given options to opt out of processes or change the process, the direction we took was still a direction they themselves were allowed to construct.

There are more obvious limitations to take account of. The priority of the research was depth of understanding rather than generalisability, nevertheless, due to the small sample size further research is needed to test the findings. The selection process was

also a necessary limitation. Further research would need to be done with a range of student groupings in order to generalise the findings. A particularly important means of adding further validity to this research may be to conduct it with different year groups in the same school. In this research the year 9s seemed to be more likely to take critical roles than the year 10s who were in their GCSE cycle, which could suggest that the further students enter the exam process the more performance becomes a constraint.

Additionally, this research is open to one of the common criticisms of action research, that the project would be affected by my bias as a researcher. I was very aware of this and certainly, in terms of creating the framework of a process and a focus on cultural change, I affected the process. However, beyond that I allowed the project to be led as much as possible by the students. The problem became another one, *i.e.* that the students sometimes wanted me to provide leadership and direction when the student voice focus meant that I wanted to avoid doing so.

One of my regrets in terms of the research is that I was not able to give more time to shared interpretation of the results with the students towards the end, and this also stands as a limitation. However, the dynamics of the process at the time made this very difficult, indeed the students had largely disengaged and decided the process had run its course and were not interested in further analytical or reflective work. If I were doing the research again I would put far more focus into developing structures and activities through which the students could share interpretations and which the students would find engaging. I had not fully accounted for how complex this would be in practice.

I also recognise that there are other factors affecting the students' behavior which the research does not account for. For example, their experience of other organisations or their family experience could influence their tendency to act as change agents. This could be related to their experience of, for example, whether authority figures have encouraged them to act as change agents or not. It is also reasonable to assume that their parent's attitudes to education, and any role they may have perceived their parents taking in organisations, may also influence their attitudes. Additionally the influence of class factors in terms of the work of Bourdieu has been discussed in the research, however there is limited focus on exploring the class factors in terms of the

students involved. Psychological factors could also influence their tendency to act as change agents. For example, Rosenberg (1979) has noted ways that self-conceptions motivate behavior: one of these is “*self-consistency or the wish to maintain one's self-picture (identity) and to protect self-conceptions against change*” (Burke & Reitzes, 1981:85). Students resistance to the role of change agent may be affected by their desire to maintain the self-picture they already have, even if that is a self-conception they do not experience as valorised. This may be partly down to the processes of adolescence itself or a simple fear of losing control of identity. Further research would be needed to fully account for internal psychological resistance to the role of change agent.

Finally there are some potential limitations regarding the focus on both process and action in the project and how this affected the students. One of the reasons process was sometimes emphasised was to enable time and reflection so that the students' voices could emerge (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001a; Freire, 1968; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009) and also because it is considered to be advantageous in terms of achieving outcomes for participants (Lewin, 1946). These issues are discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.4. It is important to clarify that I did not see a contradiction between process and action in that the reflective element of the research was designed as a basis for taking action. This focus on process was done in order to enable the students to make more targeted decisions on how they might want to act. However, it could be perceived that the focus on process may have unintentionally sent the students a message that process and reflection were more important than achieving outcomes in the project and that this was potentially ‘setting them up to fail’. In other words, it is worth considering whether some students may have unconsciously interpreted the time spent on reflective work as an indication that exploration was more important than action in the project. It is important to clarify that the focus on process was always purposeful in that it was clearly aimed towards enabling action and presented as a precursor to potential action. Reflective tasks were connected to potential actions. Process and action were not mutually exclusive and the reason I set the project up in stages was to indicate that the reflective periods were designed to help decisions about actions be made.

It could also be perceived that this focus on process may have affected students' disposition to act as change agents by indirectly making them more aware of the complexities or difficulties of change. In other words, it could be argued that the focus on process and reflection may have had the unintended result of adding to their potential anxiety. It is possible that this focus on process unconsciously affected their perceptions of the ease of taking action. It could be considered to be a potential limitation of the research in that it might have contributed to their inhibition towards acting as change agents. However, I think the focus on process helped them consider what they wanted to do and why they wanted to do it (see section 2.1) and thus, rather, may have given them an increased sense of control and reduced their potential anxiety when acting as change agents.

Contributing to the literature

It is worth considering at this point how this research contributes to the existing literature in these fields. The research perhaps makes its most original contribution to organisational theory (Armstrong, 2004; Bazalgette et al., 2005; Hutton, 1997a; Owens & Valesky, 2007) in indicating how systems theory can be used in schools to contribute to our understanding of student experience of the change agent role. This is important because analysis of student experience in schools can be dominated by sociological and psychological approaches and this research makes some indication as to how a systems approach could contribute to those understandings.

The contribution of the organisational approach in this thesis is not just in suggesting that performance culture affects students' understanding and disposition towards the change agent role but in deepening our understanding of how this happens in organisational terms. This is significant because of its potential effect on adult dispositions. To do this, the thesis uses very specific organisational concepts of 'change agent', 'role', 'organisational culture' 'organisational socialisation' 'organisation-in-the-mind', 'performance culture' 'systems boundaries' and 'internalisation' and uses them to form the basis of an argument about how schooling may affect students' disposition towards, and understanding of, the change agent role in adult organisations. It explores the complexity of this process and how this could affect the emergence of organisational change systems. Related to this, it offers a framework of the organisation-in-the-mind young people / research participants may

be developing based on their experience of the change agent role, and links this to performance culture. It also shows how the change agent role may be experienced and interpreted in a school by studying how systems boundaries were affected by students and adults. This framework and the processes that were studied in organisational terms throughout the thesis, including what they revealed, may be of value to those seeking to understand how schooling affects adult organisational behaviour. They may also be of interest to those studying resistance to the role of change agent in adult organisations. Finally, they may be of value to those attempting to initiate organisational change.

The research is also relevant to the field of student voice and the wider sociological fields relating to cultural reproduction and production and resistance theory. Practically speaking student voice appears to be at a critical point in terms of theory and practice, a considerable number of academics are raising concerns about what is happening in practice in schools (Bragg, 2007; Fielding, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2005; Mitra, 2006; Taylor & Robinson, 2009; Thomson, 2009; Thomson & Gunter, 2005; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Whitty & Wisby, 2007) and this research would seek to position itself as contributing to this literature in particular by providing some further evidence to support these concerns. However, this research adds further complexity to these concerns by indicating how students themselves can inhibit their own change agency due to their internalisation of performativity as culture by affecting system boundaries. The benefits of the organisational approach is to indicate that part of the solution may lie in creating new organisational structures in schools, and that this may not be as problematic as it may seem if external bodies can be created to support the process and create a buffer between the school's internal culture and the external pressures on the school.

The findings also contribute to the wider sociological debate and particularly Giroux's concern to understand the processes of how students may collude in reinforcing their own passivity. The findings also challenge critical pedagogy by problematising the extent to which students actually seek emancipation, and the difficulty in differentiating acceptance from submission. However, more importantly than this chapter 6 adds to the reproduction debate by suggesting that a vehicle for reproduction may be the process of how organisational socialisation in school forms an organisation-in-the-mind which may then affect adult organisational behavior.

In chapter 8 a model is developed based on the implications of the research. This model is a minor contribution in that it develops Fielding's work by offering some distinct ideas from systems psychodynamics. However, it is not intended to be the main original contribution of this research; rather the contribution the research makes is an analysis of what students may learn about the change agent role through schooling. The research suggests that one of the factors that affects their learning about this role may be their internalisation of performance culture, and discusses the implications of this for student voice. Originality also comes from the use of the concept of 'organisation-in-the-mind' as a way of describing how students may develop an inhibited disposition towards acting as organisational change agents through schooling.

Evaluating the theoretical approach

It is worth evaluating the the contribution of different theories to this research. As has been outlined there were limitations to the research methodologies, however the theoretical framework which combined the concepts of systems theory, role theory, organisation-in-the-mind and organisational socialisation proved invaluable in framing the findings. What this framework revealed is the need for further thinking about structures and roles in schools in terms of this kind of work. This has led me to suggesting that student voice as a concept is itself problematic if it is understood as voice from the basis of the role of student. This needs to be reconceived as youth voice on the student role. In other words, during student voice work students cannot perceive themselves as being in the role of student but need to be allowed to step out of role and reflect on the role itself and how it constitutes their identities, values and affects their voice, and *how* they voice that voice. As has been argued, creating structures through which students could step out of role in school is highly problematic but it seems to be an area for further research. The problem in terms of students taking the role of change agent is equally complex, however justifying the need and value for creating those structures may be easier.

The theoretical approach though led me to concluding that there are ethical issues at play in terms of the structural problems. The ethical problems relate to whether adequate structural conditions are in place in schools for student voice type work. This was a project that recognised that some forms of student voice have been

criticized for their tokenism in terms of selecting highly engaged students or not enabling students to act on their concerns. It set out to try and create a structure through which students could perceive themselves, and be perceived as taking a change agent role. However, the project revealed that even this process is fraught with difficulty as the students only perceived the student role as safe and valorised. On this basis it was concluded that structures need to be put in place in schools to valorise the formal change agent role and this is something that may need to begin at primary level to acculturate students to it. The methodology of this project reveals that further work of this type in schools has to ask three questions:

1. From what role do students believe they are voicing or acting on their concerns?
2. Is there a structure in place to give value and legitimacy to this role?
3. Is this structure led by someone who is in a position to protect this structure's boundaries from performance culture?

If students feel they are still acting within the student role or feel the new role is not valorised or that the structure from which they are taking that role is not being led, then performance culture is likely to become a key variable in the processes that occur. In order to avoid this, further research needs to be done into how these structures could be created, and they need to be tested in practice in schools. The thesis concluded by indicating how such a bounded structure could be set up.

However, even with new structures there may always be complexities regarding student voice. At the start of this research I was aware, to some extent, that student voice projects can be tokenistic and indeed this awareness informed why this project was designed with an action basis. In other words, I understood tokenism as the process of listening to students but then not attempting to enable action on their concerns. I specifically attempted to ensure this project did not function this way by clarifying the students were going to have opportunities to act on their concerns. This project did nevertheless run into aspects of this problem itself despite my attempts to avoid it, and indeed this is one of its findings. I feel I did everything I was aware I could do to avoid tokenism but my experience was that it occurred due to the organisational culture of the school and how it was internalised by students. This suggests that unless significant cultural changes occurred in schools it is likely that it

will continue to be an issue for student voice processes. In the light of this, I have made indications about cultural changes that could be made by school leaders.

Some final words: the potential of a new approach

Taylor & Robinson (2009:8) point out that;

“given the dominance of the performance-related, standards discourse, it is against this hegemonic discourse that any student voice work which has a genuinely transformative or radical potential might have to struggle to construct its practices, and that it may have to do so as a counter-discourse”.

Their identification that developing students’ change agency may have to construct itself as a counter-discourse goes to the heart of the problem. Students as change agents work is unlikely to be sustained as a counter-discourse in the long term. The focus of energy now may need to be directed at justifying students as change agents work in new ways which position it, not as a token to students rights, but as an education process itself which has its own validity. It is helpful to understand that if schooling affects the organisation-in-the-mind in the negative ways this research has indicated it could equally affect it in positive ways.

Take for example the diagram on the next page which indicates the positive aspects that could be learnt based on the concerns that arose in this research. Pulling all the ideas in it together, a vision for developing students’ change agency in schools could be: **Developing students’ disposition and capacity to take transformative roles in organisations, and create alternative, or new, organisational structures and visions, to meet organisational, cultural, or social concerns.** This definition, considered pedagogically, could become a vision which positions students as change agents work as concerned with students’ capacities to initiate organisational change and reform. As Postman & Weingartner (1969) pointed out, this kind of vision may not always have the support of everyone, but since 2008 there is renewed justification for it, and growing acceptance of the need for it.



Fig C.1: The positive potential of learning to act as organisational change agents.

This would not be a revolutionary process, indeed this research suggests that fears that empowering students may lead to social dysfunction are misplaced, and that students are very conservative about these processes. Pushed to its ideal form, a school with an organisational change agency approach would be one with innovative structures where the students co-created their school, and their learning was their facilitated reflection on this process. It is clear that schools are very far from this model because of the social forces on them in terms of the exam system, league tables, the demands of Universities, Ofsted, and Government concerns to manage parental anxieties – all of which require a kind of organisational compliance from students which hinders the development of change agency. All of the pressures from all these adult systems filter down and are transformed into a desire for students to be as compliant as possible in

order to accept instruction and perform, and every alternative initiative is ultimately evaluated based on how well it complements this performance system.

Schools are particularly vulnerable to what is known in organisational theory as institutional isomorphism where organisation's purposes and internal structures are formed over time by a need to maintain legitimacy in the power structures of their environment, thus changes which are counter cultural will never be sustained unless heavily protected from those forces. The added complexity, as this research shows, is that students themselves learn how to collude with, and reinforce, this culture of compliance in order to secure their own status. The argument against organisational change agency in the current system was one the students in this research were well able to make when they asked how changing the school was going to help them get their GCSE's and it was not a question I found easy to answer given their circumstances. It is difficult to really valorise work of this type (in terms of developing the organisational role of change agent) to young people when there is so little valorisation of this change agent work at a policy level. Moreover, students seem to be well able to accept tokenism and initiatives that give the appearance of change without structurally changing anything, and seem to be well aware of the political nature of these processes.

Nevertheless, the idea of developing organisational change agency is not idealistic but rather based on a very realistic concern about the attitudes these students may need to develop. Although the research here is limited, I believe it is at least adequate to indicate the problem and justify further action research. These students are entering a world where enabling organisational change on a large scale may be the defining challenge of their time as social, economic and environmental pressures increase. At best at the moment we are doing little to develop students' disposition to act as change agents, at worst we may be actively inhibiting their disposition to do so. This is a rights issue for children but it is also a very practical issue that goes to the heart of the purpose of schooling. Not all students will wish to act as change agents in organisations, nor should they feel under pressure to do so, but they should all be given the opportunity to be disposed towards doing so, and see it as a legitimate role for them to take.

The more significant problem may be that learning this disposition may be selective. At the moment students who fit better into the status quo of their school, or perform better, may be developing more of their disposition to act as change agents but ironically may have less true interest in doing so. They may be more disposed to enacting change processes and being co-opted into the status quo. In other words, the system we have created may be teaching that those who most need change should be given the least power to do change – a significant ethical issue if it were supported by further research. Everything has a cost and this is perhaps the cost of performance.

The question then is whether this is what we really want children to learn. If children learn so much about organisational life from schooling then it is equally possible to turn this into an opportunity. We should not be trying to narrow down children's experience of the school as an organisation but accept it as a reality and embrace its possibility. Schools can become places which offer a different experience of organisational life where students can take other roles than just the student role and fully experience their own capacity to affect change on the organisations and institutions they are, after all, going to inherit.

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Appendices

A1: The student/teacher agreements

Greenfield School

To improve relationships in the school...

Teachers could take students ideas and opinions seriously.

Students should speak to teachers with respect and treat them like they would treat them if they were not a teacher.

Teachers should move on from previous events that have occurred and not automatically think the 'bad student' should get blamed for things.

Teachers should be able to expect students to learn from each other and students should understand that teachers think a lot about the groups and pairs they create.

Teachers should treat students all the same but also give individual support.

Students should listen to the teacher even though they might not like them as most of the time they are there to help.

Students should understand that they can learn as much from each other as they can from the teacher.

Students should receive merits when they deserve them – some teachers forget or don't give them out.

Teachers shouldn't bring all the class back after dinner when it is only a few people misbehaving.

Students shouldn't be aggressive with teachers.

Students should really listen to the teacher and to each other.

Teachers should not let some students disrupt the class for those who want to learn.

Teachers shouldn't shout at you if you can't do your homework – but students should see teachers in advance if they have not done their HW to get a new deadline.

Teachers should give students more positive things to do during detention as its depressing.

Chippinghouse School

To improve relationships in the school...

Teachers should listen to the students more, *at the appropriate time and place.*

Students should respect teachers more and vice versa.

Teachers should stop swearing.

Teachers should not embarrass people by putting them on the spot *(unless students have been given time to prepare an answer).*

Teachers should stop talking down to students.

Students should be respectful to ALL staff and other students.

Students should treat others in a way they would expect to be treated themselves.

Teachers should learn to use the interactive whiteboard.

Teachers should be more consistent in applying behaviour policy

Teachers should spend more time to get to know individual students.

Students should stop talking in class and do some hard work because they need to learn.

Students should listen to the teacher and the teacher should listen to the students.

Teachers should stop punishing the whole class because of one person.

Students should stop picking on other students in class.

Students should stop annoying teachers when they get told off and stop making an argument between students and staff.

Other points made that were not entirely resolved:

What would you like teachers to do differently? Teachers should listen to student's opinions because they talk all lesson and we don't get to say a word!

Teachers should not pick on individual students – or put us on the spot with no warning – some students are told off for things whilst others are not for the same thing.

If a student has 'anger management' problems the teacher shouts at them which makes them angrier.

Students should show enthusiasm for their learning and recognise their education as their reward.

- And so could some teachers show more enthusiasm for the job. Some teachers only do the job for money and if they can't handle the class they should not be teaching.

Students should stop talking in class and distracting the students who need to listen.

A2: The student/teacher negotiation method

Background

The format for this methodology was decided based on a number of factors:

Students preferred to be in different rooms from the teachers for the negotiation.

Based on my experience this seemed to make a lot of sense as I did not feel the students would feel free to negotiate unless the student-teacher dynamic was kept at some distance from them.

There were indications that some students wanted to use the experience as an opportunity to complain about teachers.

I did not want to entirely stop them being able to do this, but I wanted this process to be purposeful and focused on the whole school, otherwise it would be experienced as *personal*. With this in mind, I developed the idea that students and teachers would be developing an agreement together about improving relations in the whole school and not just between them – this meant that they would be able to depersonalise it as needed.

Students had often talked of the inability to negotiate situations in school.

I tried to make the methodology a genuine negotiation. On this basis both students and teachers could challenge each other's comments and veto them if they wished. Only the comments they both agreed on would make the final document.

I wanted the process to feel real to the students.

I could have given the students more power to make demands but I knew that they would have seen it then as unreal and not believed anything could come of what was produced. By making the document that was produced agreed by all at the end there would be a sense that, though it was a compromise, it was something that others would work with. The students seemed to favour this and used it as a device when they ultimately met the school leadership team.

Method:

The students and teachers went into separate rooms but with both rooms beside each other.

They were both given a small portable white board and pens.

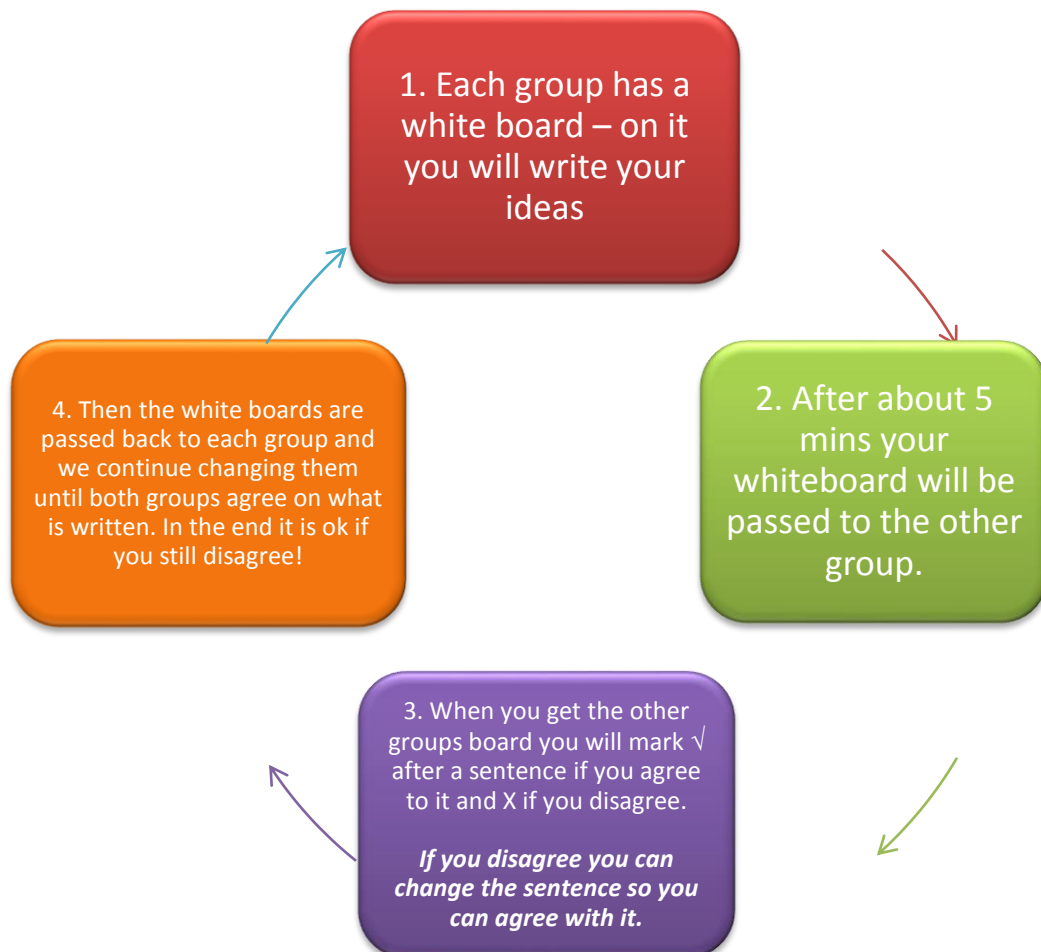
Each group was given two sheets, the first outlined the instructions, the second was some of the research the students had done.

Sheet 1:

The rules of the game!

The aim is to make a short agreement between your two groups about how relationships could be improved.

Please do not identify anyone personally – this is about everyone in the school.



In the final 20 minutes of the session the two groups met to reflect on the methodology.

Comments on the methodology:

Engagement with the methodology was not a problem, it had its own dynamic and created great curiosity and multiple dynamics between the teachers and students. Given the scope of what they could have written, students in this school made relatively conservative requests. The students changed what teachers had said from ‘students *could*’ to ‘teachers and students *should*’.

A minor flaw with the method is that the researcher has to keep noting what they have written before they delete it and move on.

Teachers found the method less fulfilling than the students and would have preferred if everyone had been in the same room, however, the students felt empowered by the methodology.

The methodology seemed to allow for the right balance between freedom and accountability for the students – they allowed themselves to be open with their ideas in the first part of the session but this was tempered with knowing that they would be meeting the teachers at the end.

The idea of a plenipotentiary was very useful and was a role I gave them that became something else. Initially, the role was just to hand the whiteboard between groups, however soon the students took turns to do it and used it as a way to gauge the reactions of the teachers to what they were writing, and clearly to test the teachers’ reactions to any boundary testing.

A3: Ethical Approval

1) Information and consent forms for parents



Students as Change Agents

Information sheet for Parents/Guardians

1) What?

Your child has been selected to take part in the research project called Students as Change Agents. This is a research project which will enable students to get involved in improving the culture they experience in their school.

Your child will take part in workshops with some of their classmates and the project researcher. Together, they will analyse and discuss how they see the culture of the school, draw pictures of how they perceive the school and then develop small projects to try and improve the school's culture.

2) Why?

The project is timely and important for two reasons:

Firstly, getting students more engaged in school involves giving them more of a say in making it a place they are comfortable learning in. However, they learn little from just being consulted - this project will enable them to get actively involved in improving their school by themselves, and enable them to develop some of the skills and attitudes needed to do this.

Secondly, in the changing working world students need to be able to take a confident and dynamic role in organisations. Moreover they need to believe they are of value to organisations and have the right and capacity to change and improve them. This project will enable them to have the experience of taking an active and transformative role in the school which may positively affect their confidence about critically and successfully engaging with organisations going into adulthood.

3) When?

Your child will take part in about 15 hours of workshops during school time from September to January. They will be supported in making sure they do not miss out on classwork and homework and will be given special attention by their teachers.

4) **What will my child get out of it?**

Firstly, your child will potentially feel more ownership of their school and be more engaged with their learning experience there.

Secondly they may develop many new skills in terms of taking an active role in an organisation. Thirdly, in the long term the project may increase your child's confidence and belief in their capacity to affect and take an active role in organisations they work in.

5) **Will you share the research with others?**

The results of the research will be shared with other people at presentations, in books, magazines or on the Internet. Other people will not be told that your child or their school took part.

Audio recordings will be made during the project just for the researcher's records. Students will also draw pictures which will be photographed. We will ask your child's permission before using any photographs and these will also be made anonymous.

6) **Can my child drop out?**

If you are unhappy with the workshops in any way or don't want your child to take part in the workshops anymore, that's OK. Just get in touch with the project researcher.

Project Researcher: Ian Kehoe
Tel: 079 66394294

If you do not feel that your complaint was handled effectively you have the right to contact the Project Supervisor.

Project Supervisor: Dr Tim Herrick
Contact: 0114 222 7004



The
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Sheffield.

Students as Change Agents Consent form for Parents/Guardians

Are you happy for your child to take part?

Before this project can start, we need your consent for your child to take part. Please fill in the form below and return to your child's teacher as soon as you can. Thank you.

Please Circle

I have read and understand the information sheet.

YES NO

I understand that I can withdraw my child from this research project at any time without giving any reason.

YES NO

I am happy for the project researcher to listen to my child's responses.

YES NO

I am happy for my child to take part in this project.

During this project the researcher will photograph pictures the students will draw.

I give permission for pictures my child draws to be used anonymously in publications/presentations.

YES NO

Your name Date Signature

Researcher name Date Signature

2: Forms for students



Students as Change Agents Information sheet for Students

1) What?

I would like to invite you to take part in some research with me. I want to develop a way for students to be involved in changing their schools culture.

Getting involved will mean:

- Taking part in workshops with other students to draw pictures of how you see the school's culture. You don't have to be good at drawing!
- Developing small team projects to try and change parts of that culture.

2) Why?

It is important that students not only have a say in the school's culture but also have the opportunity to learn how to change it.

3) When?

You will take part in about 13 workshops from September until January.

4) What will I get out of it?

It will be an exciting project, you will be a 'change agent' – a special role in the school with special responsibilities and we will develop some interesting projects to improve the schools culture. You will be a researcher on this project too and help develop information that will help lots of other students in the UK.

5) Will you show the research to other people?

The results of the research will be shared with other people at presentations, in books, magazines or on the Internet. We will not tell other people you took part.

Photographs will be taken during the project. We may also need to use some of the photographs or film at presentations, in books, magazines or on the Internet. We will ask your permission before using any photographs.

6) **Can I drop out?**

If you don't want to take part in the workshops anymore, that's OK. Just talk to Mr Kehoe.

Please read this carefully

- 1) I have listened to Mr Kehoe's presentation and understand what this project is about.

YES NO

- 2) I understand that Mr Kehoe will tell other people what I say during this project but will not tell them who I am.

YES NO

- 3) I want to take part in this project.

YES NO

- 4) During this project I will take photographs of pictures you draw. If you do not want me to take photos of your pictures to show to other people draw a circle around No. If you do not mind, draw a circle around Yes.

YES NO

If you decide you don't want to be part of this project anymore, that is OK. Just let me know.

Your name

Date

Researcher

3: Ethical approval forms

ETHICS REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FORM

This form is for use by members of academic staff in the School of Education when reviewing a research ethics application.

Note to reviewers and applicants:

The ethical review process in the School of Education is designed to provide critical response on ethical issues identified in research proposals. For this reason, reviewers' comments are not anonymous*. The comments given here are intended to help applicants (and where appropriate their academic supervisors) to revise their research plans where necessary to ensure that their research is conducted to high ethical standards.

The contents of this form remain internal to the University, and should not be used for wider dissemination without written permission from the Ethics Reviewer named here and the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel.

1. Name of Ethics Reviewer*: Reviewers who wish to make anonymous responses should contact the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel before completing the review.	Verity Brack
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2. Research Project Title:	Students as Change Agents
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3. Principal Investigator (and name of Tutor/Supervisor in the case of student applications):	Ian Kehoe Supervisor: Tim Herrick
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4. Academic Department / School:	Ed Studies
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<p>5. I confirm that I do not have a conflict of interest with the project application</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Or</p> <p>The following details may be considered as a conflict of interest. (If a possible conflict of interest is declared, the Chair of the Ethical Review Panel will take this into account)</p>

6. I confirm that, in my judgment, the application should:			
Be approved:	Be approved with <i>suggested</i> amendments in '7' below:	and/ Be approved providing <i>requirements</i> specified in '8' below are met:	NOT be approved for the reason(s) given in '9' below:
	✓		

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7. Approved with the following suggested, optional amendments (i.e. it is left to the discretion of the applicant whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments):

1. In section A6, it says the potential for distress is low but doesn't give a reason.
2. Section A6 also says that all adult staff will be made aware/expect different behaviours. Parents and other students also need to know this.
3. Information Sheet for Students section 5: this says that photos will be taken but doesn't say of what, whereas the rest of the application always says photos of the drawings. This needs to be clarified on the information sheet.
4. The declaration that students have to sign is confusing in part 4. In all the other parts 'I' relates to the student but in part 4 'I' relates to the researcher – this should be re-worded.
5. It doesn't mention anywhere whether or not the students can discuss the research with other students who are not part of the project. This needs to be clarified.

8. Approved providing the following, compulsory requirements are met (i.e. the ethics reviewers need to see the required changes):

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9. Not approved for the following reason(s):

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10. Date of Ethics Review: 5 August 2011

ETHICS REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FORM

This form is for use by members of academic staff in the School of Education when reviewing a research ethics application.

Note to reviewers and applicants:

The ethical review process in the School of Education is designed to provide critical response on ethical issues identified in research proposals. For this reason, reviewers' comments are not anonymous*. The comments given here are intended to help applicants (and where appropriate their academic supervisors) to revise their research plans where necessary to ensure that their research is conducted to high ethical standards.

The contents of this form remain internal to the University, and should not be used for wider dissemination without written permission from the Ethics Reviewer named here and the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel.

1. Name of Ethics Reviewer*: Reviewers who wish to make anonymous responses should contact the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel before completing the review.	Andrey Rosowsky
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2. Research Project Title:	Students as Change Agents
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3. Principal Investigator (and name of Tutor/Supervisor in the case of student applications):	Ian Kehoe Tim Herrick
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4. Academic Department / School:	Educational Studies
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5. I confirm that I do not have a conflict of interest with the project application
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6. I confirm that, in my judgment, the application should:			
Be approved:	Be approved with <i>suggested</i> amendments in '7' below:	and	Be approved providing <i>requirements</i> specified in '8' below are met:
✓			
			NOT be approved for the reason(s) given in '9' below:

7. Approved with the following suggested, optional amendments (i.e. it is left to the discretion of the applicant whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments):

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8. Approved providing the following, compulsory requirements are met (i.e. the ethics reviewers need to see the required changes):

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9. Not approved for the following reason(s):

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10. Date of Ethics Review: August 4 2011

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