# Student Voice in Building Schools for the Future

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the University of Lincoln
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

September 2007

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my husband who has been unbelievably supportive as I have progressed through the EdD. I could not have completed the thesis without his support, understanding and patience.

Special appreciation goes to Professor Jacky Lumby, my tutor for Stage 1 and 2 of the EdD programme and Professor David Scott who helped me to re-focus my research. I am extremely grateful to my tutor for Stage 3, Emeritus Professor Angela Thody who gave me considerable advice, guidance, support and especially encouragement as I progressed through the development of this thesis.

I am also grateful to Trevor Cooper, Assistant Director of CYPF at Cornwall County Council, and the Headteachers who gave me their full support in working with the students. Finally I would like to especially thank the students; without them this thesis would not have been possible.

## Abstract

The research explores student voice in the process of designing schools, using a case study of a Buildings Schools for the Future (BSF) One School Pathfinder project, 2005 – 2007. The suggestions made by the students during the design development were compared with those raised by the staff and parents to discover if the student voice brought anything different or unique to the project. Comparisons were then made with the Student Council's contribution on projects at two schools local to the case study school. To explore the contribution made by 'non traditional students' a similar exercise was conducted in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) with students who had been expelled from mainstream schools because of behavioural issues.

Group interviews and focus group feedback from students at the case study school, from different stages of the design process were examined to assess the impact the student voice may have had on the completed design. Interviews were conducted with members of the design team at the case study school to establish how much impact the student voice was perceived to have had on the completed design compared with the voice of others, whether it brought innovation to the design and if involvement in the project had an impact on the students. Comparisons were then made with interviews held at a second BSF Pathfinder in a neighbouring Local Authority and the findings submitted for peer review.

The findings appear to demonstrate that there is very little difference in what the student voice contributes; across schools and across time, the student voice is consistent and predictable. The impact of the student voice was found to be minimal compared with the impact of others. The process of involving students in the design process was however felt to benefit the students and the design process. Finally suggestions are made as to how the involvement of student voice can be improved, and moved from a consultation process to one of collaboration in the future; for ways to address the balance of power within the design team and for further areas of research.

**Contents** **Page**


Title i
Acknowledgements ii
Abstract iii
Contents iv
List of Figures v
Glossary vii

Chapter One: Introduction
Introduction 1
Building Schools for the Future 2
The legacy of earlier building programmes 4
Definition of design 6
Student involvement 8
The case study 10
Research design 11
Thesis outline 12
Summary 12

Chapter Two: Literature Review
Introduction 14
Definition of 'Student Voice' 15
The justification for engaging student voice 19
The outcome of student involvement 25
Methods of involving students and the level of engagement 29
Conclusions 34

Chapter Three: Methodology
Introduction 35
Researcher overview 35
Ethical considerations 38
A case study approach 40
The process for collecting data at the case study school 42
Interviews 53
Conclusions 55

Chapter Four: Findings
Introduction 56
Findings on the involvement of student voice to establish if it brought anything different or innovative to the design 57
The impact of student voice on the completed design or design process 81
The impact on the student 90

Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, Future directions and Recommendations
Introduction 97
Summary of research finding 97
Discussion 102

Conclusions 117
Future directions 119
Recommendations 123
Epilogue 125

Appendices
Appendix A. Bexley visit ( 7th October 2005): impressions and issues
Appendix B. Survey of Sorrell students
Appendix C. Design display used at the case study school
Appendix D. Drawing depicting a day in the life of a student

## List of Figures

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Figure 1.1 | Esplanade House: an example of conflict of interest on design | 7 |
| Figure 2.1 | Student voice continuum developed by Lee and Zimmerman (1999) | 28 |
| Figure 3.1 | DQI Venn diagram presented by Fisher (2006) | 50 |
| Figure 4.1 | Bedminster Down School: toilets block designed following consultation with students | 68 |
| Figure 4.2 | The Bexley Academy main entrance | 76 |
| Figure 4.3 | The Bexley Academy: a very open design | 76 |

## List of Tables

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Table 2.1 | Comparison of literature review suggestions made by student voice | 26/27 |
| Table 3.1 | Methods for data collection: an overview | 38 |
| Table 4.1 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: colour and decoration | 57 |
| Table 4.2 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: improving communications | 59 |
| Table 4.3 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: improving dining facilities | 61 |
| Table 4.4 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: learning environments and facilities | 63 |
| Table 4.5 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: reception area, reputation and identity | 64 |
| Table 4.6 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: social spaces | 65 |
| Table 4.7 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: storage | 66 |
| Table 4.8 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: toilets | 67 |
| Table 4.9 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: aesthetics | 69 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Table 4.10 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: temperature and acoustics | 70 |
| Table 4.11 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: furniture | 71 |
| Table 4.12 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: outdoor spaces | 72 |
| Table 4.13 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: sustainability | 73 |
| Table 4.14 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: security | 74 |
| Table 4.15 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: resources | 77 |
| Table 4.16 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: health and welfare | 78 |
| Table 4.17 | Collated comments from students, staff and parents on improving school buildings: work experience and vocational education | 79 |
| Table 4.18 | Findings from the comparator schools: the students were asked what they would like in their ‘perfect school’. | 80 |
| Table 4.19 | Student consultation on completed school design | 83 |
| Table 4.20 | Changes to the student DQI forms | 91 |

# Glossary

*Academies:* All-ability independent schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in partnership with central government and local educational associates.

*BB98: Building Bulletin 98, Briefing Framework for Secondary School Projects:* This document sets out area guidelines for secondary school buildings and grounds.

*BREEAM:* The British Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method. BREEAM helps schools and Local Authorities to set environmental targets for new and refurbished school buildings. Any building project which exceeds a total value of £2 million should achieve 'very good'; the project team for the case study school aimed to achieve an 'excellent' rating. The rating is based on scores resulting from an assessment which takes into account such things as the materials used, the consultation process, environmental features, travel arrangements and environmental impact.

*BSF:* Building Schools for the Future is the programme launched by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in February 2003. The stated aim is to transform secondary education through rebuilding or renewing every secondary school in England over the next 15 years.

*CABE:* The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment set up in 1999 as advisors to the government. Their aim is to promote good design of buildings and spaces by influencing and inspiring the people making decisions about the built environment so that they choose good designs. They are also appointed as 'watchdog' over all BSF designs.

*DEMOS:* An independent think-tank and research institute 'for everyday democracy'. Their aim is to influence the policies of the government in areas relating to public services; science and technology; cities and public services; arts and culture; identity and global security. They conduct research; develop debates through their web site; hold conferences; publish documents and develop partnerships with policy makers to inform and influence policy.

*Designmyschool.com:* A web site promoted by the Design Council and Ultralab, providing practical tools, ideas and resources to enable students, teachers and parents to take part in designing their school.

*Design Council:* The Design Council is funded by the UK government to promote the best use of design and demonstrate that design can play a vital role in strengthening the economy.

*Design Quality Indicator (DQI):* the tool used to assist with the briefing, development and evaluation stages of a project.

*DCSF:* The Department for Children Schools and Families replaced the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in June 2007.

*DfES:* The Department for Education and Skills was the government's department responsible for all aspects of education and training. In June 2007 this became the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

*EBDOG:* Education Building Development Officers Group. An association formed for Local Authority (LA) officers. Meetings are held twice yearly to consider issues relating to school buildings.

*Exemplar Designs*: A compendium of exemplar designs produced as the result of a design competition held during 2003. The term is now used to describe completed designs that are judged to be excellent examples.

*Joinedupdesignforschools:* A DfES funded project led by John and Francis Sorrell to link designers to school projects. Students take the role of client to brief the designer on their needs and act as the design group through the development of the project to the completed design. The projects were never originally intended to be carried through to the delivery phase but the DfES did allocate 50% of the funding for those LAs who agreed to implement the schemes.

*LA:* The 150 Local Authorities are the second tier of government responsible for the provision of local services including education (schools and youth services), social services, highways, fire and rescue services, libraries, waste disposal, consumer services and town and country planning.

*LEA:* A Local Education Authority (LEA) is part of the local council or local authority (LA), in England and Wales responsible for education within that council's jurisdiction.The phrase became obsolete in official use in the Education and Inspections Bill, presented to parliament in 2006. The Bill includes a clause allowing for the renaming of Local Education Authorities as Local Authorities in all legislation, removing the anomaly of one local authority being known as a local authority, a local education authority, and a children's services authority. LEA is still frequently used informally to refer to the Education Department of the relevant local authority.

*LEP:* A Local Education Partnership is the joint venture company, developed by PfS, which allows for the design, build, long-term facilities management and area-wide ICT support to be put in place for a group of BSF schools clustered as what is known as a 'wave'. Each wave is a phase providing funding for approximately twelve LAs. Each LA will receive funding for approximately ten schools which will be geographically grouped. The LEP is a development of the PFI model with PfS, the LA and the successful private contractor continuing in partnership to deliver a series of further school building developments within the area over a period of time, usually ten years.

*OECD:* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The OECD consists of 30 member countries and plays a prominent role in fostering good governance by monitoring key economic areas, deciphering emerging issues and identifying implications for strategic policy making.
Ofsted: The Office for Standards in Education, responsible for school inspections.

*OJEU:* Official Journal of the European Union. The publication in which contract notices appear, to which interested suppliers respond.

*Output Specification:* A detailed description of the functions the new accommodation, or provided service must be capable of performing. The Output Specification is intended to state only the outputs required of the services, and not the way in which the provider will achieve these.

*PfS:* Partnership for Schools is the company responsible for developing BSF. Established by the government in April 2004 they work with LAs and their stakeholders on the standard processes and frameworks developed by them, ensuring that each BSF programme is based on a strong educational vision, that schools are well designed, built on time at a reasonable cost and sustainable.

*PFI:* The Private Finance Initiative was introduced in 1995, but more widely adopted since 1997. The aim is to increase the involvement of the private sector in the provision of public services. It was also a way of investing large sums of money in public services without increasing government borrowing. The PFI is a form of public private partnership (PPP) that marries a public procurement programme, where the public sector purchases capital items from the private sector, to an extension of contracting-out, where public services are contracted from the private sector. Under the most common form of PFI, the private sector designs, builds, and finances the school building(s) based on 'output' specifications produced by the LA managers, and then continues to operate the facilities, usually providing maintenance, caretaking, catering and grounds maintenance and sometimes ICT. Such projects need to demonstrate a genuine transfer of risk to the private sector contractor before they will be agreed by PfS. Under the PFI, the public sector does not own the school during the contract period but pays the PFI contractor a stream of committed revenue payments for the use of the facilities. At the end of the contract period, usually twenty five years, ownership of the school building(s) reverts back to the LA.

*PRU:* Pupil Referral Unit, sometimes called a unit for Education Out of School, it provides education to students who are school phobic, young mothers, students unable to gain a place in a school because of admission issues or students who are excluded from mainstream schooling because of behaviour problems.

*SMT:* Senior Management Team.

*Ultralab:* Ultralab is sponsored by the government, charities and companies to research, apply and disseminate innovation in learning technology.

*Unicef:* The United Nations organisation for protecting the rights of the child.

*Wave:* A phase of funding, or within a LA, a geographically grouped number of schools identified for a BSF project.