"Student Voice" and Governmentality: The production of enterprising subjects?

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Sara Bragg★
The Open University, UK

"Student voice" is now taking a more central role in educational policy, guidance and thinking. As it does so, however, it becomes less clear how to interpret it: it can perhaps no longer be seen as a radical gesture that will necessarily challenge educational hierarchies. Drawing on qualitative research into one student participation project, "Students as Researchers", the article explores how far Foucauldian concepts of governmentality may offer a more sophisticated understanding of the power relations embedded in student voice initiatives. From this perspective, for instance, such projects may be read as attempts to instill norms of individualism, self-reliance and self-management, which resonate with new configurations of power and authority under neo-liberalism, respond to specific debates about school standards, effectiveness and competition, and help construct young people as reflexive "knowledge workers". Whilst a governmentality perspective does not preclude acknowledging the positive effects of participation projects, it does draw attention to their complexities, such as the new value hierarchies and exclusions they may create, problematising particular groups of young people and limiting possibilities for resistance.

Introduction

The vogue for student participation and consultation is increasingly well established at many levels in the UK, from the more prescriptive levels of statutory requirements (such as the 2002 Education Act, which requires schools to consult with pupils), guidance from the Department of Education and Skills or the school inspection body (Ofsted) about assessing the degree to which schools give pupils a say, to more optional invitations to engage in particular projects, issued at school or Local Authority level. All these attempt to make "student voice" a normal rather than marginal aspect of schooling.

However, there is less consensus about the meaning of this new attention to students' opinions. There is a relatively large literature devoted to advocating and celebrating student voice, which takes various forms: for instance, manuals and how-to guides on instituting participation (e.g. Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, &

★Child and Youth Studies, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK. Email: s.g.bragg@open.ac.uk

Sinclair, 2003); accounts that report the outcome of student consultation, which often carry an implicit message that young people have been underestimated (e.g. Rudduck & Flutter, 2003); and work that traces the motors of participation, often locating it within the discourse of human rights, particularly the 1989 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (e.g. Alderson, 2000). A liberal perspective on the growth of interest in voice tends to be optimistic and relatively unquestioning, welcoming it as the mark of a new enlightenment and readiness to share power on the part of adults. It assumes that student perspectives have somehow always been there, waiting to be discovered, "the treasure in our own backyard" (SooHoo, 1993), and that their potential role in educational change has been overlooked through ignorance, misjudgement, or (in a typically psychologising move) "fear". Releasing or "liberating" voice is held to enable more "authentic" relations between teachers and students or to "empower" students. There is a "redemptive" language here (cf. Popkewitz, 1998)—student voice will help students become better citizens and more active learners, and schools to become better places. Such perspectives, however, seem reluctant to engage with the shifting power relations that have accorded students their new authority to speak, or to be critically reflexive about the means used to shape and channel what can be recognised as "student voice".

For years many educators argued in favour of student voice as part of a larger emancipatory project, hoping it would be transformative not just of individuals, but of the oppressive hierarchies within educational institutions and even in society. Within higher education, these arguments were made by critical pedagogues such as Henry Giroux (e.g. 1986) and have already been critiqued particularly by feminists (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1991; Orner, 1992), who have questioned the hidden coercion in "voice", whose interests it serves and the value of silence. Now educationalists and others observing the implementation of student voice at school level—including those who are also its advocates—are surveying the field with some suspicion. The fact that student voice now appears to be fully compatible with government and management objectives and that senior staff are introducing it with the explicit aim of school improvement, causes disquiet, even concerns that it might be cynical and manipulative, intentionally or not masking the "real" interests of those in power. Michael Fielding, reviewing a number of initiatives, questions "Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation? . . . Or are we presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control?" (Fielding, 2001, p. 100). Such ambivalence indicates the difficulties current educational theories have in providing frameworks within which consultation and participation initiatives become intelligible. This article aims to contribute to the analysis of student voice within educational research, by drawing on Foucauldian governmentality theory.

Governmentality and Participation

Foucault's thinking on governmentality in his later work (Foucault, 1991) has received increasing attention in recent years (e.g. Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 1992; Ong, 2006; Rose, 1999). It has been taken up by many academics to develop insights into contemporary phenomena (including programmes connected to the politics of the "Third Way"), such as unemployment (Dean, 1998), self-help literature (Rimke, 2000), development (Triantafillou & Nielsen, 2001), education and the school (Ball, 2003; Hunter, 1994, 1996), youth participation (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005) and discourses of childhood (Vandenbroeck & Bouverne-De-Bie, 2006).

"Government" refers to the indirect and heterogeneous programmes, strategies and techniques that have sought to regulate the conduct of conduct, including the relation of the self to the self, in order to fabricate subjects who are "capable of bearing the burdens of liberty" in advanced liberal western democracies (Rose, 1999). In the process, the modern human being has been defined as a unique individual, possessing an autonomous self that is capable of being worked on through various governmental "technologies of the self" (Burchell, 1996). More recently, according to this analysis, neo-liberal regimes have "rolled back" the boundaries of the welfare state, not in order to remove power but to entrench it further at the level of the individual. They govern less through the formal institutions of the state, and more through forms of "expertise" that seemingly lie beyond it—for instance, in the "caring professions", in the media or the family—that encourage action on the self, by the self.

A governmentality perspective challenges the liberal notion of "empowerment" as handing over power to less powerful groups (such as, here, students), or as a removal of previously oppressive power relations. Instead, it enables us to understand how power works by producing practices for acting on the self by the self, stressing the dimension of self-subjectification (the ethical practices) in any process of government (Triantafillou & Nielsen, 2001, p. 65). Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005), analysing various manuals and directives about youth participation in education, argue that "empowerment" is an element in a particular mode of power or government, interpellating individuals to think about themselves in ways they describe as "immunisation".

Whilst governmentality is only one potentially relevant theoretical perspective, it enables a focus on aspects of student voice projects that are often ignored or taken for granted. These include, for instance, the self-understandings and identities student voice produces for teaching staff and students, the technologies through which "voice" is constructed, and questions of whom and what is problematised or rendered "abnormal" in the process. We are not dealing with questions of policy choices and decisions, nor with the conscious intentions of the actors in the process, but rather with the social and cultural effects of broader societal shifts. My aim is to challenge the homogeneity of many discussions of student voice, which treat different projects as if they all refer to the same entity, and to develop more nuanced

critiques of particular projects which explore the details of implementation and not (only) the benign motivations behind them. At the same time, however, Foucault's emphasis on the productive aspects of power—the notion that freedom depends on and requires the presence rather than the absence of relations of power—allows recognition of the positive effects of student voice projects in fostering particular capacities. In this article I will argue that Students as Researchers (SAR) is a technology of the self—one example of the way individuals in modern societies are urged to constitute themselves as autonomous, responsible and choosing subjects, and more specifically as "reflexive knowledge workers" (a term drawn from Ong, 2006, p. 239).

Methodology

The data presented here were gathered during research conducted as part of a Teaching and Learning Research Programme Network on "Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning" (2001–2003), funded by the Economic & Social Research Council in the UK. Taking the view that "schools have changed less in the last 20 years than young people have", the overall aims of the network of "Consulting" projects were to explore more participative models of education, specifically in relation to consultation with pupils about teaching and learning. One project within this, directed by Michael Fielding and on which I was a researcher, focused on an initiative called *Students as Researchers*. The term "Students as Researchers" has sometimes been applied to projects where students work alongside trained social researchers or youth workers as assistants on research questions determined by professionals (e.g. Atweh & Burton, 1995; or see an Australian initiative documented at www.studentsasresearchers.nexus.edu.au). Here, however, it aimed to be more student-directed, and more specifically focused on teaching and learning. It invited students to investigate issues that mattered to them in their educational experience. Although in practice their concerns often focused on the more familiar terrain of traditional Student Councils (such as school environment, toilet and dining room facilities, and so on), a distinctive feature of the work was that it encouraged students to consider issues of teaching and learning. Students therefore researched questions such as "what makes a good teacher?" and "what makes a good lesson?" They used research methods such as interviews, questionnaires and surveys, and reported their findings to classroom teachers or to senior staff, depending on how widely the initiative had been taken up in their school. Similar versions of SAR in the USA have been documented by Campbell, Edgar, and Halstead (1994), SooHoo (1993) and Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998). The project built on previous knowledge and frameworks developed by the project director (and within the Bedfordshire Schools Improvement Project, www.bsip.net). Schools joined on the basis of willingness or interest, so already broadly shared Michael Fielding's perspectives, but the "distributed" research model adopted was one where the actual initiatives

were largely shaped by senior management and teachers in their own work contexts. This level of autonomy meant that we could observe how the original ideals of SAR were being interpreted and adopted in different contexts.

As the researcher in seven core schools, five secondary and two primary, I collected documentation (such as research reports), carried out interviews (approximately 25 with senior managers and teachers, 20 with pairs or groups of students) and observed key moments in the SAR process (such as training sessions or student presentations). I visited three schools once, three schools at least twice, and made repeated visits to the most local school. I maintained email contact with teachers, which produced rich data in some cases (Bragg, 2007). During the 18 months of the project (between 2001 and 2003) the research team occasionally provided specific training events or workshops for individual schools and organised two conferences where teachers and students from participating schools came together and shared their work. The schools involved were generally "successful" ones by contemporary standards, focused on achievement and learning, and involved in a range of contemporary government initiatives, such as "Beacon" or Specialist School status. That is to say, they were aligned with prevailing culture and policy concerns and norms. This paper does not aim to evaluate the projects, in terms of, for instance, the impact they had on the school and on the achievement of those involved, and so on (for that, see Fielding & Bragg, 2003), but instead to explore how SAR is discursively constructed and why it might have a place in contemporary educational thinking. I have selected quotations representing significant themes in the data that demanded interpretation, to illustrate an argument that is intended to provoke and foster debate.

"Students as Researchers" and the Reculturing of Schools

I begin with the perspectives of senior managers responsible for managing the SAR process, on the grounds that their views often represented the most consciously articulated or elaborated level of student voice rhetoric. Their discourses shape or provide a framework for students' and teachers' possibilities for being and acting, although they obviously do not determine them.

Managers drew on a complex and even contradictory mix of discourses to explain the significance of SAR, as exemplified by this headteacher, who refers to consumer culture (pupils as consumers and schools as service providers) as well as human rights discourse:

> It [SAR] is the consumer insight, which we don't normally get. I see children as having rights within the education process. We provide them with a service rather than favours which is quite a change within education in itself and it's by no means embedded. (Head)

SAR is one means by which students are invited to be more involved in schools, often running alongside other participation measures such as Student Councils,

"buddying" systems, mentoring, and so on. When asked why such involvement was important, managers gave remarkably similar responses:

> If you are involved you are motivated, if you are motivated you are happy, if you are happy you work harder. That's the theory anyway. (Deputy Head, Upper School)

> If you're happy you can learn, the children say, and I think they're right. (Deputy Head, Primary)

> 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. (Deputy Head, 11–18 school)

From a Foucauldian perspective, of course, these statements do not so much describe as *produce* understandings and subject positions. Underlying SAR is a set of assumptions about how individuals work, what motivates them, what is "good", which according to the last speaker scarcely merit comment, let alone research. It is held to be "obvious", for example, that young people are in search of happiness and meaning, that they need to feel in control and involved, that individual responsibility is personally empowering and desirable, that people should be active not passive and are more likely to be creative and enthusiastic if they are subjectively implicated in their work and "own" it. These managers imagine a pre-existing "will to participate" in students, which they believe SAR reflects rather than constructs. In turn, students' subjectivity, once developed in "happier" directions, will serve the self-interests of the school and ensure organisational success.

   It is worth situating these senior managers' assumptions and discourses historically. Ian Hunter's Foucauldian account of the school as a "pastoral bureaucracy", emerging from early State programmes to establish prosperity and order by augmenting the capacities of populations, suggests that we should not be surprised by this dual concern with students' welfare and with performance targets (Hunter, 1994). Nor should we condemn it as "mere" instrumentalism; the bureaucratic or administrative state, according to Hunter, was not a betrayal of higher principles but an achievement, providing the concept of public good beyond religious factionalism that helped (for instance) to put an end to civil wars.

   More specifically, the managers' statements share similarities with common contemporary managerialist rhetoric, such as that found in popular management manuals. (Indeed, other management mantras—such as "there's no I in team"— cropped up in some conversations and interviews). We might see them as the products of "psy" knowledge (the complex of psychology-related professions), which has become dominant over the last century (du Gay, 1996, 1997; Rose, 1999). Du Gay and Rose's research suggests that the shift to neo-liberal, post-Fordist societies is most clearly manifest in changes in work, workplace cultures and occupational identities, where societal trends become visible in new discursive formations. For instance, the notion that new work habits, dispositions and forms of conduct are necessary for workers to identify with their employing organisation and enable it to

gain competitive advantage is part of the "turn to culture" that came to prominence in business thinking from the 1980s, as du Gay has argued:

> "Culture" has ... come to be seen as a crucial means of ensuring organisational success because it is held that if you can effectively manage "meaning" at work, so that people come to conceive of and conduct themselves in such a way as to maximise their involvement in, and hence their contribution to, the organisation for which they work, you are more likely to have a profitable, effective and successful firm. (du Gay, 1997, p. 1)

Du Gay terms this an "enterprise discourse", which generalises market conduct to other areas of life and values particular qualities such as being self-reliant, taking initiatives, risks and personal responsibility. In recent years education has also generated its own stellar gurus such as the prolific author on educational reform, Michael Fullan, who similarly argues that restructuring requires "reculturing"; changed attitudes and dispositions that will make new ways of working a "felt necessity" rather than an imposed requirement (Fullan, 2000). Therefore how managers discuss SAR might indicate how far corporate ways of thinking or seeing the world, initially seen in contemporary capitalist organisations, have now emerged inside schools, eliding their particularity as institutions. Such corporate discourse might in turn appeal in part due to the competitive context increasingly imposed on schools (through for instance, the publication of league tables and the spread of notions of parental choice). Student voice, linked to pragmatic goals of school effectiveness and improvement, promises to help deliver survival and even success in this new world of educational competition.

The Technologies of "Voice"—Shaping subjectivities

Student voice is not unmediated, but guided, facilitated and supervised through specific techniques that delimit what can be said, and how speakers conceive of themselves—techniques for shaping subjectivities. In the SAR process, students typically received some form of training from university academics in research techniques such as interviewing, constructing questionnaires and so on, largely within a positivist framework. Teachers and managers often argued that this had both intellectual value, in that the training was rigorous, and a social or cultural capital element in connecting students to higher education institutions. Many adults also commented that they had been won over by the serious and substantiated content of students' research. Whilst this attention to developing a student voice worth listening to is commendable, its academic emphasis does have limitations that I explore below. Meanwhile, I also observed that students supplemented this formal knowledge with their informal expertise garnered from acquaintance with media and consumer culture, such as market surveys or interviews in the press and on television. Students may have enjoyed SAR because of the confidence boost of feeling that they were in relatively familiar territory; and this does also suggest that SAR addresses students as "consumers" as much as in terms of more "academic" identities.

The training sessions served to install and maintain norms of activism and self-assertion, and encouraged individuating processes. For instance, at one SAR conference, students played an "opinion line" exercise, in which they arranged themselves along the floor according to how far they agreed or disagreed with statements read out by the trainer, forming an embodied survey. Several students commented afterwards that they realised that through their involvement in SAR, they had become confident about expressing views that differed from the majority. Being a "citizen" has been increasingly understood as learning to "have" and "express" opinions, but public opinion only exists through the research techniques that make it measurable (such as the Gallup poll) and the packaging of issues in terms amenable to polling (Osborne & Rose, 1999). Techniques such as the opinion line may therefore in general help to normalise certain forms of behaviour or attitude, disciplining young people into current requirements for modern citizenship. More specifically, they encourage young people to see themselves as unique individuals, inciting them to voice their concerns and views to qualify as responsible members of a group.

The processes of research inside schools also create new and hybrid identities, or "make up" new ways of students to "be" at school (Hacking, 1986). For instance, insofar as they were evaluating teaching and learning, student researchers were consumers of education. Yet they were also engaged in work that approximated to professional (research) practices, and gave up their free time such as lunch breaks to do so. Then again, this intensification of work offered personal fulfilment, it was not experienced as a chore. Such hybrid identities, du Gay argues, have been encouraged within business, particularly the service industries (du Gay, 1996). Organisational practices encourage workers towards an affective identification with the workplace and a sense that they are both obligated to and responsible for its functioning. Some students' statements indicated that SAR achieved something like this—they described the outcomes of SAR in terms of their attitudes to the school in these terms:

> You get a much better idea of how the school's run and why certain things happen, it's not just a faceless institution. (Year 12 Researcher, interview)

> In researching the different topics and aspects of the school we have found that we have greatly improved our understanding and awareness of issues and areas of improvement within the school. We feel more aware of the changes that are around us. Although staff are constantly working to better our school, it's pleasing to see that our efforts are helping to make a real difference. (Year 9 Researcher, conference presentation)

> I now realise that the opportunity to make a difference to our school environment is there for the taking. Now we must learn how to make use of this opportunity in the best possible way. (Year 10 Researcher, conference presentation)

The second and third statements here might suggest that SAR has succeeded in instilling new forms of obligation and responsibility on young people—to manage themselves and their environments carefully and "prudently" (Kelly, 2007). The

students construct themselves as having the future in their hands, as responsible students who take individual responsibility both to inform themselves and to influence change or outcomes around the school through their own choices and actions. "The school" as a community is embodied and invigorated with a being that evokes loyalty from these students. From the point of view of the school, students' positive attitudes to school and staff would only be welcomed. However, as I go on to explain further below, it also involves a re-orientation of bonds away from the peer group in ways that can reinforce or create divisions; and it ascribes only benign intentions and effects to the educational system. Moreover, the statements should be read in relation to the context for which they were produced. The more casual insights of the first interviewee contrast with the following ones, which were produced for "public" consumption at conferences in the presence of teachers. We might note an element of hyperbole in the words that are cited ("constantly working to better . . .") that might make us question how profoundly students sign up to the project.

SAR also shapes the subjectivity of teachers in new ways. As part of research into understandings of "good" pedagogy, SAR frequently involved students observing teachers' classes and giving feedback. Students rarely suggested radical changes to teaching practice, but followed a broadly "progressive", liberal agenda in asking for greater mutuality, respect and active learning. Teachers who welcomed feedback from student researchers often remarked that it did not fundamentally alter their understanding of teaching, but did serve to remind them of what they had learnt during their teacher training. Whilst teachers often experienced this positively, as a move towards a dialogic, reflective model of professionalism, forged in alliance with students, it also represents a move away from a model of professional autonomy where teachers make their own decisions about teaching quality. Cynically one might read this as a way to discipline teachers as much as to provide students with real choice. The presence of student researchers (real or simply potential) acted to re-activate and reinforce norms of "good" teaching that might be neglected in a context where local authority involvement in providing further training is being undermined and schools encouraged to self-manage.

Further, one teacher's remark to me, that she needed to counter what she saw as her negative reputation amongst students and was thus involved in SAR as "a PR exercise for the kids", suggests interesting new self-perceptions among teachers. In drawing on images of enterprise, this teacher constructs an image of herself as her own individual business unit, marketing her skills and self to students; further evidence perhaps of corporate discourse infiltrating educational thinking and notions of professional identity (Ball, 2003).

Creating Learners for New Economic Times?

As noted above, the version of SAR discussed here was innovative because it focused on questions of teaching and learning, rather than (only) on the areas over which students have traditionally been given a say. Teaching staff frequently argued that

students' research would primarily enhance their understanding of their own learning, referring implicitly or explicitly to debates about "lifelong learning":

> Any research around their learning is going to increase their understanding of their learning and of course ours. (Head)

> I want [SAR] to help develop students as people who can control their own learning and can direct it because they can understand it. (Deputy Head)

Indeed, students too frequently commented that this had been the case: SAR seems to promote practices of reflexivity and self-problematisation amongst those who carry out the research, encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves as well as contribute to school success:

> It has been quite helpful for us to understand some of the problems students have, but also that we really need to help the teachers, because if we don't put any input in and don't behave there's no chance that teachers are going to be able to get on with their job. (Year 12 Researcher)

> I am aware of what students can do to make teaching and learning easier or harder. (Year 10 Researcher)

> Seeing other people's behaviour has helped me to think about mine. (Year 9 Researcher)

Such cultural outcomes may be more significant than the actual research reports produced by the students, as they incite particular forms of work on the self. The student who comments on "seeing other people's behaviour" has, in one sense, been witnessing that throughout her school life. However, the new optic of being a researcher leads her to a different, third-person perspective on herself in which she becomes both object and subject of knowledge. Being positioned as a researcher creates a new form of internal policing in which students become their own critics, rather than a hierarchy in which students are told what to do, helping them become self-managing agents of their own lives and enhancing their reflexivity. SAR in this sense is an ethico-political strategy, in that it encourages the art of self-examination and helps instil behaviour of individual self-management.

These are ideas and techniques for acting on the self and re-engineering it for new economic times. "Ideal" students in these times have globally relevant knowledge and skills; they no longer make demands, but take the initiative. The skills learnt through student research—teamwork, communication, enterprise, reflexivity about learning and the self—are also the skills allegedly needed to compete in the new knowledge economy; involvement in SAR thus enhances marketability. Many students remarked that SAR would "look good" on university application forms. We might say SAR encourages an entrepreneurial relation to the self:

> With the self-motivation and the independent learning style that I experienced while carrying out the research project, I feel that I would be able to cope well with the transition from a teacher-dominated classroom to the more self-learning

environment of university. (Year 13 Researcher, presentation at conference based on her university application form)

You get sort of confidence building, team building and all sorts of research skills, so that's something you can use throughout your working life. (Year 11 Researcher)

My communication skills have definitely improved as a result of carrying out the research project. This is because it involved both verbal and written communication with a range of people, from year 7 pupils to the head teacher. (Year 10 Researcher)

In front of posh people I can talk formally, getting my point across. (Year 9 Researcher)

These comments suggest that these teenagers are looking towards a particular *kind* of future—white collar, professional—even if perhaps, as the last quotation may imply, it requires leaving behind a rather different class identity. In one sense, schools are simply doing their job in preparing students to compete in a changed, neo-liberal climate; but this does also raise questions about how far this is a middle-class project of the self (Skeggs, 2003), who is excluded from it, and the class and gender basis of its appeal.

The training process works not through coercion or sanction or even primarily incentives, but through moralisation. It establishes the active and responsible learner as a desirable role model by ascribing those qualities to students. However, it should be noted that there are privileges attached to involvement in SAR, such as off-campus training, networking with other schools, conferences, day trips, free lunches or other "treats" for attending meetings, even demarcated rooms within the school or access to staff. There is a tension here between appropriate recognition of students' work, and the creation of new elites within the school.

Furthermore, taking individual responsibility for one's learning increases pressures around failure, as material and structural factors are implicitly exempted from blame. So whilst SAR, through its focus on researching pedagogy, does try to make learning explicit, the concern is that the most important aspects of learning—the hidden curriculum—are not amenable to being made explicit and so may be overlooked in a way that reinforces inequalities and oppression.

The Appeal of Autonomy

One theme that emerged repeatedly in interviews was the pleasure students took in becoming more independent, taking their own decisions about what to do:

You're not pressurised by teachers to do specific things, you're independent about how you research it . . . You can choose what you want to do when, so you don't have to do everything in a set order, you can decide whether you want to . . . You're not watched over by a teacher saying get this done, get that done, you do it—and that makes it work better . . . There's more trust. In a normal classroom teachers would come round and check up on you . . . (Years 7–9 Researchers in group interview)

> It was nice because the teachers that we didn't quite know, we were getting to know, not in a personal way, but it was an equal thing ... It wasn't like the teacher was telling us what to do. (Year 10 Researchers in pair interview)

> It's different in that we have a lot more input and it's just, we have to find out what we're going to do and then go from there, it's very much the students' sort of thing rather than just, here's a set amount of work, we've got to get through it. (Year 10 Researcher, interview)

> Teachers don't help as much, they try and leave as much as they can up to you. (Year 9 Researcher, interview)

Whilst it would be churlish to deny the positive aspects of the work as students describe them here, we need to put them in a wider context. As Rose has argued, autonomisation and responsibilisation are key strategies of neo-liberalism, encouraging action on the self, by the self as a means of ensuring individual well-being (Rose, 1999). In part, then, we could read these students' comments as an indication of how they have responded eagerly to being interpellated as independent subjects, precisely the mindset promoted by neoliberal strategies. However, we might also note that they are likely to be addressed as autonomous agents by media-consumer culture; SAR is therefore more in step with their outside-school experience. And we could read in these statements other elements: not simply a victory for neo-liberalism, but students' exhaustion at dealing with the overload and pressures of a standards- and content-driven National Curriculum ("a set amount of work" to get through, where teachers are required to "check up on you" and so on). SAR may also provide a longed-for escape from performativity culture—but only for some.

Resistance and Exclusions

Student participation in initiatives such as SAR expands but also narrows how young people are "made up" in schools, establishing new hierarchies and norms. As we have seen, SAR assumes a benign view of the school, and normalises young people as responsible decision-makers with respect to their education and learning. The key question is what happens to those who do not want to participate. Student researchers sometimes made moral judgements on those who would not respond to their research, or who subverted the process (for instance, by not filling out the surveys they devised, or doing so improperly), castigating them as "silly". Whilst this is hardly strident language, we can see within it something of how those who cannot or will not measure up are marginalised as deviant or risky subjects who threaten the new normativity. The assumption of a "will to participate" means that not doing so is rendered senseless ("silly")—whereas perhaps in previous times, forms of resistance could be read more easily and heroically (Willis, 1977). Yet there are legitimate reasons why students might feel that school has not given them anything, just as learning and employability are social not just individual issues.

SAR does shift power relations, and therefore does not tell strictly the same old story of social class hierarchies. For instance, in one school "disaffected" students

(and there is often a social class dimension to such labels) were explicitly targeted for involvement in the research. Such students can be brought into the dialogue as long as they are prepared to do so on certain terms. (The normative epistemology involved in rendering student populations knowable and amenable to intervention deserves analysis in its own right—see Kelly, 2007, on "at risk" youth). Nonetheless, SAR might exacerbate differential opportunities and outcomes through its emphasis on constructing an "academic" voice, installing norms of verbal competences that may privilege the already privileged (see Arnot & Reay, 2007, this issue). Indeed, perceptions of the diversity of the student research groups were often at odds; in one school, teachers insisted that SAR involved a "wide range" of ability, whilst students who were not researchers explained to me that it was the preserve of "the clever ones".

Thus, SAR helps establish new—and more demanding—norms of school belonging, where young people are invited to be, not "pupils" (with the connotation that these are passive, done to) but "students" who actively take the initiative, are enterprising, resourceful, flexible and reflexive. The very nomenclature of "student" implies a longer-term identity and a specific future, either at college or university or as a lifelong learner in the new knowledge economy. There is an ethical shift here, where attention is moved away from a school's duty to provide, on to individuals' responsibility to maximise opportunities, take advantage, become autonomous; if they do not, this may be read as their personal failure. 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.

Conclusion

I began by discussing the dilemmas of analysing and understanding participation projects, how far they should be celebrated or viewed with suspicion. I argued that an example such as Students as Researchers can usefully be read as an example of neo-liberal governmentality in that it works at a distance, without recourse to direct forms of repression or intervention, instead shaping students' norms, preferences, capacities and identities. It encourages individuals to constitute themselves as active, responsible and choosing subjects—in this case, as students who can take charge of their own learning. Moreover, it works through not against young peoples' subjectivities, constructing their personal goals and aspirations and harnessing them to broader organisational objectives. To achieve its effect, SAR mobilises strategies familiar from consumer culture, which are also part of contemporary business practice.

A Foucauldian analysis argues that technologies such as SAR do not annul or distort young people's capacities as agents, because these do not pre-exist particular practices. It draws attention instead to how specific practices install positive competences. SAR does indeed increase young people's capacity to transform,

acquire skills, to make choices and to develop forms of conduct or ways of acting. It is very likely that students are won to it partly because it holds out an image of themselves as autonomous and independent, which is held to be desirable within the wider culture.

However, although the freedom SAR offers is not a sham, it does take place within a specific disciplinary framework, and it comes at the cost of an intensification of relations of domination—the requirement (even if not fulfilled) to assent with heart not just body, to give an inner commitment not just outer conformity. It involves more intense work on the self, requiring from students constant scrutiny and self-criticism. It appears voluntaristic—one can freely choose to be the right sort of person—while requiring the adoption of a voice and an identity that is implicitly middle class in order to play the game. In addition, it can create new networks or relations of power, or reinforce existing ones, as it enters a field where young people are already differentiated according to age, gender, class and race. If SAR constitutes students as active, responsible, able to take charge of their own learning, then potentially, one also takes responsibility for one's failure to learn. If it creates new alignments of loyalty and establishes a social obligation to improve the school and identify with it, it creates new categories of problematic students in the process. If the lines do not match exactly with traditional categories of social class, the fit is close enough to merit the attention of those concerned with social justice perspectives. Thus whilst we can hail the achievements of committed individuals who have sought through measures such as Students as Researchers to equip students with the skills of participation in contemporary society, we might still have reason to question the exclusions and inequalities that lie at the heart of that society.

Acknowledgements

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