

Enhancing our understanding of Assessment for Learning: how teachers' use student consultation strategies to inform the development of classroom assessment practices

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Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Manchester, 2-5 September 2009

In this paper I report on how four teachers in one secondary school in England used processes of student consultation to inform the development of their classroom assessment practices. The researcher worked with the teachers and their classes in developing collaborative working relationships with benefits for students' learning, teacher's professional growth and transforming research knowledge into practice. A premise of the study was that using Assessment for Learning (AfL) and student consultation in classrooms would encourage a deepening of the collaboration between students and between teachers and students, all essential in the development of classroom cultures where learning is construed as a co-constructed process.

Drawing on socio-cultural theories of learning, the research design adopted a case study approach at one 11-18 school, where considerable time, effort and expertise had been devoted to establishing a whole-school approach to AfL, and where the senior management team were in the formative stages of introducing a whole-school based student consultation strategy. The researcher worked with teachers from Dance, English, History and Maths and one of their classes as they prepared for high stakes summative assessments (GCSE & BTEC National Awards). Post-lesson interviews informed by lesson observations were carried out with the teachers, and group interviews were carried out with students in a phased interventionist study. The teacher's use of classroom assessment practices was tracked throughout the study with a specific focus on the ways in which they changed and were informed as a result of the student consultation process.

Emergent findings compound the view that teachers from different subject areas approach AfL in distinct ways and that some resonate more closely with the 'spirit' than with the 'letter' of AfL (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). During the student consultation processes all four teachers experienced 'comfortable and uncomfortable learnings' (McIntyre, Pedder, Rudduck, 2005) and their choice of student consultation strategy/ies seemed to be linked to their pedagogic content knowledge. All four teachers responded to the views and preferences their students expressed by seeking to embed their selected consultation strategies within their own classroom contexts and using the process in instrumental ways. However, some teachers were more sophisticated at problematising the data from the consultation strategy than others and this did not appear to be linked to subject discipline per se.

Implications of the research findings for educational policy and educational practice will be considered.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) and student/pupil consultation are widely recognised features of school and classroom life in the UK. They form two of the nine gateways to the personalisation of the learning process and are acknowledged by OfSTED as exemplifying 'good practice'. Although neither are 'new' practices, their prominence in educational discourse and links with the personalisation process has resulted in both processes being considered as potentially innovative. They are viewed as useful means of enhancing learning outcomes and as having the potential to deepen the collaboration between students and between teachers and students; essential in the development of classroom cultures where learning is construed as a co-constructed process. (Shepherd, 2000)

In 2005/06, I completed an MPhil course undertaken in order to explore teachers' and students' use of classroom formative assessment practices. Using qualitative methods of data collection I focused on two teachers and a group of their students as they were preparing for high stakes AS/A2 examinations using formative assessment practices in different subject areas; Psychology and Religious Studies. The main aim of the study was to access teachers' and students' thinking on the classroom assessment practices they used to enhance further learning. One of the key findings of that research was that while both teachers used formative assessment practices in their respective classrooms, both felt an underlying tension in using them when students preparing for summative tests. Furthermore, the strategies and rationales that underpinned each teacher's use of formative assessment differed. The differences in each teacher's purposes and practices suggested that the subjects teachers teach and their beliefs about learning influence how teachers use formative assessment in classrooms (James, 2003; Hodgen & Marshall, 2005; Wiliam, 2007; Pedder, 2007). The students in my research could all see the benefit of using formative assessment practices to help them to learn, however a number of them struggled to use practices such as self and peer assessment relying instead on the teacher's direction, instruction and final assignment of a grade/mark.

Wiliam (2006) considers the relationship between formative and summative assessment in outcomes/standards based systems as one of the most intractable problems in classroom assessment. Negotiating this dual role of assessment represents a formidable challenge. In order to balance both components of assessment, teachers are required to develop sophisticated kinds of professional expertise consistent with the demands of promoting a classroom pedagogy capable of optimising student performance in high stakes examinations while also optimising the quality of student learning. At root, teachers and students are

faced with challenges in different contexts of reconciling the distinctive demands of a performance and a learning orientated culture (Dweck, 1999; Watkins, 2001). Teachers cannot be left unsupported in facing such a challenge. There is a growing body of research which expresses the view that teachers need opportunities to continue learning themselves, to do so collaboratively and in ways that are explicitly related to classroom contexts of teaching and learning, and to be supported in such learning by their schools and colleges. This is seen as an important precondition of sustainable processes of developing innovative classroom practices to advance students' learning (Pedder, James, & MacBeath, 2005; James & Pedder, 2006; Pedder, 2006; Wiliam, 2007).

One effective means of collaborative classroom-based professional learning is through the process of student consultation. Teachers actively seek their students' ideas and preferences in relation to teaching and learning experiences as a powerful form of professional learning and renewal of classroom practice (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; McIntyre & Pedder, 2004; Arnot & Reay, 2004). My PhD thesis (2007-2010) was designed as a means of developing research-based understandings of how student consultation is used by teachers to obtain formative feedback from their pupils to help them improve AfL practices. This paper briefly outlines the study and the preliminary findings. It begins by focusing on the rationale behind the use of AfL and student consultation, before explaining the research design itself, outlining the preliminary findings and offering some tentative conclusions on the key research question:

How do teachers use processes of student consultation to enhance their development of classroom assessment practices?

Assessment for Learning

Throughout my research I used the concepts of formative assessment/AfL interchangeably in line with much of the literature in this area and I adopted the definition that AfL/formative assessment is:

'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers, to identify where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go to and how best to get there' (ARG, 2002)

The concept of AfL became a defining feature of New Labour's education policy through its association with personalised learning. Fullan argues that AfL was a by product of external accountability; a set of practices to enhance learning gains in a performance culture (Fullan, 2005). Ecclestone and Daugherty (2006) however suggest that interest in AfL grew at the grassroots from groups of teachers who were becoming informed of the empirical evidence of the positive learning gains associated with formative assessment strategies through projects such as KOMAFAP and Learning how to Learn (LHTL) (Black & Wiliam et al. 2003; James, 2006; James, et al. 2007) . The interest in formative assessment

was fuelled by the Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004) agenda, with the implicit suggestion that schools needed to be learner centred to achieve desired outcomes for children of: being safe, healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being.

Recent policy documents regularly use the concepts of formative and summative assessment, suggesting that schools and teachers need to find innovative ways of blending the two together. The 14-19 White Paper (DfES, 2005) viewed the balance between what they term internal and external assessment as 'essentially the right one' (p74), so it would seem that current government policy and discourse favours a blending of summative and formative assessment in classroom practices. This effectively means that teachers are being challenged to develop pedagogy sophisticated enough to optimise student attainment scores on national tests at the same as optimising the quality of student learning. In facing this challenge teachers are caught between two cultures; the performance culture which stresses achievement through results in high stakes tests and a learning culture which stresses innovative formative assessment practices as a rigorous way of supporting learning processes and securing the learning outcomes associated with the knowledge-and technology-rich society (Hargreaves,1999; Castells,1988). One potentially effective way of contributing to the development of such pedagogy is through the use of student consultation; where teachers actively seek out and work with their students' views and preferences on classroom assessment.

Student Consultation

Processes of student consultation have a broad advocacy; students, teachers, researchers and increasingly policy makers see the inherent value of paying attention to what student say. This includes value for the teachers in hearing first hand accounts of what they can do to help students' learning. Value for the school in attending to students' views which may improve learning outcomes, and value for students in improving their confidence and self-worth through expressing their opinions to teachers who want to listen. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) question why students' views of schooling have been neglected in the culture of consumerism and where in the delivery of personal services all other stakeholders seem to have their views accessed, articulated and responded to as a given 'right'. Soo Hoo (1993) describes students ' as the treasure in our backyards' (p386) the rich potential of which is yet to be fully realized. There are two main premises that are widely considered to provide justification for student consultation; pupils' rights/democratic arguments and pupils as expert witnesses.

There is a strong argument that all students have a right to be consulted and to have their voices listened to on all aspects of schooling. Democratic principles automatically confer students with the right to be heard in schools and in society, and this is articulated in the citizenship agenda, Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004)

and forms a key plank of the government's personalized learning agenda where alongside AfL 'pupil voice' provides another gateway to personalizing learning. The establishment of the post of Children's Commissioner to act as the voice of children and young people provides an indication of the importance voice plays in current government policy. Furthermore, Article 12 of the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child provides a legally binding obligation for children to have the right to express views, and the right to have those views given due weight in the UK (Lundy, 2007). Consulting students on classroom assessment practices and purposes can clearly be justified on the grounds of rights and on democratic principles.

A different justification for student consultation is related to the work of Flutter and Rudduck (2004) who consider that students should play a pivotal role in teaching and learning because they directly experience a wide range of different techniques and classroom practices on a daily basis. Evidence suggests that when asked about teaching and learning activities students offer insightful (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996) comments. Teachers have found students' views to be an invaluable source of continued professional learning (McIntyre et al., 2005) because of the detail and contextual insights of their accounts. When teachers demonstrably respond to students' views this has been found to be motivating for students as it signals that they are being treated as active members of a school/classroom with valid viewpoints to offer (Arnot & Reay, 2004; McIntyre, Pedder & Rudduck, 2005). Furthermore, research on school improvement and effectiveness studies suggest that when schools attend more to students' views about teaching and learning this tends to enhance student learning outcomes and contributes to school improvement (Sammons et al., 1997).

The potential for improving classroom assessment practices through eliciting students views is enormous, although clearly premised on factors such as whose views are articulated and how the teachers respond to them (Morgan, 2000 cited in Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). As teachers access and work with students' views about classroom assessment the similarities with the practices and processes of AfL are evident:

- both are premised on teachers accessing and working with students views and preferences in progressive ways, in other words there is a strong formative element in both
- to optimize learning outcomes, both require teachers and students to be respectful of each others views and be willing and able to work together in classroom relationships based on a degree of mutual respect and trust
- both processes can be usefully viewed through socio-cultural theories and considered as social practices of discourse based around patterns of participation

A genuine concern when any initiative is incorporated into practice by schools is that it loses its primary focus either because the initiative is imposed on schools without accompanying support for capacity building (Elmore, 2004) or because it is hijacked for other purposes. For example, some schools use student consultation as a means of meeting Ofsted's recommendations that students should be consulted as a way of enhancing school improvement; sometimes this can lead to consultation processes being based around Ofsted visits or for the primary purpose of generating quantitative data to feed into the self evaluation process. Fielding (2004) fears that the transformative potential of student consultation and participation will be difficult to enact in a performance orientated culture, and may lead to a regressive pedagogy, where teachers and students are hyper-examined and placed under pressure to teach to the test. Schools, anxious to monitor teachers' performance, sometimes use systems of student consultation in ways that by-pass teachers. For example, senior management teams appoint students as 'inspectors' asking them to make summative assessments of the quality of their teacher's teaching. Within such a surveillance culture it becomes very difficult for teachers to develop the trust and dialogic approach needed to consult with their students effectively, and this can lead to student consultation becoming little more than a set of ticks on a check list administered for purposes of internal and external accountability (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). These kinds of concerns relate to research on AfL where it has been suggested that the spirit of AfL has been reduced to a series of bolt-on practices which teachers can add to their repertoire of techniques (Marshall and Drummond, 2005). If we want to prevent student consultation from becoming incorporated as a technique to bolster school effectiveness and school improvement through narrowly defined performance indicators (MacBeath, 2006) then we need to find ways of encouraging and supporting teachers in their use and understanding of it.

My study aimed to develop collaborative working relationships with students and teachers, which would benefit students' learning, teacher's professional knowledge and seek to transform research knowledge into practice.

Research Design

The research design used a multi-staged case study approach with a planned intervention, at one 11-18 school in Eastern England. The site was chosen as it had a whole school approach to AfL in place and a senior leadership team working on a similar strategy for student consultation, at a whole school level. I worked with four teachers and a group of their students over a nine month period (English, Dance, History & Maths). The research was multi-staged as I explored their current use of classroom assessment practices pre- intervention, then worked with the teachers in consulting the students and then focused on the extent and nature of any changes to practices as a result of the intervention itself. This process is represented in figure 1.

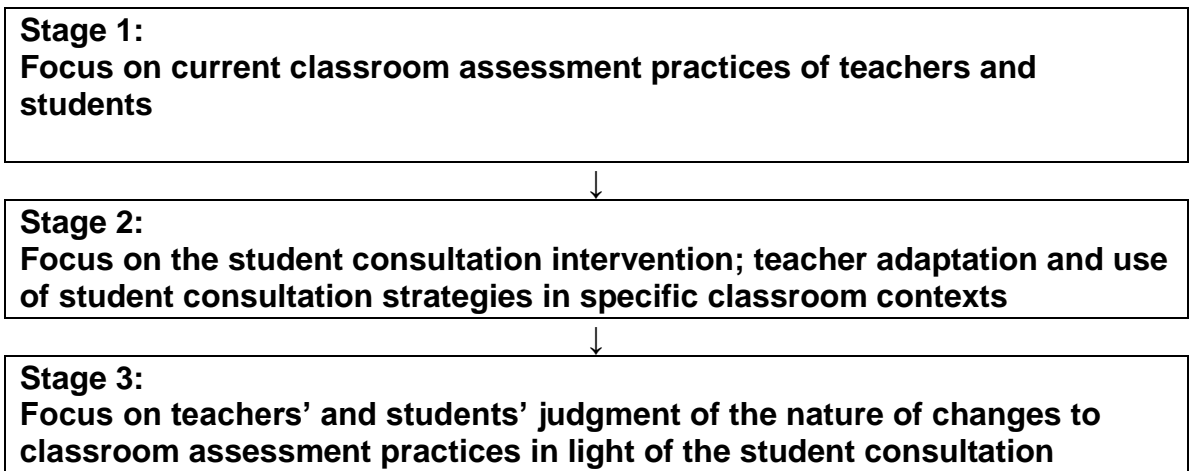


Fig 1: The Research Process

The study collected qualitative data from using lesson observations and post-lesson interviews. The teacher interviews were semi-structured and post-lesson group interviews were carried out with the students. Lesson observation notes were used to inform the questioning and content of the post-lesson interviews and as a means of enhancing the authenticity of the interview data (Cooper, 1993). Providing a shared context was important in developing common reference points that would help to support the teachers and their students in articulating detailed, contextualized accounts of classroom assessment practices.

A key foundational strand of the research was that individual cognition has its source in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) and led me to the theoretical position of interpretivism. Interpretivism is a theoretical framework with roots tracing back to Weber (1970) and the concept of *verstehen*, or the attempt to achieve empathetic understanding from the point of view of another. Crotty (2003) views the concept of *verstehen* as an attempt to harmonise the idiographic with the nomothetic, making possible the rigorous study of human interaction by attempting to explain objective phenomena and develop understandings of subjective phenomena. As I was accessing accounts of the assessment practices and processes used in specific classroom contexts I needed find ways of delving into teacher's and student's views and some of these were based on and around would could be considered as objective phenomena.

The study can be considered an example of research based evidence. As I was based in one school, working with 4 teachers and one of their classes the research knowledge generated was highly likely to feed into practice, and stage 3 of the research was focusing on what those changes might be, both in relation to classroom assessment practices and classroom relationships. For Cordingley (1999), research and evidence informed practice needs to be viewed through the lens of professional problems experienced by practitioners. Through articulating their needs and concerns, teachers are more likely to engage with research

which will foster improved practice. In my study the four teachers had become involved in the project as they were all interested in the fusion of AfL with student consultation and would be able to work with their classes, supported by a researcher in attempting to develop new and innovative ideas. I would describe my inquiry as an iterative process where teacher *development* sits alongside the *research* process with the hope that any knowledge generated will become transformed as it is applied by members of communities of practice in order to advance classroom practice.

There now follows a brief account of the findings from the four subject areas, with a summary matrix on page 13, indicating the different ways in which the teachers used processes of student consultation to enhance their development of classroom assessment practices.

History

Stage 1

The History teacher used a limited range of assessment practices in a formative way, claiming that History GCSE was a more demanding subject to teach than other cognate subjects such as RE which could use a wider range of classroom learning practices. Her underlying use of classroom assessment was to increase the students' marks and grades and optimize achievement. She took primary responsibility for this, displaying a set of teacher centered practices based on the calibration of the 'complex' assessment criteria. The department followed the whole school approach to assessment. The teacher did however display a desire to change her practices. She believed that she taught her classes in the ways in which she herself learnt; largely through visual and auditory means. A key theme of her interviews and a core dimension of her observed practices was her attempt to develop her teaching practices in order to accommodate students who preferred more active learning strategies.

The students were content for the teacher to lead on assessment all agreeing that responding to individualized specific targets formulated by the teacher helped them to 'learn' and to improve their marks/grades and performance in tests. They viewed assessment as something that 'happened to them' and understood their role to be in responding to what the teacher told them to do/change. However they felt that lessons had a tendency to become tedious and requested more active participatory activities to cater for those 'kinesthetic' learners in the class. This request for active learning included the use of peer assessment, which the students understood as being different to peer marking.

Stage 2

The teacher chose to use a sequenced consultation strategy, phased in over time. It was fundamentally a combination of a questionnaire and a class debate with various 'spot checks' on their learning positioned at key strategic moments throughout the course. It was crucial to her that the consultation was embedded within the delivery of the History GCSE specification and that all students were involved. In this sense her choice of strategy was *pragmatic and inclusive*.

Her choice of more than one consultation practice used over a period of months suggests that she was viewing the research as part of a *strategy*. She was not seeking a one-off snap-shot of her students' views but rather to access and problematise them; looking to work with the students' views. She was not content to accept their views at face value, and sought to ponder them, extending the consultation process in order to confirm her analysis.

Stage 3

There were *noticeable changes* to classroom practice as a result of the student consultation. The class were using more active learning strategies, in particular role plays and debates were becoming regular features of classroom life. The class had also started using more peer assessment. Both the students and teacher reported that the changes were part of an ongoing process. Although ultimate responsibility for assessment was still felt to reside with the teacher, both parties were happy that changes they had wanted relating to classroom assessment practices were resulting from the student consultation process.

In relation to classroom relationships the teacher felt 'closer to the group' as a result of using more formalized consultation. The female students agreed that their opinion of the teacher had improved, the male students reported no change in their relationship with the teacher or fellow classmates.

English

Stage 1

This was a teacher who used a range of assessment techniques across a sequence of lessons. He did not claim to have individual lesson plans and tightly specified learning objectives for each lesson he taught, instead he approached teaching and learning of English in terms of a sequence of lessons, and describing the importance of adopting a strategic approach to teaching English . Each sequence had a final aim and various objectives would be achieved over that period of time. Self and peer assessment were used in relation to creative writing tasks, feedback was given and received by all members of the class and individualized targets (from the teacher) were used on some but not all written work. The department followed the whole school assessment policy but adapted it for use within its own subject needs. Assessment was considered to be an integral and ongoing aspect of all lessons, and was not singled out as being the teacher's responsibility. Instead it was a shared between all members of the class.

Stage 2

The teacher and class planned the consultation together in what could be described as a *collaborative venture*. They designed a project called 'You the Teacher' and worked in small groups designing units of work that they would like to introduce into lessons, the units had to focus on learning activities that they would enjoy, the outcomes and how assessment would take place. The approach to consultation was therefore situated within the English course and designed to have *instrumental* benefits of improving student's involvement in planning lessons and strengthening their engagement to learn. Each group presented their views to the class over a period of four weeks. The consultation was based largely on dialogue and the presentations of ideas where the students were given a free choice of how to present their ideas. The teacher also used a questionnaire to access what the class thought about specific assessment processes. The class were happy with this and worked with the teacher in designing the questions.

Stage 3

There was no clear consensus of views from the class, the teacher was interested by their ideas for units of work, their desire to assess each others work (as a group) and that general contentment with target setting and responding to these. These were findings which would be worked into the course over the following months. The class and the teacher felt that their relationships with each other had strengthened as a result of the consultation, the females are more articulate on this than the males. However this class and teacher felt that they were already using consultation informally, the changes as a result of this consultation were therefore less obvious.



Dance

Stage 1

Assessment was an embedded feature of all the observed Dance lessons. The teacher had a clear strategy for using assessment to enhance learning outcomes and the classroom experience. She followed the whole school approach to assessment but adapted it for use in her subject which she claimed had quite specific needs. Assessment was a shared responsibility and task, Self and peer assessment was integral to the practical lessons and video recordings were used extensively to review and evaluate current achievement and seek to improve performance. As a small group the girls feared the lack of different critiques and viewpoints they were receiving on their performances and were concerned about relying solely on the views of the teacher. A range of classroom assessment practices were seen to be used and embedded within the classroom experience.

Stage 2

The teacher chose a mediated form of consultation, the class were given a prompt sheet of questions to think about individually and then asked to respond as a group in an appropriate way. The teacher passed the choice of feedback to the class. They chose to create a poster illustrating their views of classroom assessment, focusing on what helped and hindered their learning. In this sense the teacher was happy for the students to respond in ways they saw as appropriate and useful. During the students presentation of their views the teacher engaged in dialogue in an informal manner seeking to ensure that she understood their requests and made some suggestions for possible solutions. Some of the solutions were taken as being the teacher's responsibility (more use of the mirrors) and some were shared (providing more honest feedback in peer assessments). The consultation process was considered as having short term aims.

Stage 3

The teacher responded to one of the students' requests (using mirrors), passed one to the students themselves (honest feedback) and seemed to ignore the final one (more structured use of the assessment criteria in lessons). The class could see what had happened and felt that as 1 out of 3 requests had been met that was a reasonable outcome. They did not feel that any significant changes had resulted in relation to teacher-student classroom relationships, largely because they believed she consulted them anyhow. They did however report feeling closer to each other as a result of airing their need to be more honest in their peer feedback.

Maths

Stage 1

There was a mismatch between the teacher's espoused beliefs about her classroom assessment practices and her observed practices. The teacher claimed that her use of assessment was formative as the department followed a 'comment only' marking policy. Without a formal record of students marks she felt that an emphasis should have been on learning relevant mathematical techniques and procedures to follow instead of focusing on the actual mark achieved. However, the teacher made extensive use of self and peer marking, where she read out the correct answers and the class marked the work accordingly. The teacher understood this to be the use of self and peer assessment; conversely the students viewed it as a labour saving device for the teacher. Oral question and answer was used alongside some pre-emptive formative assessment on 'common mistakes' which the teacher demonstrated from the front of the class. This was a teacher displaying a set of tightly controlled assessment practices and who seemed to have a rudimentary view of formative assessment.

Stage 2

The teacher chose to use a structured questionnaire as the form of consultation. She joked that she was the 'nerdy' Maths teacher always wanting statistics, but justified her selection of consultation method as being aligned with the statistical elements of the GCSE course (she could demonstrate techniques with the data collected) and being the easiest way to access the views of all group members. She designed and analysed the questionnaire herself. She fed back on the results through a series of bar charts from the front of the class. The consultation was treated as having short term aims, she responded to those where a solution was clear (using grades to highlight the relative difficulty of questions) and she dismissed those where a consensus was unclear as to relevant changes to practice, opting instead to maintain the status quo.

Stage 3

There was a mismatch between the teacher's and the students' views on the perceived changes to practice. The teacher felt that some things had changed-her use of grades on work was viewed as a considerable departure from previous practice and she felt that new channels of communication had been opened up on teaching and learning. The students felt that little had changed and that although she had asked for their opinions she had responded to little if anything, largely because a clear consensus did not exist. Some of the students felt that the teacher had interpreted the findings from the consultation process to illustrate her own beliefs and justify her own teaching and assessment practices.

In relation to classroom relationships, there was again a mismatch. The teacher felt she had a 'changed' class' due to opening up new channels of communication. The female students felt more respectful of the teacher for consulting them, the males felt nothing had changed and one of them felt 'cheated' by the consultation which he described as having a 'fixed outcome'.

	History	English	Dance	Maths
Use of AfL	Formative in purpose, limited range of practices <i>Largely teacher centered</i>	Formative in purpose & practice, range of strategies <i>Learning and assessment shared</i>	Formative in purpose and wide range of practices <i>Learning and assessment shared</i>	Mismatch in teachers beliefs (using AfL) and observed practices (largely summative) <i>Teacher centered practice</i>
Choice of consultation strategy/ies	Embedded within subject & course Placed strategically Questionnaire and spot checks designed with the researcher Surprised by some findings- problematised them and sought to confirm her analysis <i>Pragmatic, instrumental approach</i>	Embedded within subject & course Placed strategically Integrated into ongoing project & questionnaire; collaborative between teacher & class Interested by the findings- sought to work with them to respond over time. <i>Pragmatic & instrumental approach</i>	Embedded within subject & course Short term aims Poster design and dialogue. Collaborative teacher & class Findings affirmed what teacher already knew-accepted at face value <i>Pragmatic & instrumental approach</i>	Embedded within subject & course Short term aims Questionnaire. Limited collaboration with researcher Findings interested her but she could not respond to most of them as they were too diverse <i>Adopting the status quo- views not fully representative of student views</i>
Perceived changes to practice	<i>Significant changes to practice</i>	<i>Potentially significant</i> but not in short term	<i>Limited changes</i> to practice- teacher changed what was 'easy'	Mismatch, teacher 'lots', students 'limited'
Perceived changes in classroom relationships	Female students felt more respectful of the teacher, males did not. Teacher felt closer to the group.	Female students felt more respectful of the teacher. Male students-no change. Teacher felt limited change in classroom relationships .	No change to teacher-student relationships. Students themselves felt closer to each other.	Female students felt slightly more respectful of the teacher. Teacher felt she had a 'changed' class. Male students-no change.

Conclusions (500)

The research findings on pages 8-13 show there was some commonality in practice across the four teachers in the case study school.

Firstly, compounding existing research evidence classroom assessment practices were seen to differ across the subject areas (James & Pedder, 2006). The Dance and the English classes appeared to have embedded formative assessment practices within their classrooms and their approach to learning. Conversely, classroom assessment in History and Maths was more teacher led. All four teachers claimed to follow the central whole school approach to assessment closely, however the Dance and English teachers both felt they had adopted the approach on a fitness for purpose basis, ensuring that the needs of their subject were not subsumed by the whole school mantra. Therefore, my research suggests that AfL looks and feels distinct across subject areas/domains.

Secondly, all four teachers responded to the consultation by seeking to embed the approach within the teaching of their individual subjects and within the everyday routines of classroom life. For the Maths teacher this meant working with numbers and choosing to use the consultation process to demonstrate various statistical techniques. For the English teacher the consultation process was embedded within a sequence of lessons and used as part of a 'You the Teacher' project looking ahead strategically with possible changes to practice. All four teachers also claimed that teaching their subject was *unique*, each bringing its own opportunities and constraints. It seems therefore that the concept of pedagogic content knowledge may be applicable to teachers' choice and use of consultation strategies at this level (14-19)

Thirdly, where there was considered to be changes in the use of classroom assessment practices these were associated with teachers who adopted a strategic approach to the consultation process. The History and the English teachers both acknowledged that short term aims were unlikely to have lasting consequences. Conversely the Dance and Maths teachers approached the research with a focus on the short term and what could be achieved with immediate effect. They chose to do this for different and quite specific reasons.

Finally in relation to the changing nature of classroom relationships there was a noticeable difference between the ways in which male and female students understood the impact of consultation on relationships within the classroom. Female students in all four subjects reported feeling more respectful of the views and opinions of their peers and the teacher as a result of the consultation. Male students did not report these feelings at all. This may of course be a result of the use of group interviews and males tendency to hide their emotions in such situations. This gender split was not evident with the teachers (the English teacher was the only male), however a split was evident in relation to the English and Dance teachers who felt little had changed as they already had well developed classroom relationships based on openness, trust and respect. The History and Maths teachers felt more had changed and that the consultation process had strengthened their relationships with their classes. The key difference in relation to the teachers seemed to be where the approach was construed as being 'new' or different the impact was perceived to be greater.

It would seem on the basis of this limited small scale study that using student consultation has the potential to improve classroom teaching and learning practices and to enhance relationships between teacher-students and the students themselves, all of which are important features in classrooms and schools conducive to innovation and improvement. Student consultation has transformative potential as it seeks to open up channels of communication on a range of topics which may otherwise remain untouched. Case studies such as this one illustrate some of the opportunities and the constraints facing schools, subject communities, teachers and groups of students. If student consultation is to become a fully recognized strategy for enhancing school improvement and for empowering students to become the creative and critical thinkers which the knowledge-and informative rich society needs then the educational community needs to find ways of articulating the strong and growing body of evidence indicating the transformative potential of student-voice. For policy makers to listen and take action requires tangible evidence of 'what works' and this is an enormous hurdle because as reported in this case study teachers in different subject areas and working in different schools will experience consultation in distinct ways. The approach of 'one size fits all' is unlikely to be met with praise by any quarter of the educational community. In the 14-19 sector where difference and distinction seem to be the order of the day, the time may be coming for school leaders and policy makers to acknowledge the strong and powerful voice of individual subject communities and seek to approach student consultation by attending to the views and preferences of subject teachers working in distinct sectors of education.

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This document was added to the Education-line collection on 22 January 2010