The danger of subverting students' views in schools

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Abstract

This paper is firmly grounded in the position that engaging with students' voices in schools is central to the development of inclusive practices. It explores the tensions that can be created when efforts are made to engage with students' voices in relation to their experiences of learning and teaching. An example from a three-year research and development project, which worked alongside teachers to use students' voices as a way of developing inclusive practices, is used to illustrate these tensions. This project, though showing that students' voices can be a powerful means for understanding learning and teaching in schools, also encountered challenges with these processes. This paper focuses on the experiences of one secondary school which (possibly inadvertently) subverted and undermined students' voice initiatives and explores the potential negative impacts of this on individual students, on students as a whole, and on teacher development. By doing this, suggestions as to how such tensions can be avoided in schools are offered, with the aim being to allow a genuine engagement with the views of students.

Introduction

The concept of 'inclusive education', though continually evolving, has increasingly been seen as concerning the provision of education for all children (Ainscow and Kaplan, 2005; Slee 2001). Essential to this, many educators have argued, is the importance of understanding the experiences of education from the perspectives of those who directly encounter it, which in the case of schooling, means children and young people (Thomson, 2008; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). Slee, for example, states that inclusive education 'requires that we seek understandings of exclusion from the perspectives of those who are devalued and rendered marginal ...' (2011, 107). The notion of engaging with students' voices, therefore becomes intertwined with inclusive education. It is from this position that this paper - and the project it describes - emanate.

The students' voices movement has gained considerable attention over the last two decades not least due to the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (1989) which ratified children's right to be heard through Articles 12 and 13. Since then, a significant number of countries have ratified the Convention with governments required to demonstrate how they implement the Convention's principles. The term 'students' voices' (or student voice as it is most widely used) encompasses a range of meanings, from expression of views either verbally or non-verbally, to active participation in decision-making. This spectrum has been well illustrated by way of a ladder (Hart 1992) or a pathway (Shier 2001), both of which indicate that there are greater and lesser ways in which children and young people can express their views and participate. Hart's ladder in particular also highlights the pitfalls in participation initiatives by using words such as 'manipulation' and 'tokenism' (Hart 1992).

In the UK the students' voices movement has been endorsed amongst practitioners and academics, and is reflected in some policy documents (e.g. DfES 2003; DfES 2001). A number of empirical studies in various contexts have demonstrated the impact that an engagement

with students' voices has on students and on practitioners (Davies et al. 2005). For example, Flutter (2007) suggests there seems to be a change both in terms of thinking and practice of teachers who are involved in student voices approaches. However, such processes can also be challenging. More explicit concerns about the movement have been expressed, especially amongst teachers, for example, about when students are involved in appointment processes in schools (TES 2009; NASUWT 2010). This was emphatically stated by the General Secretary of the NASUWT in 2010 when she argued:

> Children are not small adults. They are in schools to learn, not to teach or manage the school ... it is clear that too many schools are engaging not in student voice but in the manipulation of children and young people to serve the interests of school management and its perspective (Keates cited in Williams, 5).

This paper does not have space to engage in the debate as to whether particular examples of student voice initiatives, such as involving students in staff appointments, have gone too far. Rather, it focuses specifically on using students' voices to develop learning and teaching, and in turn, inclusive practices. By using examples from one secondary school in the UK, it seeks to explore some of the tensions that can be created when engaging with students' views in schools. In discussing these, an exploration of how students' voices can be subverted, despite efforts to be heard, will be made. In addition, the paper aims to identify possible ways forward when dealing with tensions that might co-exist alongside students' voices initiatives, and the implications that these might have for contexts that wish to engage genuinely with students' voices and develop inclusive practices.

Students' voices: focus on learning and teaching

A number of studies have looked at students' voices in schools. The phrase itself is hard to define, as outlined by McLeod (2011):

Despite its popular currency, it is often not clear what exactly is meant by 'voice' and, more particularly, what is actually being summoned in the notion of 'student voice'. Voice is a resonant yet slippery term, sometimes used metaphorically, sometimes literally, sometimes with benign connotations, at other times with subtle regulatory and oppressive ones (180 -181).

Thomson (2008) argues that voice means 'Having a say, as well as referring to language, emotional components as well as non-verbal means that are used to express opinions' (4). Adopting such a formulation, we also go beyond the concept of language and refer to other ways of expressing opinions.

In many research studies, 'students' voices' has been translated into exploring students' views on issues such as school uniforms, what students think about the playground (e.g. Lawson 2010; Burke 2005), the physical environment in the school (e.g. Kaplan 2005) or their experiences with bullying (e.g. Thomson and Gunter, 2007). Whilst all of these are very important areas that need to be given attention, it is of equal importance to involve students in areas that are related to learning and teaching. This can be of great value for schools since students can offer an alternative perspective to that of adults and can help practitioners learn more about their successes and failures and consider possible changes (Charlton 1996).

In the UK, the first major initiative that focused directly on issues of learning and teaching was the influential ESRC-funded project "Consulting pupils about learning and teaching" (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Since then a number of other studies have been developed based on the ideas of this project, with some examples where students were not just consulted but also worked as co-researchers in order to develop the curriculum. For example, Leat and Reid (2012) explored the role of student researchers in a secondary school for a curriculum development project alongside a university. They describe how the student researchers had a positive effect on what was taught, by whom and how. They argue that the key to these changes was located in relationships, more precisely the change

of relationships amongst students and teachers (see also Hope 2012 a,b). Similarly, Fielding (2004) has emphasised the importance of relationships between student researchers and teachers, and the opportunities that are opened up through dialogues between them. In addition, Fielding and Bragg (2003) provide a list of the positive impacts on student researchers such as: developing a positive sense of self and agency, inquiring minds and learning new skills, social competences and new relationships, as well as reflecting on their own learning and becoming creative and active.   Likewise, studies in other countries suggest similar benefits. For example, Mitra's work in the United States (2003; 2004) suggests that student voice activities can create meaningful experiences for students, which help to meet fundamental developmental needs. In her own work she demonstrated a growth of agency, belonging and competence for students involved in students' voices activities, especially for those students who otherwise do not find meaning in their school experiences. In addition, Carrington et al (2010) emphasise the importance of pedagogy for fun and engagement, positive student–teacher relationships and student-centred learning based on work carried out with student researchers in Australia.

However, such processes - regardless of the benefits mentioned above - also entail challenges, both for researchers as well as for schools that give students a voice.   For example, Cunninghame et al. (2009) refer to a case where some school staff were displeased with the findings of student researchers (which were challenging teacher-pupil communication in the school), and therefore, ensured that the researchers' posters with these findings were not displayed. Kaplan (2005) also refers to an example where the deputy head removed visual images and comments about supply teachers from the presentation of student researchers as these were not seen as positive. Similarly Wilson (2000) uses the phrase "backstop principals", to mean senior members of staff who amend, frustrate and reject students' ideas. Such reactions, as these examples suggest, mostly frequently seem to occur when the issues that students bring to the surface relate to challenging issues about learning and teaching. When this happens, it can be argued that students' voices have not been used in an effective way but rather in tokenistic ways (Hart 1992; Shier 2001). It is interesting to note that school councils – frequently seen as the main

mechanism for eliciting students' voices – often do not engage meaningfully in dialogue about teaching and learning (Robinson and Koehn 1994; Wyse 2001).

To sum up, despite the fact that there is literature suggesting that students view issues in schools in different ways compared to adults, and can offer insightful perspectives that can make teachers change their practices (Messiou 2012), it appears that such processes present considerable challenges when used in schools.

Therefore, the key questions that will be addressed in this paper are:

- What tensions are created when involved in students' voices initiatives in schools?
- In which subtle ways can students' voices be subverted in schools (despite efforts to be heard)?
- What should schools have in mind when engaging with students' voices, in order to make sure that they are truly heard?

Two examples of what happened in one secondary school in the UK will be used as an illustration of the challenges associated with such processes. This paper is written by the two university researchers who were actively involved, alongside teachers, in action-research in this particular school.

Background to the project

The secondary school that is used as an illustration in this paper was an active partner in a three year (2011 -2014) European Union project. The aims of the project were to explore how teachers can use students' voices to develop more inclusive practices with regard to teaching and learning. The project involved 13 organisational participants in total, 5 universities and 8 secondary schools across three countries (Spain, Portugal and the UK). The schools were selected because of the wide-ranging diversity of their student populations. The methodology used was that of collaborative action research. Teachers

worked alongside university researchers to carry out an intense two-cycle action research project where the views of students were used to inform and develop learning and teaching practices in schools. Using an evolving framework to guide them, each team experimented with ways of collecting and engaging with the views of students in order to foster the development of more inclusive classroom practices. The project's central claim to originality and significance was in the way it merged two previously distinct approaches: one of engaging with students' voices and the other of lesson study. Lesson study, though known as an established method for encouraging teachers to reflect upon their teaching practices, had previously been entirely reliant on the views of teachers with no account taken of the perspectives of students. Observations and interviews were carried out in order to identify ways in which these processes led to changes in thinking and the introduction of inclusive practices amongst the teachers. (for more details about the methodology, please see Messiou et. al. in press).

There is evidence that teachers from all eight schools in all three countries, through their engagement with the project, fundamentally changed their thinking and practices. As a direct result of the project, some have stated, they have modified their practices to respond to the diverse learners in their classrooms. However, this process was not straightforward. In this paper, by focusing on one of the participating schools in detail, we explore the complexities associated with the engagement of students' voices. It has to be noted that challenges such as the ones experienced in the school described here, were experienced in the other participating schools to some degree, in some schools more than in others. These findings, therefore, are not UK-specific; they resonate across all eight schools and in Spain and Portugal as well as in the UK. However, a rather striking example of one UK school is used to highlight how the process of engaging with students' voices can be challenging and to identify possible ways to address such challenges. The data used here come from interviews with students and with staff, as well as from records of observations which were made for monitoring the progress in the schools.

The school in question is an average-sized secondary school based in a city in the North of England. Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Eastern Europe and the UK. Nearly one third of the students are eligible for Free School Meals (a measure of deprivation) and approximately 15% of the school population has special educational needs. The school was keen to be involved with this project because it had taken a renewed interest in engaging with students' voices and had made an explicit commitment to developing mechanisms for student engagement. All other identifying features of the school, its staff team and its students have been removed or changed in order to protect anonymity.

We, as university researchers, worked in close collaboration with our colleagues in this school. Our relationship was based on equality, though it was recognised by all that roles and expertise were different. It was vital to the action-research methodology that the schools felt in control of the processes that they undertook and that they felt able to make their own decisions about their specific context. We, as outsiders, explicitly acknowledged (and we do again here) that teaching takes place in an increasingly challenging environment and that taking account of students' views places additional levels of pressure on teachers. Our role was to support teachers to find innovative ways of engaging with students, to advise them about the use of lesson study (if they had not used it before) and to monitor the impact of the new approaches on teachers' thinking and practices and on students' attitudes.

This paper has been written by us, as university researchers, but its content has been discussed on numerous occasions with our colleagues at the school in question. They have helped us to refine our understanding of what happened at this school through engaging in open and honest dialogue with us. By publishing this paper, it is not our intention to come across as critical of the school in any way, but rather, to use the experiences here as an opportunity for us all to learn and to develop our understanding of the complexity of using students' voices in schools.

Two examples of ways in which students' voices were subverted:

1. Choosing to dilute the potency of students' views for other members of staff:

During the first cycle of the project, teachers chose to focus on one particular cohort of students who they felt were not achieving their full academic potential and might therefore be considered marginalised. We (university researchers) took the role of leading small focus groups with this specific group of students in order to gather data about their experiences in relation to learning and teaching practices in school. The main tool used during the focus group interviews was the Diamond Nine Activity (Fox and Messiou 2004). This interactive group-based activity involved giving students 15 cards with statements regarding learning. They were asked to choose 9 cards and put them in the shape of a diamond, having at the top the one they believed to be most important and at the bottom the one they thought was least important. The Diamond Nine Activity provoked intensive discussion amongst the students about learning and it helped students to recognise that their thoughts differed from one another. Some, for example, believed that lessons should prepare students for getting a job whereas others felt that school should be fun. The groups were observed and their discussions were recorded and later transcribed.

The views of the students varied considerably and included:

> *"I think it's easier to learn by doing it, then you can memorise how you did it, than just learning it off the board and writing it down."*

> *"It was very good when we watched a film. It was much better than reading a book or explaining it to you. You actually watch it. So when we had the assessment it was so much easier to write it cos we remembered it."*

> *"Learning should be about having fun, and understanding life, instead of just getting a job. Because people could learn anything, and be really smart, and not get a job."*

In addition, students, offered constructive feedback such as the following advice to teachers:

> *"do more fun activities. It's an easier way to learn, like, say if you just sit there and read through a book, you get bored and distracted and don't even read it, but say if you did something like a game or something else, then we'd listen."*

However, a number of more challenging comments were raised such as those below:

> *"Some subjects could be interesting, but the way that they are taught makes them boring (it's the method of teaching, not the content, that is boring)"*

> *"I don't like it when teachers favourite other students, say if someone's really loud and is messing about but the teacher likes them, they just don't bother with them, but if someone else is really loud and the teacher doesn't like them, they'll always pick on them and I don't think it's fair."*

> *"We put our hands up and then she tells you put your hands down and wait for the answers. And I say 'it is about work, I don't understand it'. And she says 'just put your hands down and wait for the answers'. But then it's not learning is it? It is just listening to the answers. You don't learn anything."*

As can be seen, the comments were detailed and specific. When the collection of data was completed, a report was sent to the teachers who were leading the project. The report consisted of students' quotations, as well as our own reflections. We organised the issues brought up by the students in eight themes that emerged based on what the students discussed. These were: feedback, ways of working, asking questions, students left out in lessons, seating/grouping plans, teachers' attitudes, having a say/choice of what you learn, other general comments (such as best thing in school, rules in school etc.).

After the direct quotations, which we felt to be the most powerful section of the report, the main recommendations were identified as follows:

- Students want lessons to be **more creative** and hands-on.

- Students want to be able to **choose the groups** that they work in even though they appreciate that teachers might think that they would about if they sat with friends, they still wanted to be given a chance.

- Students do not like feeling as if teachers have **favourites** and that rules do not apply to everyone equally

- Students want **more feedback** on their work, and not just in terms of assessments.

- Students want to be able to **ask questions** more often, and for teachers to **check whether they understand.**

We ended the report with our reflections, emphasising that we focused more on areas for improvement.

Our intention was that this report would be shared with other members of staff and we encouraged the teachers to use the quotations to stimulate further discussions amongst all. Although we included many direct quotations, these had already been anonymised by taking out any specific reference to school subjects or particular staff. For us, what was important was to think about the issues raised in order to improve teaching practices, rather than focusing on specific subjects. In other words, a comment made for a Maths lesson for example, could have been equally helpful for a Science lesson.

However, the teachers who were leading the project in the school decided to follow a different approach. They did not want to share any of the quotations from the students with the rest of the staff, since they felt that this would create tensions and would lead to the sort of comments like: "Are they talking about me?", "I do not do that in my lessons", or

"What they are saying is not the truth". Instead, they simplified the report to a single page of recommendations and circulated this.

Though we respected the teachers' decision, in our view, this diluted the potency of the students' views to some extent. What could have acted as a powerful stimulus for reflection was not utilized fully on this occasion. Fear of the reaction of colleagues acted as a barrier to engage truly with students' voices.

2. ***Using (but not using) student-researchers***

During the second cycle of the action research, the school moved into another level by extending the position of students within the project. Based on the understanding gained in the first cycle, and especially that students have insightful ideas in relation to teaching and learning, as well as the importance of actively engaging them in school processes, teachers decided to give students a more central role by asking them to become student-researchers. This gave students a far more active role as they could become the drivers of the project and could play a role in making key decisions about direction. The school asked the same group which took part in the first focus groups to become researchers (those who were perceived as being on the margins). Fourteen student-researchers from this school received intensive training at the university about methods of data collection and analysis and about planning their school-based research. The student-reseachers worked with teachers and made plans to carry our interactive activities and role-play with their peers. They left the university feeling enthusiastic and eager to get on with the project, as documented by some of the evaluation feedback they gave on the day. However, some months later, we interviewed the student-researchers about their experiences and realised that the momentum was lost. They had started to see their tasks as being an additional 'chore' and some of them had dropped out. Despite making decisions to carry out interactive activities, including some that they had invented themselves, they had reverted to a more traditional 'question and answer' format which they found 'boring' and entailed writing up notes and reports to pass to the lead teacher. They did not appear to have any sense of control over the research or any power to change their role in it. When asked whether they felt that

teachers in the school were aware of what they were doing or the purpose of their work, the answer was emphatically 'no.'

The teachers at the school reflected on the experience of the student-researchers and came to two conclusions: first, by being invited to participate, the student-researchers had been thrust into a leadership role which, with hindsight, did not suit some of them (which might be the case but is also a deficit way of thinking about these students); and second, the school acknowledged that the level of support offered to the student-researchers was minimal and that they might justifiably feel 'abandoned'.

It is important to point out that this second cycle of the project coincided with one of the teachers in the leading team for the project being on leave. Another member of staff took over who did not hold a senior position in the school. This is significant because, as has been noted in other research (Kent and Deal 1998; Deal and Peterson 1999), seniority matters in terms of having an impact on school processes. In this particular case, the student-researchers needed a clear sense of working *alongside* teachers rather than just working on their own, and this sense of partnership was lacking. The student-researchers did not feel that they were heard within the school and thus, their motivation to continue waned. The school expressed its wish to have student-researchers, but in the event, these students were drastically underused. Their voices (or their potential voices) were thus undermined.

Discussion:

The purpose of engaging with students' voices as part of this three-year EU-funded project was, ultimately, to use these to develop inclusive practices. Evidence from this project suggests that the teachers did benefit to a great extent from the ideas offered by the students, and more importantly from the exchange of ideas amongst colleagues and students (Messiou et al, in press). One, for example, said that:

"I know it's changed my practice. I do incorporate more practical work and kinaesthetic-style activities because they do enjoy doing them and do get a genuine delight out of doing them."

There are significant indications that teachers in the school explored in this paper did move forward and develop their practices, as evidenced by peer observations, self-reflective questionnaires and students' feedback. Many believed in the importance of giving power to students. As the second cycle of the project showed, they gave students a more active role by asking them to become student-researchers, largely because they were convinced during the first cycle about the importance of engaging with students' views.

However, the emphasis of our paper here has taken a different angle. We have tried to explore what happens when teachers - either intentionally or unintentionally - do not manage to engage in **meaningful** ways with students. This has important implications: for individual students; for the student population as a whole and for teacher development.

In this school, it is perhaps unfortunate that the students who formed the focus groups in the first cycle of action research were later the ones who were invited to become student-researchers. Rather than having two chances to express their voices, in reality, they might more accurately be seen as experiencing a double impact in terms of not being heard. The teachers were well intentioned when they gave the opportunity to this particular group of students (identified as marginalised) to become student researchers. What they wished was to give them a key role in the school. In the teachers' view, perhaps some of these students were not suited to this role and were rather pushed into it, but without really want to be in these roles. They were then (inadvertently) 'blamed' for not fulfilling the potential of these roles. This, of course, reflects a deficit way of thinking about students and one that we do not sit comfortably with. For us, it was more the way that the process was managed in the second cycle that created the difficulties rather than any 'failings' in the students themselves (something that was also acknowledged by the teachers).

Looking at the students' responses, it could be argued that it was the fact that they saw no change that led them to be disinterested. For example, one mused on her experiences by saying: *"I don't think the lessons have really changed, they are still the same really, you just switch off and they're really boring."* Keeping in mind that these were the students who made specific suggestions in the first cycle of the study and were in a position to see whether their ideas led to sustainable changes in practice or not. Furthermore, in reflecting on their experiences as student-researchers, their body language communicated far more than their words. Video recordings and observations indicated that students who were once excited and animated had become fidgety, disinterested and monosyllabic. Their body language was so noticeable that it made us consider whether they had stopped wanting to engage in discussions as they had not seen any significant or lasting changes which they could attribute to their own efforts. This relates to Thomson's (2005) notion of voice as well as Lewis's (2010) interesting point that voice means listening to silences and what these might mean.

The student population as a whole is also impacted by unsuccessful efforts to engage with voices because they will have no sense of moving forwards. In this example, the student-researchers canvassed the views of their peers in other year groups and found, for instance, that students wanted more hands-on and interactive lessons – in short, they found that students were saying exactly what they had said the previous year. This could potentially continue every year, with students giving similar feedback, as has been the case in a great deal of research about students' voices (see, for example, Burke and Grosvenor 2003).

Finally, teachers are significantly affected by a lack of meaningful engagement with students' voices. By diluting what students said, as in the first example in this paper, teachers in the wider staff team missed opportunities to gain valuable insight into their teaching practices and thus, reflect on and develop their practices. By underusing the student-researchers and subverting their voices, as in the second example, teachers risk students' disengagement at various levels. The consequences of this can be significant in terms of relationships with students (Finn 1989; Furrer and Skinner 2003).

As mentioned earlier teachers' resistance to what students say is something that has been found by other researchers (e.g. Ainscow and Kaplan, 2005; Kaplan, 2005; Messiou 2012). Fielding (2004) argues that:

> There are some voices we wish to hear and others we do not and in dismissing those that seem to us as too strident, too offensive or too irresponsible we may often miss things of importance and of a deeper seriousness than our first impressions allow (303).

The teachers in the school described in this paper dealt with this issue by sharing carefully edited versions of the students' views. Though for us as researchers, this cannot have the same impact on teachers, compared to when using exact quotations, it makes us reconsider as to whether this could be a starting point for schools who are new to such approaches. In other words, since students' voices can cause feelings of uncertainty and dissatisfaction amongst teachers (based on what this particular group of teachers claimed), it could be argued that the way the teachers in this school chose to approach it was a sensitive and appropriate response for that particular context. On the other hand, we would see this as appropriate only as a starting point. In our view, what is 'disturbing' and specific is more likely to affect teachers and their practices in the classroom and that engaging with students' views about a specific subject (with no editing at all) is more likely to challenge teachers to rethink what they do and change it. Whereas, if the comments shared are generic there is the risk of teachers saying that this does not apply to them. Surely, such an approach involves ethical issues and it needs to be dealt carefully. For example, if specific challenging issues arise that relate only to a particular teacher these could be shared individually with the teacher involved rather than shared with all in a team meeting. The evidence that we have in regards to teachers changing their way of thinking and practice comes from the teachers that were leading the project who read the students' exact quotations. One of them said:

> *"This had taken ... certainly two of us out of our normal ways of teaching and that was a good thing 'cos it challenged us as professionals ... it challenged us to do something different and that's a positive thing ..."*

Or, as the other teacher said:

> *"it actually boosted our self-esteem to see that trying these new things had worked ... it had paid off ... and that made us feel good as teachers ..."*.

These staff also shared that the engagement with students' views was personally and professionally challenging for them. On one occasion, a student joked with her that:

> *"I thought we weren't meant to be using text books any more ... thought you were meant to be putting a bit of effort in, Miss"*

As the teacher admitted, she knew the student very well and was able to laugh off this comment, however as she pointed out:

> *"some other teachers might not have felt happy about that and I must admit ... it stayed with me that comment ... so maybe I have got paranoia there ... you have to be careful about how you feed back ... the feedback's got to be done carefully so obviously with teachers ... you don't want them to get paranoid ... you don't want them to take a step back so you have got to be careful and scale up somebody who has the power to feed back ..."*

This teacher brings up a very important point about how the students phrase the feedback that they give to teachers, so that teachers' confidence is not damaged due to the words that the students might use. Therefore, this is an area that schools who wish to use such approaches should have in mind. Perhaps giving examples to students about the different

ways in which views can be expressed so that teachers are able to hear the feedback without getting defensive could be a good way forward.

Conclusion

Returning to the questions that we set out to explore in this paper, as evidenced through the two examples that we used, tensions can be created in schools that engage with the views of students. Such tensions can be experienced both by teachers and by students. For, example, teachers might feel threatened by what the students say, as we saw in the example where they decided not to share the quotes from students due to fears of the colleagues' reactions.   . On the other hand, there were tensions about the students, for example, when students themselves saw little value in sharing their views with their teachers if nothing happened after those views were shared.   This is an example of the numerous and subtle ways in which students' views can be subverted and reinforces the point that students need to feel that their opinions are taken into account somehow, even if what they suggest might not necessarily be what happens in the end.

As argued by many of our teachers in the project, teachers do have the professional knowledge to make judgements about issues of learning and teaching. What is of importance though is to make sure that students are informed as to why certain decisions are made, and to demonstrate to them that they are indeed heard. Otherwise, their voices are subverted and important opportunities for teacher development might be missed.

Engaging with students' voices, in a genuine way, is an important step in the development of inclusive practices in schools. As this project has shown, doing this meaningfully is challenging but there are also dangers in doing it simplistically. Slee (2011) suggests that 'inclusive education invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer and our role in shaping both of those worlds (14). In this respect, it can be argued

that students' views, if listened to carefully, can allow schools to rethink their own roles in developing more inclusive environments.

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