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## Consulting Pupils on the Assessment of their Learning

This project examined pupils' participation in their own assessment from a children's rights perspective, based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It demonstrated that when genuine opportunities for participating in and understanding assessment are presented, pupils engage in the outcomes of their learning and focus on their progress. Children show the motivation and capacity to be involved in decision-making processes where policy makers use child-centred methods to consult children directly.

- Children can be consulted directly by policy-makers on matters of educational significance such as assessment policy and practice.



Child-centred consultation methods allow children's views to be expressed. It is important that methods be inclusive and that children's views be listened and responded to by adults.

- Pupils derive educational benefits through developing increased understanding of their assessment in classrooms where there is congruence between a teacher's beliefs and practices of Assessment for Learning (AfL).



Teachers need supported to create participative classroom learning cultures based on sustainable rather than instrumental AfL.

- Teachers and parents are generally supportive of children's rights and increasing participation in learning and assessment.



Opportunities are for increased awareness across the education system of how to apply and evaluate children's rights in practice.

- Children can be involved collaboratively as co-researchers in mainstream research projects in ways that enhance the inquiry and enshrine children's rights.



This takes time and careful negotiation. We need a better understanding of the implications of engaging children more democratically in research.

# The research

This project was designed to take account of the current educational policy context in Northern Ireland through its focus on two major assessment initiatives - pupil profiles (PP) and assessment for learning (AfL). Although locally situated, it adds to our understanding of assessment and learning practices and their relation to policy development in other countries (Sebba, 2006), and to our knowledge of the role of pupils in policy-making and implementation. Given its connection to current policy, the project also addressed questions about how to carry out research with schools, teachers, policy makers and especially pupils in a context of national policy change. The study engaged with three existing research fields: Assessment for Learning, Pupil Voice and Children's Rights.

## Assessment for Learning

There is accumulating evidence of gains in pupil achievement and self-esteem resulting from interventions based on what we now call Assessment for Learning. AfL is a pedagogical approach which emphasises the crucial role of formative assessment in the learning process. It is based on such practices as sharing learning intentions, expectations, and success criteria, and on providing effective feedback, quality questioning, dynamic group work and self- and peer-assessment. With the recent shift in attention to the learner, with its implications for the development of learner autonomy, this study explored these practices within a children's rights framework.

## Pupil Voice

Studies by Rudduck et al (2003) have provided evidence for the educational benefits of engaging pupil voice about teaching and learning. This project showed that engaging pupil voice was necessary but not sufficient, and set out to explore the tensions between consultation which is limited to classroom practices and consultation which explicitly involves children in participatory citizenship.

## Children's Rights

Children's Rights in assessment are a relatively under-researched area. This study conceptualised pupil consultation on assessment from a critical legal perspective. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legal and moral imperative with two key elements, the right to express a view and the right to have the view given due weight.

These rights have been further analysed into four distinct facets:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: The view must be listened to
- Influence: The view must be acted upon as appropriate (Lundy 2007:933).

This model underpinned the design and conceptualisation of the project.

## What we did

We undertook a qualitative, in-depth study in primary and post-primary schools to understand the possibilities, processes and consequences of pupils becoming fuller participants in their own assessment. It comprised three interrelated studies, each of which had a particular focus on children's rights and pupil participation in assessment initiatives

## What were pupils consulted about?

Pupils at Key stage 2 were consulted about what they thought about the introduction of an annual pupil profile as a way of assessing their development and progress, and how they thought their own views might best be incorporated in this development.

At Key stage 3, pupils were consulted on how they experienced participation in

classrooms embodying AfL principles and practices. They were asked what helped or hindered their learning and assessment in these contexts, and how they understood the language of assessment including terms such as achievement, grades, criteria, feedback, and self- and peer-assessment.

## What were teachers and parents consulted about?

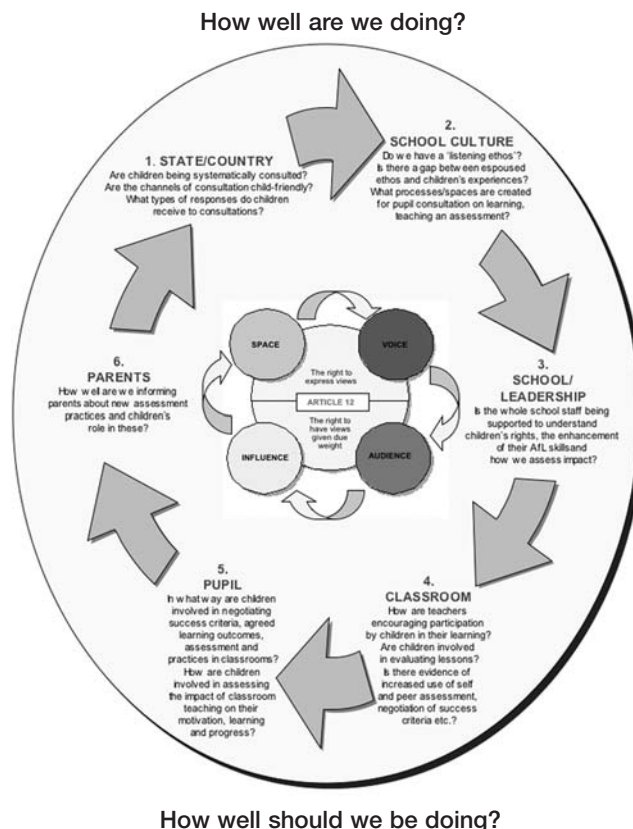
### Children's Rights and Assessment

Teachers' and parents' views on pupil participation in assessment and children's rights were identified. The aim was to highlight any tensions between their views and children's entitlement.

### Students as co-researchers

The project enshrined the principles of pupil rights and participation within its own design and processes. Some of the pupils at KS2 and KS3 advised on appropriate ethical informed consent and the methods for Study 1 and Study 2, and co-researched and co-interpreted aspects of the data. In addition to traditional survey methods, the project developed creative methods for use with pupils and teachers which incorporated E-consultation, focus groups, drawings, and pupils' digital recordings of their AfL classroom experiences, and which used co-interpretation of drawings and digital recordings of classroom observations.

### Children's Rights Perspective and Assessment for Learning (AfL)



## What KS2 stage pupils said about pupil profiles

KS2 pupils indicated to policy-makers that a pupil profile should:

- be seen as a personal document as well as an academic one
- provide detailed teacher feedback to improve their learning
- help them and their parents and guardians to make good decisions about their progress and future schooling
- be child-friendly, attractive and colourful
- be written in readable, understandable language
- include a voluntary section for pupil self-assessment
- include a picture of a pupil's wider abilities and achievements
- contain 'best work' exemplars chosen by teacher and pupil together
- have a section completed by parents or guardians
- be given to the pupil throughout the year to give time for improvement
- encourage a pupil to think well of themselves and their potential to achieve.

## What KS3 pupils said about assessment

KS3 pupils felt most positive about their assessment in classes where:

- they knew what they were supposed to do in any task, test or homework
- the teacher discussed with them how their work would be assessed
- they understood the language of assessment
- they knew how to assess their own work and practised doing so
- they could evaluate a classmate's work and tell them how to improve
- they were given positive feedback on what they had done ok or well
- positive comments came before any negative ones
- they were not made to feel embarrassed about their work
- they were told how to improve individually and could work out what they needed to do
- feedback was presented clearly and soon
- marks were accompanied by detailed comments
- any classmate's assessment was supported by the teacher's comments.

Pupils indicated that teachers who espoused the 'spirit' of AfL provided greater opportunities for genuine participation in learning and assessment, and were personally convinced of its importance. Such teachers associated their commitment to child-centred values

## Major implications

Our project has implications for children and young people, for teachers and school leaders, for government and policy-makers, and for researchers.

### Consultation

Study 1 showed how to engage pupils directly in consultation on a current government policy initiative, using a variety of child-centred e-consultation mechanisms. The children identified candid preferences for how their progress should be recorded in the profile for their educational benefit. In order to ensure that children's views are taken seriously, it is important that there be a direct conduit to government and that children are provided with feedback on how their ideas have been taken into account. Information and communications technology was integral to the realisation of the rights-based approach upon which the e-consultation process was modeled and is worthy of further development and application. If Article 12 is to be fully implemented in schools, action needs to be taken to ensure that children are involved at each stage of a decision-making process that will impact on their classroom experience.

### Learning and Assessment

This project provides evidence of the educational benefits of engaging pupils directly on assessment in classrooms. Pupils indicate increased motivation and willingness to engage in their learning progress where their views are taken into account, where classroom learning engages them in practical learning activities and where the teacher is inclusive, concerned about their progress and listens to their

with having been afforded a say (or not) in their own childhood. They explained gaps between their values and practices as being both personal (e.g. lack of reflexivity) and systemic (e.g. school culture).

Pupils in classrooms where teachers showed evidence of coherence between the their beliefs and their AfL practices demonstrated more in-depth understanding of assessment principles and practices than those in classrooms where coherence was less evident, or where pupils' assessment discourse was restricted to tests and examinations.

## What teachers and parents said about children's rights and pupils' participation

Most teachers and school leaders were supportive in principle of children's rights in learning and assessment, but had an

ideas. This provides an atmosphere in which pupils are encouraged to indicate their learning and where it is OK not to know. Given the unevenness of pupils' experiences of participation and consultation even within a single school, this suggests the need for awareness-raising and for audits to check the progress of children's rights in relation to learning and assessment. Capacity should be built through in-school reflection and by means of pre-service and in-service development of teachers. These should be designed to help teachers in classrooms engage pupils authentically through AfL practices and encourage all pupils to participate in decisions of significance to them.

### Research

While there is a rapidly-expanding research literature on engaging pupils more democratically in the research process, this project extends the notion of students as co-researchers within an externally driven project. By engaging pupils as research advisers, data gatherers and co-interpreters of data, it was possible to develop research processes which were commensurate with a rights framework. Pupils were provided with opportunities to develop and express their ideas on the research independent of adults (Space and Voice) and to have their ideas incorporated into research methods, process and outcomes (Audience and Influence). Given the demonstrable benefits of engagement and the legal and moral imperatives of Article 12, the challenges to authentic student involvement identified by this project (time, money, power structures) need to be taken seriously and allowed for in research proposals and funding bids.

imperfect understanding of children's rights as expressed in Article 12 of the UNCRC. They found the concepts of Space and Voice valuable in explaining their practices of consulting children and encouraging participation in classroom practices, but misconstrued the concepts of Audience and Influence. They identified lack of time, class size, accountability and curriculum constraints as barriers to full implementation of consultation and engagement. Most were keen to expand their knowledge in this area and how to apply this to educational practice.

Parents were largely supportive of their children's increasing participation in learning and assessment through AfL practices such as sharing learning objectives, negotiating success criteria, think time, "no hands up," and formative feedback. Some expressed reservations about self-assessment, and a significant percentage had little confidence in the value of peer assessment.

## Further information

Further information including downloadable findings and materials for use with pupils can be found on the project website (see below) This website can also be accessed via the TLRP website: [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org).

For academic readers, the processes and methodology of students as co-researchers is to be found in:

Leitch, R, Gardner, J, Mitchell, S, Lundy, L, Odena, O, Galanouli, D & Clough, P. (2007) Consulting pupils in 'Assessment for Learning' classrooms: The twists and turns of working with students as co-researchers. *Educational Action Research*. Vol. 15, No 3. September, 2007 pp. 459-478.

Leitch, R, Gardner, J, Mitchell, S, Lundy, L, Galanouli, D & Odena, O (2006) Researching creatively with pupils in Assessment for Learning (AfL) classrooms on experiences of participation and consultation;. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/157844.htm>

For application of e-consultation processes see: McEvoy, L & Lundy, L (2007) E-consultation with pupils: a rights-based approach to the integration of citizenship education and ICT. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, Vol. 16, No 3, pp 305-319.

### References

Lundy, L (2007) 'Voice is not enough': The implications of Article 12 of the UNCRC for Education, *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol 33, Issue 6, pp927-942.

Rudduck, J, Arnot, D, Fielding, M, McIntyre, D & Flutter, J (2003) Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning. Final Report to the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme. [www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/no5.pdf](http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/no5.pdf)

A book in the TLRP Improving Schools series, *Improving Pupil Participation in Assessment*, will provide a more general account of the project: R. Leitch et al. (2009, in preparation). It will be of interest to teachers, school leaders, teacher educators and advisers.

### Project website:

[www.cpal.qub.ac.uk](http://www.cpal.qub.ac.uk).

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## The warrant

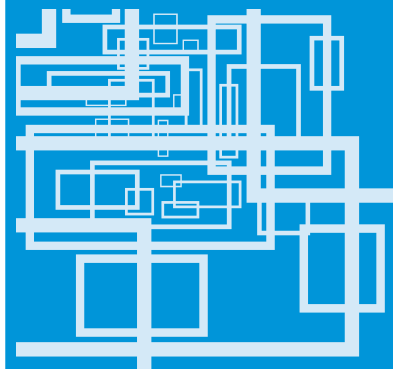
The project built on existing and robust research that has demonstrated the value of engaging pupil voice in learning and teaching and has shown how AfL practices improve learning and achievement. The project extended thinking in these areas by developing methods based on a unique and legally sound conceptualization of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989).

At all stages, the project engaged with local policy-makers for curriculum and assessment reform and with education advisers. This partnership ensured that each study was engaging with key issues and personnel within the assessment policy agenda, and provided opportunities for regular dissemination events with practitioners and policy-makers. Twice-yearly advisory group meetings ensured ongoing scrutiny and refinement of the studies.

Within the project, 290 pupils were consulted across nine schools. 157 teachers and school leaders from a representative range of schools, and 180 parents, were surveyed on pupil participation in assessment and on children's rights. Ten AfL teachers from participating schools were engaged with in depth and over time.

Data collection methods were piloted and checked by student advisory groups to ensure they were appropriately child-centred. Stimulus items within the e-consultation mechanisms were derived from a pilot group of KS 2 pupils, while KS 3 pupils collected and co-interpreted classroom observation data and images of AfL classroom experience. The extensive qualitative data were systematically analysed using standard procedures for qualitative analysis, including coding and thematic analysis using nVivo. Survey data were analysed using SPSS.

## Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP involves over 60 research teams with contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Work began in 2000 and will continue to 2011.

**Learning:** TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK.

**Outcomes:** TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes, including the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

**Lifecourse:** TLRP supports projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

**Enrichment:** TLRP commits to user engagement at all stages of research. It promotes research across disciplines, methodologies and sectors, and supports national and international co-operation.

**Expertise:** TLRP works to enhance capacity for all forms of research on teaching and learning, and for research informed policy and practice.

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