

Redesigning Schooling - 5

Student impact in the redesigned school

Tom Middlehurst

November 2013

**REDESIGNING
SCHOOLING**
THE CAMPAIGN FOR A SCHOOLS-LED
VISION FOR EDUCATION



Author

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Editors

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SSAT's purpose

SSAT believes that teachers make students' lives. As the world gets more complex, that vital role becomes ever more demanding. As the hub of the largest, longest-standing network of education professionals in England, SSAT exists to help teachers perform their job even better, more confidently and more professionally than before.

This publication

Audience: Education professionals at all stages and settings, and students engaged in student voice, leadership and impact activities.

Aims: Of all the stakeholder groups in education, children are the most important. At the heart of the Redesigning Schooling campaign is a focus on how students are supported and empowered in schools to have an impact on their own, and their peer's learning.

This pamphlet charts the journey of student voice and student leadership towards a more complete and encompassing term: student impact. It provides the theory behind this development, and shares practical examples of how schools are changing attitudes to learning by involving students in the redesign of schooling.

It ends with two perspectives, one from a headteacher and one from a student, which reiterate the case by illustrating the potentially deep and far-reaching impacts that can be achieved through engaging students meaningfully in all aspects of school life.

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Introduction



Student impact is a key part of SSAT's Redesigning Schooling campaign, and for good reason: it has become clear through our work at SSAT that change can only be fully realised when all stakeholders are engaged in the process. And no group of stakeholders is more important than the children who will spend 12 years - or 14 years, if they entered year 11 in 2013 - in statutory education.

Student involvement in the management and development of a school was originally described as student voice, and subsequently extended to student leadership. This pamphlet describes a further and yet more ambitious stage: student impact. Our working understanding of student impact is what happens when students have a real impact on their own and others' learning experiences through meaningful student voice and leadership.

Our understanding of student impact is drawn from excellent practice across the country, and built on SSAT's previous work on personalising learning; student voice being seen as one of the nine 'gateways' to achieve personalised learning for every individual student (Hargreaves, 2004).

What we are really talking about is any structured activity within a school that engages with students and enables them to have an impact on their learning, and potentially on the pedagogy and management of the school. Taken at its broadest, this could include the millions of informal, day-to-day interactions between staff and students. As David Hargreaves notes, 'in this sense, all teachers from time to time encourage and are involved in student [impact]' (Hargreaves, 2004). However, to distinguish student impact from what is essentially good pedagogy, this pamphlet will interpret the term as the more formal, planned ways of engaging students to have an impact.

The next chapter explores several implications of our understanding of student impact. Chapter 2 examines four particular initiatives and how they can support schools' work towards the wider aim of redesigning schooling. Chapter 3 offers two perspectives on the powerful contribution to school life and student development made possible when meaningful student impact is realised.

It closes with a call to action: for teachers and students across SSAT's networks to share their work in order to broaden and deepen our understanding of the power student impact has to provoke, from the ground up, real system transformation that paves the way for the genuine co-construction of schooling by students, teachers and stakeholders.

Tom Middlehurst, November 2013

Chapter 1

From student voice to student impact

Student voice, leadership or impact?

The term student impact does not reflect a rejection of or departure from earlier notions of student voice and student leadership. It encompasses and extends them.

When engaging students in issues of school redesign, it is crucial that we use a shared language (Mercer, 2000). This is discussed in depth in Emma Sims's earlier SSAT pamphlet, *Deep learning - 1* (Sims, 2006). We should apply such language not only to the content, but also the description of the discussion. How we present activities that engage with students (i.e. whether we term them student voice, leadership or impact) will greatly affect the way in which activities are perceived and the nature of those activities. If we are serious about engaging students in school redesign, we must not necessarily rely on terms that are comfortable or familiar.

The term 'voice', for instance, might suggest something ultimately passive and potentially hollow. Having a voice does not necessarily indicate that that voice is being listened to, or even heard. Moreover,

'voice' could imply that the activity is nothing more than a talking-shop, with no tangible outcomes. When one looks at the most frequent collocations (words that are commonly used alongside a particular word) of 'voice', words such as 'critical' and 'lone' count highly. If, linguistically, we associate voice with negative feeling - the sense of needing to find a voice - why do we frame activities designed to engage students in this way?

The idea of listening to students' views about their education existed in England as early as 1816 with Robert Owen's school in New Lanark, although the term 'student voice' became widespread in educational discourse only at the end of the 20th century (Cook-Sather, 2006). We must put this language in context: the term student voice was borne out of a system that, for many years, was reluctant to listen to student views. The introduction of the national curriculum in 1988 meant that discussions about what students were being taught were often shut down. So, increasingly, students' views were lost. The development of formalised student voice gave students a platform from which they could express their views to staff. Such platforms have become common in schools in the last few years, but the activities discussed in this pamphlet, for which we use the term impact, go well beyond student voice.

In the 2000s the emphasis shifted from student voice to student leadership, with many schools explicitly identifying groups of students as leaders. Schools heavily involved in this movement, such as Horbury School in Wakefield, Lipson Community College in Plymouth, and Kingsbrook School (now the Elizabeth Woodville School) in Northamptonshire, developed sophisticated and coherent models of student leadership, often with a core executive of student leaders. The student leadership movement in England received a further boost following the UK's successful bid in 2005 to host the 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. A number of grants and projects were



set up to support the development of students' leadership skills, such as the Youth Opportunity Fund, in which young people were able to be involved in spending decisions to support youth engagement.

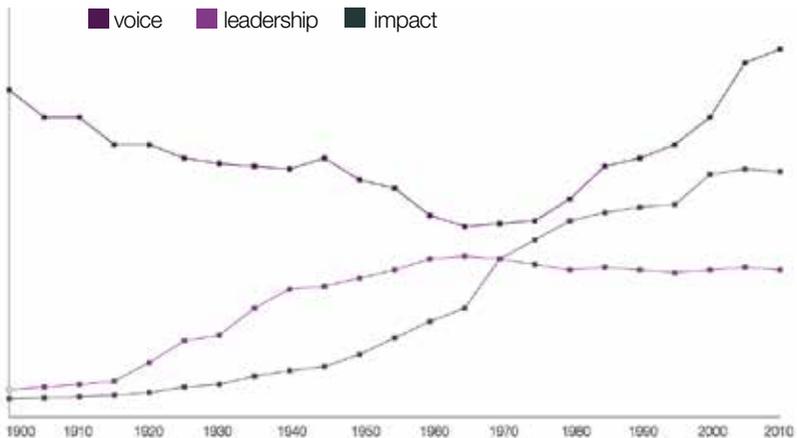
At a surface level, the term 'leadership' is more positive than the more passive 'voice'. Leadership is seen to be linked closely to emotional intelligence (Goleman et al, 2002) and to certain key character traits and values (Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993). However, the term leadership can be unhelpful in some contexts. Some verbs and nouns that collocate with leadership can be pejorative: 'battle'; 'challenge'; 'assert'.

These words don't sit easily with popular notions of student leadership or with the personalised learning agenda. And we must ask whether everyone really can be a leader - if everyone is, the term becomes meaningless. It can undoubtedly be off-putting for some students who do not, and do not ever want to, identify as 'leaders'. Students can have a profound impact in school without necessarily 'leading' anything and without displaying any of the characteristics we associate with leaders. If our ambition in redesigning schooling is for every student to be empowered to have an impact and achieve to the best of their ability, then we need a more encompassing term.

SSAT therefore advocates the term 'student impact' to describe an overarching, comprehensive understanding of the types of activities that students may be engaged in as part of redesigning schooling. The wide variety of roles through which students can have an impact includes web and app designers, student journalists, peer mentors and educators, associate governors, tour guides and student observers. Every member of the student body can have an impact on their learning, or their peers' learning, without the term becoming meaningless (unlike 'leader'). And impact relates to outcomes rather than structures – it can become a self-regulating term, helping schools avoid tokenism when engaging students in activities directly relating to their schooling. In principle, a school cannot say its school council is

an example of student impact unless it actually *does* have impact. In our current work with SSAT member schools, we find the term student impact is increasingly being adopted as a more meaningful and more inclusive term.

Linguists in particular may find it interesting to know the frequency patterns of these three terms in the English language corpus from 1900 to 2010, illustrated by the graph below. Whenever ‘voice’ becomes frequent, ‘leadership’ becomes less so, and vice versa – suggesting that the two terms are in opposition to each other. It is also interesting to note the dramatic rise of ‘impact’ in the 20th century – perhaps as society has become increasingly concerned with explicitly proving worth.

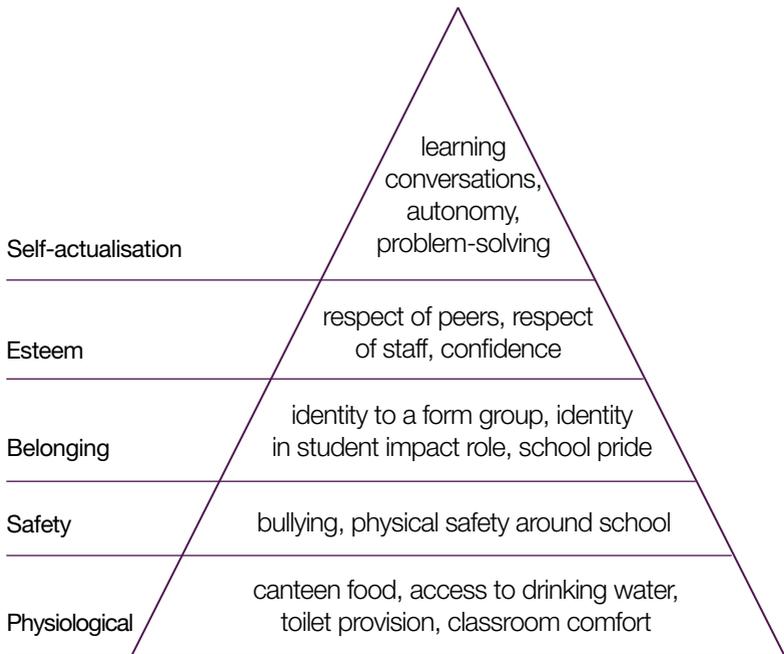


Meaningful for whom?

To have impact, activities have to be meaningful – but meaningful for whom? Do we ask this question enough? What matters to the senior leadership team may not reflect a disengaged year 10 student’s concerns. A school community contains myriad voices and opinions, so there can be no such thing as a singular student voice (or singular teacher voice, for that matter).



Alongside the movement from ‘voice’ to ‘leadership’ came a view that these activities had to be closely linked to the learning outcomes of the students involved. Sims points out that school councils which focus on issues such as uniform and toilets ‘have little impact on the core business of schooling, that of teaching and learning.’ However, we must not underestimate the importance of these issues for young people, and Sims goes on to note: ‘Evidence suggests that until students have tangible wins on these apparently peripheral issues... they will not trust staff to engage them on the important issues’ (Sims, 2006). So it is useful to adopt a broad view of what constitutes a conversation about teaching and learning. Students’ feelings about the state of the toilets, their uniform, and the food they eat at lunch all contribute to their learning. If we apply Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to student impact activity, it becomes clear that these issues are important:



Adapted from Maslow, 1943

In developing a culture of student impact, a school is likely to progress through these different needs. You cannot expect students to feel confident in, for example, giving feedback to a teacher on their lesson, until trust has been built up through more basic requirements being satisfied. Doing so shows students that their views are respected and can be actioned; that they can make tangible differences.

Even when a school has built this type of relationship between staff and students, there will always remain a need to revisit these issues. For example, the Blue School in Wells, Somerset, has a thriving school council which involves hundreds of students. The council engages in issues about teaching and learning, and all members are explicitly 'learning to lead', but activities also include keeping chickens and managing a school garden – a reflection of those myriad voices and opinions within a student body. So while as educators we may want students to be talking about teaching and learning in sophisticated ways, we must guard against hijacking student impact activities by imposing our own values on young people.

Impact on learning

There is much evidence to suggest that when students engage with student impact programmes and activities, their capacity for learning increases. Student impact in England is closely associated with personalising learning, defined as 'meeting more of the educational needs of more of the students more fully than ever before' (Hargreaves, 2004).

Student ownership and autonomy are key foundations for student impact, and can permeate through other aspects of school life (Nystrand, 1997). One of the conditions for 'deep learning' is growing learner autonomy, the notion of which has been keenly debated in recent years. With both the Secretary of State and the revised



Ofsted framework making it clear that there is no one way to teach, the early 21st century assumption that a good teacher should be a facilitator rather than an instructor is being questioned. But whether by instruction, intervention or facilitation (Alexander, 2006) – or more likely a combination of these and other methods – the test is whether students’ capacity for learning increases. Carol Dweck’s convincing discussion of a growth mindset indicates that intelligence is not fixed (Dweck, 2012). Engaging in activities which develop students’ independence, reflectiveness, decision-making and motivation will increase their ability to learn, however they are taught.

Levels of participation

Obviously when we consider the extent to which students can have impact in schools, we are not just talking about large-scale impact, but also the day-to-day wins that build trust and develop relationships over time. So it is useful, before a particular project starts, to consider the extent to which students will be asked and enabled to participate. Factors to consider are whether students’ roles will be passive or active, and whether the activity applies to an individual or small number of students or to the whole student body (Hargreaves, D, 2004). Over time, schools might be expected to move from safer to bolder and more adventurous activities.

In SSAT’s recent work with schools on student impact, we have found it useful to adapt Roger Hart’s eight-level ladder of participation (1997) into a seven-level ladder which can be more readily shared with students of varying ages and abilities:

1. Manipulation
2. Decoration
3. Tokenism

4. Informed
5. Consulted
6. *Directed* and leading
7. *Directing* and leading

Adapted from Hart, 1997

The first three levels are negative forms of activity, in that students are not having genuine impact. These levels are generally to be avoided. The later four levels are positive, enabling students to have impact, albeit to different degrees.

Manipulation

Some forms of consultative activity might be framed as student voice, leadership or impact when they are in fact manipulation – students are coerced into activities in which they have no say and with which they might fundamentally disagree. Of course, there are times within school when students will have to do things that they are opposed to, and this is part of daily school life. Often this manipulation is likely to be unconscious, for example when staff seek a student mandate to justify certain predetermined activity. It is important to be clear and explicit about levels of participation with both staff and students.

Decoration

Decoration is likely to occur when student activity is not scrutinised or its purpose not debated. Why, for instance, have a student dance performance at an open evening? Is it to impress potential parents? Or to give the students a chance to perform to a real audience? Either reason could be valid as having an impact on the students' school experience, but clarity of intention and purpose should avoid the event being seen as mere decoration.



Tokenism

Tokenism is the emergency setting when staff believe that they have to tick a box to impress senior leadership, governors, Ofsted or other stakeholders. Of course tokenism does not just happen within student impact - examples might include the AfL (assessment for learning) strategy deployed only when an inspector walks in the room, or pages of data that are perfectly presented but unused. Tokenism can be avoided through strategic planning, so it does not become the go-to setting in moments of crisis or stress.

Informed and consulted

Informing and consulting students are perhaps the two activities most closely associated with traditional forms of student voice. Students are meaningfully informed when staff share relevant information with them because staff believe they need to know it. Again, this can be ensured when the purpose of informing students is made explicit; being clear on why the students need to know something rather than just automatically assuming they do.

However, it is easy for consultation to become tokenistic. Staff may elicit student views about something, and then completely ignore them, never explaining to the students involved why their ideas were not realised. Not only is this not meaningful impact, it is potentially harmful and will damage any trust previously built up between staff and the student body.

This is not to say that when students are consulted, staff must always act on their views. Rather, that the adults engaged clearly explain the process of the consultation, the range of stakeholders being consulted, who will ultimately make the final decision, and why particular views may not be translated into action. In this way, even if students' views are not carried forward fully, students understand that they have had a

meaningful role in a wider process. Yet again, the intention of the adults consulting students must be considered here: are they consulting young people because 'it's the right thing to do' or because they genuinely want to know and understand the students' perspective to inform their decisions? Meaningful consultation can provide a useful and sometimes surprising insight into the sophistication of students' views about their learning and experiences.

Directed and leading

When students are directed and leading, they are being given a mandate by staff or other stakeholders to lead on a project. This is, for many schools, the first level in developing very tangible student impact. While students being meaningfully informed and consulted definitely does have an impact, it is not always immediately noticeable or measurable, as its major benefit tends to be contribution to a long-term change in culture and relationships. In contrast, when students are asked by staff to lead on a project, the whole school community can usually see the impact. This might be a discrete project, such as organising a charity event or conducting specific research, or ongoing activity such as a school council running its own meetings. At this level, although students may be leading the project, the direction ultimately comes from staff.

Directing and leading

Directing and leading is the top level in this student impact ladder. As a culture of trust and dependence is built through informing and consulting students, and students develop confidence by leading on projects given to them by staff, students themselves can begin to direct their own activity. For example, a team of student researchers may be asked to do a research project by senior leadership (directed and leading). In carrying out the research, the team may identify areas for future research, which they then plan and undertake themselves



(directing and leading). Activity in which students are directing and leading themselves will be successful only when there is a culture of trust and when students are engaged, responsible, mature, collaborative and independent.

There is a persistent belief that schools should always be aiming for the highest level of participation, reinforced no doubt by the metaphor of a ladder, which suggests a hierarchy. Yet a school with a strong culture of student impact will not always expect its students to be directing and leading themselves. Providing all activity is meaningful (i.e. is not manipulation, decoration, or tokenism), it is of value, whether students are being informed, consulted, directed and leading, or directing and leading. There are times when it is not appropriate for students to be leading on a project. This should not undermine their participation, provided that the rationale is strategic and shared explicitly with the students.

What is far more important is that students (and indeed other stakeholders) are told or agree together upon their level of participation *before* a project is started. But even with the clearest intention of why students are being informed rather than asked to lead, an activity will ultimately be tokenistic unless that intention is shared with students in accessible language.

It is useful for staff and students to discuss where different activities may be located on the ladder – i.e. what it is they are trying to achieve. For instance, staff and students could collectively consider where the following activities would be located:

- The head boy and girl are invited to become associate governors, attending all governor meetings.
- The school is becoming an academy, and students are kept up to date with the process.

- The students are asked their views on a new uniform policy.
- The school council are photographed for the prospectus.
- Students are given permission to start a new student paper.
- The chair of the school council invites the local MP to speak at a meeting.
- The headteacher prepares a group of gifted students with what to say to Ofsted.
- The student council runs its own elections to recruit the next year's members.
- Students ask for the toilets to be repainted, which they then are.
- A student charity group is asked to run a disco for the new year 7s.

The revised ladder can be used as an audit tool for schools to measure the impact of their student voice and student leadership activities.

Principles of student impact

To avoid student impact activities being manipulation, decoration, or tokenism it is important to underpin any activity with certain principles and values. It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to define what these principles and values should be. Instead, we would suggest that student impact groups (whatever initiative they happen to be undertaking) work with staff to agree what principles are important to them. They should reach a consensus reflecting the staff's understandings and needs as well as those of the students.

A useful starting point for this discussion might be to consider the following principles which are often used in SSAT's network of schools:

- Student impact groups have their own room, to which they have access for meetings and to carry out work throughout the week.
- Student impact groups manage their own recruitment and



elections, with each cohort responsible for recruiting the following year's groups.

- Student impact group(s) have a budget, which they manage independently.
- Student impact group members have regular opportunities to meet the senior leadership team and governors.
- Student impact groups have regular opportunities to share their work with the wider student body.
- Student impact groups contribute to the school's self-evaluation.
- The school has an annually reviewed student impact policy.
- Student impact group members can contribute to all school policies.
- Student impact groups have specific training before they take on their roles.

It might be helpful for staff and students to explore together these nine statements at the first meeting of the year, and attempt to agree on a 'diamond nine' (the most important principle at the top, going down to the least important principle at the bottom, in a 1-2-3-2-1 formation).

Links to Redesigning Schooling

As stated in the introduction, student impact is core to the Redesigning Schooling campaign, as it is only through engaging all stakeholders that real system change can ever be achieved. There are many activities that enable student impact, but for the purpose of this pamphlet we have identified four popular initiatives that align closely with, and can support work on, the four themes of Redesigning Schooling (see panel):

These four initiatives are:

- School councils
- Student researchers
- Students as learning partners
- Student curriculum designers.

The next four chapters explore in detail, using examples and case studies, these four initiatives in action.

There are many other activities that can enable student impact, providing that an activity: is meaningful for the students involved; increases the students' capacity for learning; has clear levels of participation which are articulated before starting; and is underpinned by principles and values. If all these are achieved, the activity is likely to be a success for both the students and the wider school community.

Redesigning Schooling: the four themes

The four themes of Redesigning Schooling are covered in separate pamphlets by Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton (teaching and learning), Dylan William (curriculum design), Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (professional capital), and Peter Matthews (accountability). Additional pamphlets by Bill Lucas and Peter Chambers cover other stakeholders: parents; and employers, HE/FE, sponsors, government and the wider community.

Developing effective pedagogy is vital to redesigning schooling, as we know that an effective teacher is what makes the most difference to a student's chance of success.

- The students as learning partners (SaLP) initiative is a model of student observation which is teacher-led and entirely non-judgemental. Inviting students into your lesson can give real, meaningful insights into the learning that goes on in the classroom.

Principled curriculum design puts the focus of curriculum design on the outcomes that the real school curriculum aims to achieve, beyond the slimmed-down national curriculum.

In his pamphlet, Dylan William suggests that not only should all teachers be involved in this process, but so too should all stakeholders, including students.

- Many schools are now consulting students on what they would like out of a five- or seven-year education.

Professional capital, advocated in Fullan and Hargreaves's book of the same name, suggests that the teaching profession should adopt a professional capital over a business capital model (professional capital being the sum of human, social and decisional capital). SSAT seeks to build on this by working with teachers to define the new professionalism, – a professional capital approach to teaching underpinned by rigorous school-based action research. In Bay House School in Hampshire, all teaching staff are committed to undertaking a research project every term, the findings of which are all published in a school journal.

- Working on research with students, or empowering students to undertake their own research projects, can be a powerful way of gathering evidence.

Intelligent accountability seeks to establish an accountability system that is broader than merely focusing on Ofsted, by considering four key relationships: contractual accountability, professional accountability, market accountability, and moral accountability.

- School councils may be regarded as a form of moral accountability, ensuring that school leaders inform and consult students, and allow them to lead on their own projects.