

Better than a professional? Students as co-contributors to educational design

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Acknowledgements | i |
| Executive summary | vii |
| Why does this project matter? | vii |
| Students' perspectives on learning, the relationship between home and school, and curriculum decision making | viii |
| Changes and reflections | ix |
| What we learnt from this collaboration | ix |
| Final remarks | xi |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| Background: Why does this project matter? | 2 |
| <i>Premise 1. The world has changed, and schooling needs to change in order to be relevant and valuable in a 21st century or "knowledge age" society</i> | 2 |
| <i>Premise 2. Using principles of "deliberative democracy", schooling, as a public service, should be shaped with engagement and involvement from the entire community</i> | 3 |
| <i>Premise 3. Young people, as the recipients/users/direct beneficiaries of schooling, have a right and a responsibility to be involved in decisions about their learning and schooling</i> | 4 |
| The report | 5 |
| 2. Methodology | 7 |
| The research questions | 7 |
| The workshop process | 8 |
| The research process | 8 |
| 3. Workshop design: What did we do? | 11 |
| Workshop one: What, where and how do we learn? | 11 |
| Workshop two: How is it decided what and how we learn at school? | 12 |
| Workshop three: What can people's experiences tell us about schooling? | 13 |
| Workshop four: How do we share our findings with others? | 14 |
| Ongoing developments | 15 |
| <i>Students' advice for ongoing work</i> | 16 |
| Summary | 18 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 4. Students' views: What did they say? | 21 |
| Important learning and where it occurs | 21 |
| Curriculum decision making | 24 |
| Impressions of schooling and curriculum shifts over time | 25 |
| <i>Thoughts about how schooling has changed over time</i> | 25 |
| <i>Thoughts about curriculum changes</i> | 27 |
| School One students' confidence findings | 30 |
| Summary | 31 |
| <i>Students' views in relation to ideas about 21st century learning</i> | 31 |
| <i>Students' views in relation to the views of school staff and family/community members</i> | 32 |
| | |
| 5. Changes and reflections: Did we make a difference? | 33 |
| Shifts for students | 33 |
| <i>Insights into education as a system</i> | 33 |
| <i>Confidence to express, research and represent views</i> | 34 |
| <i>New eyes or dispositions for learning</i> | 35 |
| Shifts for schools | 36 |
| <i>Reinvigorating respect for—and seeing the potential of—student voice</i> | 36 |
| <i>Converting voices to changes</i> | 37 |
| Shifts for family and community engagement | 39 |
| <i>A conduit for engagement</i> | 39 |
| <i>Shifting from presentations to dialogue</i> | 40 |
| Summary | 41 |
| | |
| 6. Conclusion: What did we learn? | 43 |
| Tensions and questions | 43 |
| <i>Tension 1: Reifying students' "naïve" claims versus inculcating them into "our" paradigm</i> | 43 |
| <i>Tension 2: Presenting views versus entering into dialogue</i> | 44 |
| <i>Tension 3: Creating expectations for change versus managing expectations about change</i> | 44 |
| <i>Tension 4: Meaning making versus destabilising experiences</i> | 44 |
| <i>Tension 5: Quick, broad coverage versus long-term in-depth investigation</i> | 45 |
| <i>Tension 6: Working in schools versus working with schools</i> | 45 |
| <i>Tension 7: Students as connectors versus students as contributors</i> | 45 |
| <i>Tension 8: Students as a homogeneous group versus students as heterogeneous</i> | 46 |
| Final remarks | 46 |
| | |
| References | 49 |

Tables

| | | |
|---------|---|----|
| Table 1 | Intentions and process for workshop one | 11 |
| Table 2 | Intentions and process for workshop two | 13 |
| Table 3 | Intentions and process for workshop three | 14 |
| Table 4 | Timeline of developments | 15 |
| Table 5 | Collation of presentation slides by School One and School Two students about their reflections on the workshop series | 17 |

Figures

| | | |
|----------|--|----|
| Figure 1 | The Venn diagram wall chart | 12 |
| Figure 2 | Photo of the activity in School One | 22 |
| Figure 3 | School Two students' summary slide on most important learning | 22 |
| Figure 4 | School One students' summary slide on views of schooling | 26 |
| Figure 5 | Slide used to convey a prescriptive curriculum | 28 |
| Figure 6 | Slide used to convey an outcomes-based curriculum | 28 |
| Figure 7 | Slide from School Two presentation | 29 |
| Figure 8 | FACE students positioned as a lever to connect the views of others | 46 |

Appendices

| | |
|---|----|
| Appendix A: Interview guide for student researchers | 51 |
|---|----|

Executive summary

NZCER's Families and Communities Engagement (FACE) project is investigating ideas and practices involved in bringing together teachers, families, local communities and students to contribute to collective conversations and decisions about education. This report concerns a sub-project of FACE that aimed to develop and research a process to engage small groups of secondary students in two schools to become critical and informed contributors to curriculum and education design. Both schools were girls' schools and had previous relationships with NZCER researchers. Over a series of weeks and months, we developed workshops to support small groups of students (mostly in Years 9 and 10) to undertake small-scale research on their own and/or others' views and experiences about learning and school. In one school, a dozen students from two classes were approached by a teacher and invited to take part in the project. In the other school, we introduced the project to one Year 9 class, and those students who were interested opted to work with us. We also collected our own research information throughout the process.

Why does this project matter?

Three interlinked premises underpinned the design of this project. These are:

1. The world has changed, and schooling needs to change in order to be relevant and valuable in a 21st century or "knowledge age" society. One key element of this change is a shift in ideas about knowledge and, hence, a shift in ideas about curriculum and how it should be developed.
2. Using principles of "deliberative democracy", schooling, as a public service, should be shaped with engagement and involvement from the entire community.
3. Young people, as the recipients/users/direct beneficiaries of schooling, have a right and a responsibility to be involved in these decisions.

The process we designed for working with students was further influenced by four principles:

Start with students' own lives and experiences: We started with students looking at themselves before they set out to do their own research. This signalled that their experiences and thoughts were valued. By examining these we could both model research skills necessary for more representative work and could deepen conversations about learning as we built a sense of trust and co-ownership of the process.

Bring together our knowledge and students' knowledge: We provided some training and skills development to support students to express and reflect on their views. We were explicit about our

own knowledge areas (i.e., education theory and research processes) and attempted to translate our thoughts about curriculum design into a frame that students could engage with, without oversimplifying matters to the point that they were inauthentic. We continuously reaffirmed that we learnt a lot from talking with students, and that education is always up for debate, with students having as much to contribute as other experts.

Develop participatory activities: We tried to make the workshops relaxed, fun and as thought-provoking as possible, and to develop a range of participatory activities that might differ from the learning opportunities students commonly experience at school. While we strived towards the process being student-led, in reality we were somewhat constrained.

Have an end product in mind: We requested that, at the very least, students be able to present their work to an audience, and NZCER researchers and key staff worked behind the scenes to clarify how student work might be able to dovetail with (or initiate) other developments within the school. Initially we could not promise to the students that they would feed directly into curriculum decision making but did try to enable conditions for that to be possible.

Students' perspectives on learning, the relationship between home and school, and curriculum decision making

The early workshops engaged students in thinking about what matters in their learning at school, and what sort of relationship (if any) there is between their school learning and learning that happens at home or in other contexts of their lives. The students identified many things they thought were important to learn at their age; some relate to specific knowledge areas, while others are better described as dispositions, identities and competencies. *How* they learn and how they *feel* about learning were equally important to *what* they learn. Students recognised that their home and school environments contribute to aspects of their learning in many knowledge areas and ways-of-being even though there seemed to be little direct engagement between their school and their families. Their families and schools may be invested in some similar “outcomes” but they do not necessarily recognise or plan for this in any explicit collaborative sense.

Students felt they had little input into what and how they learn at school and are largely uninformed about how curriculum decisions are made nationally and locally. However, they had strong views about what might be important for curriculum design and could explain what enables them to learn most effectively and enjoyably. Like many adults we work with, the students' views of learning, schooling and curriculum design seemed to be in transition between 20th and 21st century ways of thinking about knowledge, learning and schooling.

When given the opportunity to discuss big-picture curriculum ideas and undertake critical close readings of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) students could begin to articulate how these did or did not match their own experiences, and the perspectives of others including their fellow students, teachers and their family members. Students also recognised some of the key dilemmas that educators and policy makers grapple with. They were ready to put their

informed ideas in the mix and looked forward to opportunities to discuss these with their teachers and families.

Students in both schools presented their findings at a range of forums, where students could also discuss their views, answer questions and pose suggestions to teachers and school leaders, family members and other students.

Changes and reflections

Our project represents the very beginning of a long-term process towards students becoming co-contributors to curriculum, teaching and learning. Some initial shifts occurred for both the students, and their schools. In summary these shifts were as follows:

- Students gained confidence in expressing, researching and representing the views of themselves and others.
- Students gained new insights into education as a system, and began to see themselves as part of a much broader picture nationally and historically.
- Students began to bring more of a critical eye to what, how and why they were being taught. The majority focused on what they thought teachers could do differently, while a minority also noted that they had approached their own learning differently.
- School staff were impressed by the power of the students' messages, and their abilities to speak confidently amongst large audiences and intimate two-way discussions. This often required the students to consider questions beyond what we had covered in the workshops and opened up additional opportunities for them to engage directly with other groups.
- A few concrete changes developed as a result of the work in School One, where the project had extended and teachers were working with student-researchers directly. Possibilities for change were being discussed in School Two.
- Families were encouraged into the school for conversations about teaching and learning because they wanted to hear their daughters present. The family sessions, and the interviews that students conducted with family members as part of the workshop process, appeared to open up some opportunities for parents to affirm, question and challenge key messages about education from the students and other presenters. However, they tended to listen more than speak. Students and staff at both schools were interested in further exploring ways to better engage families in dialogue.

What we learnt from this collaboration

As researchers, we also encountered a range of tensions and questions. We hope that schools keep these in mind as they continue—or embark on—establishing learning communities designed to engage students as co-contributors to education design.

Tension 1: Reifying students’ “naïve” claims versus inculcating them into “our” paradigm:

One of the challenges we faced was balancing our aim of asking students to express and represent their views with our aim to give them access to the “big picture” so that they could make more informed comments.

- Could these collaborative approaches produce an unintentional co-opting of students into existing frames of thinking (i.e., teaching students to see things in “school” ways or “researcher” ways of thinking *instead of* in students’ ways?)

Tension 2: Presenting views versus entering into dialogue: The primary aim of the project was to work towards establishing learning communities where teachers, parents, students and other partners could engage equitably in conversations.

- How do we continue to move beyond the “consultation” model in which different groups are asked to present their views to one another for school staff to “take into account” in their planning, and move towards real-time problem solving and shared decision making?

Tension 3: Creating expectations for change versus managing expectations about change:

The youth participation literature suggests that authentic student participation should lead to action, but in any project like this change is likely to be gradual, emergent—and sometimes nonexistent.

- How do we ensure that there are good feedback processes in the future so that students can hear about any long-term changes that their work may have fed into?

Tension 4: Meaning making versus destabilising experiences: The opportunities for inquiry into the bigger picture context helped some students to “make sense” of their educational experiences but, at the same time, we were aware that without adequate support this might have the potential to destabilise them if their educational experiences do not live up to their new ideals.

- How can we increase students’ ability to see “problems”, while at the same time also develop their capacity to represent or solve them?

Tension 5: Quick broad coverage versus long-term in-depth investigation: As we were only in the schools for a limited time, we attempted to cover a lot of ground quickly, in the hope that students or the school might find something of particular interest to follow up on in more depth.

- How can work like this better align with the principles of 21st century learning: for example, giving students opportunities to generate new knowledge by carrying out authentic tasks in real-world contexts; foregrounding the agency, responsibility and transformative potential of the learner; and providing opportunities to help students see the “big picture”? (Gilbert, 2005)

Tension 6: Working *in* schools versus working *with* schools: There are both benefits and drawbacks to being “outsiders” working with students in schools. On the one hand we are able to offer a perspective that is quite different from that of teachers or students. On the other hand, for

change to be sustainable it seems to us that it should be driven from within a school, not by external visitors.

- How can teachers, students and researchers develop the skills that are necessary for this work (particularly when it goes beyond the traditional roles and experiences of each)?

Tension 7: Students as connectors versus students as contributors. We set out to support students to become contributors to conversations about education design, but as the project progressed, they were increasingly positioned as connectors for conversations between other parties, such as schools and families.

- If students are seen as a “lever” for engaging parents and families into dialogue with the school, how can schools avoid “tokenism” (i.e., valuing students not for their input, but for their strategic value as connectors between other groups)?

Tension 8: Students as a homogeneous group versus students as heterogeneous: In this project our main groupings were: students, teachers and parents. It could be interpreted that we assumed there were more similarities within groups than between groups.

- Could a similar process begin with groupings according to different demographics, such as by culture? (For example, could a group of Māori parents, Māori students and Māori teachers work together and come later into conversation with a group of Tongan parents, Tongan students and Tongan teachers etc.?)

Final remarks

This project provided important learning for the NZCER FACE project, and hopefully both of the schools involved. We all took on new roles that extended our skill sets beyond what is traditionally associated with our positions and our “training” (i.e., there were challenges to what it means to be a student, a teacher, a researcher or a parent in regard to education). We all sometimes struggled to translate our ways of seeing the world into the language of another group (research language to education language, or “school” language to language that was relevant to parents and families). We all wanted to value our own and each other’s areas of expertise without one form of expertise dominating the conversation. We all had to work around systemic constraints associated with current schooling practices—such as timetabling and other school culture practices that, among other things, positioned our work with students as something “extra” that took time away from their regularly scheduled classes. Finally, we all appreciated feeling that our small project together was contributing something useful to a bigger system (students contributing to their school system, each school contributing to the student component of FACE, our student research component contributing to full FACE project, the FACE project hopefully contributing to New Zealand education and so on).

1. Introduction

NZCER's Families and Communities Engagement (FACE) programme is investigating ideas and practices involved in bringing together teachers, families, local communities and students to contribute to collective conversations and decisions about education. During 2008–9 the FACE programme consisted of three main projects: one that reviewed literature and carried out case studies of home–school partnerships; a second that focused initially on parents and teachers working towards developing learning communities (Bull, 2009); and a third concerned with the student voice in home–school partnerships.

This report concerns the third project, which aimed to develop and research a process to engage and support secondary students to become critical and informed contributors to curriculum and education design in their school. NZCER researchers (and later teachers) worked with groups of secondary school student-researchers. We developed a series of workshops and activities to support the student-researchers to investigate different aspects of their own and their peers' educational experiences, and to introduce them to various relevant ideas about learning in the 21st century. We also kept the students informed about other parts of the FACE project, with the intention of eventually bringing them into direct engagement with teachers/school leaders and parents/community members so that they might form collective learning communities.

In this chapter we discuss three interlinked premises that underpinned the design of this project. These are:

4. The world has changed, and schooling needs to change in order to be relevant and valuable in a 21st century or “knowledge age” society. One key element of this change is a shift in ideas about knowledge and, hence, a shift in ideas about curriculum and how it should be developed.
5. Using principles of “deliberative democracy”, schooling, as a public service, should be shaped with engagement and involvement from the entire community.
6. Young people, as the recipients/users/direct beneficiaries of schooling, have a right and a responsibility to be involved in these decisions.

Background: Why does this project matter?

Premise 1. The world has changed, and schooling needs to change in order to be relevant and valuable in a 21st century or “knowledge age” society

Future-focused literature suggests that we are in a transition from a world once perceived in terms of uniformity, homogeneity and certainty to one that is increasingly complex, diverse and uncertain (Brady, 2008; Kress, 2008). These shifts have been associated with a move from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Age and have major implications for education and curriculum development (Gilbert, 2005).

In the Industrial Age the knowledge necessary to function successfully and follow a career was seen to already exist: it could be handed down from experts and leaders to learners and workers. New knowledge creation was the business of the upper echelons of society—created by academics, scientists and top professionals in universities, laboratories and management positions. In the Industrial Age, curriculum development was a matter of selecting the most important knowledge to transmit to students; experts decided what knowledge to mass-prescribe and in which sequence. Schools were set up to teach basic skills and facts initially—reading, writing, arithmetic and general knowledge—and to move students step by step through a curriculum that became increasingly focused on discipline-centred knowledge taught by subject specialists. It was not until postgraduate study that students had opportunities to generate new knowledge.

However, future-focused literature suggests that this model for schooling and curriculum is no longer sufficient in the Knowledge Age. For example, it is no longer possible to accurately predict exactly what knowledge people will need to draw on as they move through life, particularly given the rapid pace at which new knowledge is developing and career possibilities are proliferating. Indeed, people’s ability to generate new ideas/solutions/practices/ways-of-being through relationships with other people and other ideas is the key resource for economic—and social—development. In this so-called Knowledge Age the meaning of knowledge itself has changed to the point that knowledge is seen as a verb more than a noun (Gilbert, 2005). Knowledge is the process of creating new knowledge through “networks and flows” (Castells, 2000), often on a “just-in-time” basis to solve problems as they emerge. Schools now are responsible for both preparing students to enter this world, and for reflecting new expectations on public institutions in the Knowledge Age.

In association with shifting conceptions of knowledge, there has been increasing support for the idea of moving from highly centralised curriculum design and decision making, towards various degrees of school-based development (Bolstad, 2004), and curriculum development that involves community-driven decision making (Warren, Hoong, Leung Rubin, & Sychitkokhong Uy, 2009), personalising learning (Leadbeater, 2006) and emergent outcomes (Hill, Davis, Prout, & Tisdall, 2004). Indeed, diversity is a key feature and a key resource for the Knowledge Age, as new knowledge is created when different people and different ideas bump against one another to

produce something new. In some areas this has meant a shift from a “prescriptive” curriculum that sets out and standardises knowledge for all (i.e., the inputs are clearly set out) towards more of an “outcomes” curriculum that outlines “broad brush” intentions and visions but enables far more diversity in input and design (i.e., it is recognised that any number of combinations of inputs could meet the same overall outcome).

The recent revision of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) represents, to some extent, a move from a more knowledge-centred prescriptive curriculum to a more people-centred, outcomes-based curriculum. It expects families and students to have input into curriculum design and decision making, and for that process to focus on the kinds of *people* communities want their students to become as much as the *knowledge* they want them to understand. This is reflected, for example, in the next few statements that schools were expected to implement by 2010:

The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau and communities. (Principles, p. 9)

The specific ways in which [curriculum] values find expression in an individual school will be guided by dialogue between the school and its community... When the school community has developed strongly held and clearly articulated values, those values are likely to be expressed within the school. (Values, p. 10)

Students learn as they engage in shared activities and conversations with other people, including family members and people in the wider community. (Effective Pedagogy, p. 34)

Curriculum design and review is a continuous, cyclic process. It involves making decisions about how to give effect to the national curriculum in ways that best address the particular needs, interests and circumstances of the school’s students and community. It requires a clear understanding of the intentions for the New Zealand Curriculum and of the values and expectations of the community. (Design and Review, p. 37)

The statements and the consultation process that led to the Curriculum’s review to some extent reflect new expectations on public services within the Knowledge Age. Over the past decade, New Zealand government–community partnerships¹ have gone some way towards a bottom-up collaborative approach to policy development and service delivery, although there is still a long way to go (Larner & Butler, 2005).

Premise 2. Using principles of “deliberative democracy”, schooling, as a public service, should be shaped with engagement and involvement from the entire community

Extending the ideas above, internationally theorists have been calling for a greater democratisation of public services to better reflect and serve the diversity, uncertainty and need

¹ The concept of partnership has particular significance in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi signified a partnership between Māori iwi (tribes) and the British Crown in 1840. Local partnerships are a focus of advancing the Government’s Treaty of Waitangi commitments and objectives.

for just-in-time decision making (Parker and O’Leary, 2006; Seltzer and Bentley, 1999; Stoll & Louis, 2007a). Whether through face-to-face dialogue processes, or through electronic social technologies, the idea is that open-ended solutions and systems changes need to come from collaborative problem solving by and for the people closest to any given context and these changes cannot simply be set out by outsiders (even those voted in as “representatives”) for others to follow according to hierarchical chains of command:

The great shift of contemporary politics is that there is no one source of certainty—and that progress...depends *not* primarily on the design or management of institutions but on the ways in which they draw on and interact with the people they serve. (Bentley, 2001, p. 10)

Open and collaborative models of organisation will increasingly trump closed and hierarchical models as a way to promote innovation, organise work, and engage consumers. (Leadbeater, 2008, as cited in Bradwell & Reeves, 2008, p. 27)

As old institutional hierarchies and sector delineations dissolve education, decision making can no longer be seen as the sole responsibility of school principals and/or governments:

Change needs are too rapid, knowledge is too ubiquitous, contexts of knowledge application are too diverse. Centrally coordinated strategies are unlikely to be sensitive to unique challenges of diverse contexts. They neither stimulate nor use practitioner innovation and ownership. Most important, although this reform model has been shown to raise general levels of attainment, it has failed to close the gap in educational achievement between the most and least advantaged. (Jackson & Temperley, 2007, p. 46)

It requires people from across every spectrum in society to engage in educational debate and provision, and it assumes that there can be equity in input, and justice in output. It is important that students’ voices do not get lost in the debate.

Premise 3. Young people, as the recipients/users/direct beneficiaries of schooling, have a right and a responsibility to be involved in decisions about their learning and schooling

Ideas about deliberative democracy resonate with ideas about youth participation (widely labelled “student voice” in the education sector). Participation has been defined as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 5). It also points to a continuum of youth participation evident within and beyond the education sector, from tokenistic forms to full active participation (Hart, 1992). The strongest forms of youth participation involve students working in partnership with adults and having direct input into action, rather than carrying out investigations in isolation and making recommendations for others to merely consider. For example, in *Consulting Pupils: What’s in it for schools?* Flutter and Rudduck (2004) suggest that the strongest form of youth participation involves students as co-researchers, where:

[P]upils and teachers jointly initiate enquiry; pupils play an active role in decision-making; together with teachers they plan action in the light of data and review impact of the intervention. (p. 16)

This aligns with recent calls within the education sector for professional learning communities to extend out beyond teachers (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mitra, 2009; Stoll & Louis, 2007b). At the same time the youth sector also points to the United Nations Convention on Children’s Rights (UNCROC), United Nations (1989), which protects the rights of children and young people to: obtain and disseminate information, form associations and “to freely express opinion in all matters affecting him/her and have that that opinion taken into account” (Article 12, UNCROC, cited in Lundy, 2007). Just as schools and their processes for curriculum development are expected to reflect democratic principles, so too are schools expected to enable a learning environment that prepares students to be active citizens in democratic societies. Citizenship cannot be simply learnt from the taught curriculum. Instead, understanding, competence and dispositions reflective of democratic participation are better achieved through practice and experience within schools that operate on democratic principles themselves (Landsown, 1997, in Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mailtes & Deuchar, 2006).

In reality, youth participation for education design has tended to involve researchers or teachers asking students about their individual views on particular topics, rather than supporting students to carry out big-picture research with peers or to feed into decision making directly (Lord, 2006). Students have rarely been actively involved in curriculum development (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). This project, informed by the youth participation work outlined above, was an attempt to move beyond this tradition.

The report

The approach we took in the project was informed by the three premises above. This report has been written to provide feedback to the schools involved, clarify our thinking to date and offer insights to others interested in families’ and communities’ engagement in education. Our primary audience is school leaders, teachers and youth advocates, although it is also written in the hope that students and community members might also read it. The report complements a working paper prepared by Ally Bull (2009) on the working-with-parents part of the project. At the time of writing, one of the teachers involved in this project had written a blog on this work for shiftingthinking.org, had presented at a conference and was planning to write an article from the work. Perhaps, in time, the students involved will also reach a wider audience directly.

2. Methodology

The aim of the “student voice” component of the FACE project was to contribute to our collective understanding of how schools might engage students in co-constructing the curriculum and education design in ways that might enable future-focused education and provide more equitable outcomes for all students. The 2008–9 student component of the FACE project was essentially a series of student workshops with a research process embedded within it.

The project began with the following key ideas, informed by the three premises discussed in the introduction to this working paper:

1. Students understand themselves, their needs and their interests and experiences at least as well as anyone else; however, students are likely to need specific support and guidance in order to:
 - research and reflect on their own/their peers’ learning experiences and views about school
 - engage with (and critique) various educational ideas about learning and schooling in the 21st century
 - represent their perspectives on these matters to an audience of teachers and parents/community members.
2. The NZCER researchers are part of the wider education “learning community” and/or change system, and our role should be transparent to the participants and visible in reporting.
3. All young people and all locations are different—what develops in one area may not develop in another; a process that works in one area may not work in another—but principles of a process may translate (e.g., respect for young people’s views and developing participatory processes that are appropriate to the young people in question, etc.).

The research questions

The following research questions guided the project:

1. What kinds of support help students to:
 - research and reflect on their own and their peers’ experiences and views about learning and school?
 - engage with and critique various educational ideas about learning and schooling in the 21st century?

2. What *are* the students' experiences and views about learning and school (i.e., what do they think is important to learn), and:
 - How do these relate/compare to ideas in the literature about 21st century learning?
 - How these relate/compare to the views of school staff, and parents/community members?
3. What enables students to be active participants in a school/FACE learning community and what is gained as a result (for students, for teachers and the community, for the school, etc.)?
 - How can schools support (and create space) for students to co-construct curriculum development and teaching and learning in ways that reflect ideas about 21st century learning?
 - How (if at all) does students' active participation in these learning communities contribute to shifts in teaching, learning and educational practices and structures within their school?

The workshop process

We worked with two girls-only schools on this project, both of which had previous relationships with NZCER researchers. We developed a short series of half-day workshops to support students to undertake small-scale research on their own and/or others' views and experiences about learning and school. We provided information sheets and consent forms for interested students and their parents to consider and began with approximately 12 girls per school. Details of the workshops are provided in Chapter 3.

In the first school a teacher invited a range of her Year 9 students to take part, paying attention to students' ethnicities, friendship groups and academic interests. We worked reasonably closely with the teacher across Terms 3 and 4 of 2008 and she attended parts of workshops where possible. Two teachers then extended our workshop series in 2009, and worked with the same group of girls plus two additional groups to further the research and conversation.

In the second school we introduced ourselves to a Year 9 form class and asked for volunteers. We based the process on what we had developed with the first school, with shorter workshops and less contact with school staff until our final workshop in 2009.

The research process

We wanted learning from this project to provide useful insights and inspirations for students, schools, communities and policy makers beyond those involved in the study. For that reason we collected our own research information throughout the process by:

- documenting workshop plans
- collecting artefacts generated during the workshops

- recording conversations during the workshops²
- carrying out final interviews in 2009.

We carried out the final interviews about experiences of being involved in the work and their hopes for the future (see Appendix 3 for the interview schedule) with:

- a pair of Year 10 girls from School One
- a pair of Year 12 girls from School One
- a pair of Year 13 girls from School One
- a lead teacher from School One
- a group of three Year 10 girls from School Two.

The remainder of this paper is structured by our three central research questions. We outline the kind of support that we and teachers provided to the students involved in Chapter 4 and discuss the students' views and experiences of learning in Chapter 5. We consider what has resulted from the work to date in Chapter 6, including our reflections on the opportunities and challenges that we have navigated in our attempts to work with schools and students to begin to activate student participation in curriculum design.

² We applied for ethics approval to do so, and always alerted the students to what we were recording and why. We also used this as an opportunity to discuss their own research ethics for their work. As we will explain in the following chapter we often returned workshop data to the girls for their further analysis.

3. Workshop design: What did we do?

This chapter addresses our first research question:

1. What kinds of support help students to:
 - research and reflect on their own and their peers’ experiences and views about learning and school?
 - engage with and critique various educational ideas about learning and schooling in the 21st century?

The support we trialed in this project comprised a series of four workshops designed with the above questions in mind. Below we summarise the intentions and process for each workshop.

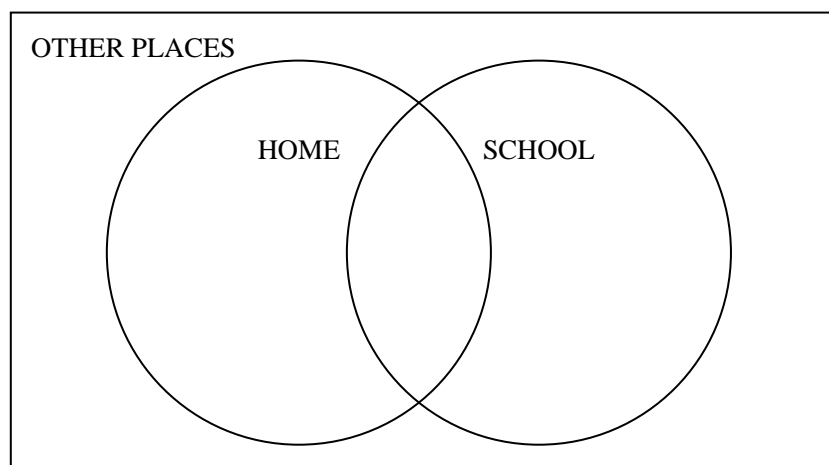
Workshop one: What, where and how do we learn?

The first workshop was dedicated to meeting one another, and beginning a conversation about “what, where and how students of their age learn”.

Table 1 Intentions and process for workshop one

| Intention | Process | Guiding questions |
|---|---|---|
| To reflect on what “important learning” is | We invited the students to write down, on post-it notes, as many ideas as they could think of in response to the guiding question. | What do you think is really important for someone your age to learn? |
| To reflect on where and how learning occurs | The students placed each post-it note on a Venn diagram wall chart (see Figure 1 below) to indicate where they felt each kind of learning occurred. | Where do you learn each—at school, at home, both, elsewhere, nowhere? |
| To reflect on signals for important learning in <i>The New Zealand Curriculum</i> | We read out some words and phrases from the principles and vision pages of <i>The New Zealand Curriculum</i> . | What does that word/phrase mean to you? Where would you put it on the wall chart? |
| To gauge students’ interest and ideas for future workshop planning | We asked for reflections about the process and possibilities for moving forwards (as a round and then written). | Would you like to continue working with us? Why are you interested in being involved? |

Figure 1 **The Venn diagram wall chart**



We typed up notes from the students' discussions so they could reflect on these during the next workshop. We also developed several simple slides to show what we (the NZCER researchers) had learnt/summarised from the day.

Workshop two: How is it decided what and how we learn at school?

This was an extended workshop, with three main components (see Table 2).

Table 2 Intentions and process for workshop two

| Intention | Process | Guiding questions |
|---|--|---|
| To deepen conversation about learning by experiencing a research analysis process | We handed out material generated in the previous session ³ and talked about ways to summarise and extend their thinking about home–school relationships. | How much do home and school know about each other? How much does school draw on your home experiences to help you learn and vice versa? What would be ideal? |
| To share views about curriculum decision making | We opened a conversation with students based on the guiding question. | How do you think what you learn and how you learn in your classes is decided? |
| To develop a critical reading of curriculum design | We presented a PowerPoint slideshow about curriculum theory and design, and how theories about curriculum have changed over time (e.g., moving from prescriptive curriculum to outcomes-based curriculum). We gave each student their own copy of <i>The New Zealand Curriculum</i> . | What do you notice about the different ways people have thought about curriculum over time? What does <i>The New Zealand Curriculum</i> say about student and community involvement in curriculum decisions? What do you make of these statements? |
| To design a student research project related to the aims of FACE | We showed examples of other student research ⁴ and suggested that students conduct interviews. We supported them to imagine questions and prompts, and talk about ethics, interview techniques and ways to reflect on interviews. | The overview question for the student research was agreed to be: <i>What can different people's experiences tell us about what school was like in the past, what school is like now and what school could be like in the future?</i> |

Immediately after the workshop we finalised the interview schedule and analysis form according to their interests for the students to use (see Appendix A).⁵ Students then set out to interview someone their own age and a family member at least one generation older than them about their thoughts on schooling in the past, schooling now and schooling in the future.

Workshop three: What can people's experiences tell us about schooling?

We moved back and forth through the following components throughout workshop three.

³ For example, we handed out an Excel spreadsheet with their “important learning” sorted into columns (home, school, both, other) as well as an anonymous transcript of their final comments about how much each student felt their family knew about their learning at school and vice versa.

⁴ This included video presentations made by other New Zealand students: for example, <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-stories/School-stories/Te-Awamutu>

⁵ Due to time constraints the School Two students used the interview schedule developed with School One.

Table 3 Intentions and process for workshop three

| Intention | Process | Guiding questions |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| To collate interview material | We developed a data table where we could collaboratively summarise the main points that emerged across all the students' interviews. | What did each interviewee think about schooling in the past, present and future? |
| To reflect on the findings | We had a broad discussion about what they had found through their interviews. | What surprised you? What did you expect to hear? |
| To debrief from interview process | We talked about the challenges of being a researcher and together discussed strategies to avoid or deal with particular challenges. | What went well? What didn't? What did it feel like? What would you do differently? |

After the workshop we photocopied all of the students' interview notes so that we could complete the data tables in more detail for them.

Workshop four: How do we share our findings with others?

The principals of both schools invited the girls to give a presentation on their work. We helped the students to prepare a PowerPoint presentation that explained the research processes and workshops. The students decided which individuals or pairs would speak to each slide and they had several weeks to practise their presentation with help from a teacher. We (the researchers) also had one or two slides to talk about the project from our point of view.

In School One the students presented at a lunchtime forum to which all staff were invited.⁶ The students fielded questions from staff at the end of their presentation. In School Two the students presented at an evening session to which parents and community members had been invited. Although few parents attended, several staff and a representative of the Board of Trustees were present, as were a number of non parent members of the local community. These people asked the students many questions after their presentation.

Students in both schools subsequently presented their findings at a range of other forums, where students could also discuss their views, answer questions and pose suggestions to teachers and school leaders, family members and other students (see Table 4 below, and Chapter 5 for further details).

⁶ Although we planned to be at this session, due to a flight cancellation we were unable to attend. Instead, the students were supported by the teacher who had been working with us.

Ongoing developments

Below is a timeline of the developments in each school.

Table 4 **Timeline of developments**

| | School One | School Two |
|-------------|--|---|
| 2007 | NZCER pilot work with student-researchers, including presentation to interested staff (pre-FACE) | |
| Term 3 2008 | <i>Workshop one</i> <i>Workshop two</i> | |
| Term 4 2008 | <i>Workshop three + four</i> Presentation to interested staff | <i>Workshop one</i> <i>Workshop two</i> <i>Workshop three</i> |
| Term 1 2009 | Presentation to heads of departments | |
| Term 2 2009 | Expanded to work with three groups of student-researchers | |
| Term 3 2009 | | <i>Workshop four</i> |
| Term 4 2009 | Presentation to families Presentation to all 150 staff + table talks | Presentation to families + table talks Presentation to all staff Presentation to all Year 10 students |

The table shows how our workshop series became part of a wider programme of work in School One. In 2007, prior to our workshops, two other NZCER researchers had supported a group of Year 10 students to talk about 21st century learning and carry out classroom observations. That one-off project⁷ (along with other NZCER projects) contributed to the birth of the FACE project. The teacher involved in the 2007 work continued to have a small role in the workshop series that we ran in 2008, and met with the girls between workshops to continue their conversations about learning and reflect on their interviews with peers and family members. In 2010, once our workshop series was completed, the same teacher partnered with another to take the project in a new direction based on key messages that the school had heard from discussions with students, parents and teachers. They were particularly interested in the following questions:

- What exactly *is* this “confidence” that the students, parents, teachers and even *The New Zealand Curriculum* say is so important?
- What makes students feel confident?
- What opportunities are given to students to demonstrate this confidence?
- How might we build the resilience required for our students to sustain their confidence when it is challenged?

⁷ Which was at the time called *Building Teacher-Researcher Learning Commitments*.

- How might we work in partnership with our learning community to help build the confidence and resilience required for our students in their futures?

School One thus expanded the project to work with three groups of students as follows:

- A group of Year 13 girls (from the school’s Challenge Committee, which is responsible for helping students to “think outside the square”) were asked to reflect on the previous girls’ work with NZCER, and develop a questionnaire for students about confidence in learning and leadership.
- The students we had worked with in 2008 (Year 10 in 2009) reconvened to review their previous year’s work in relation to the concept of confidence. The group used the Year 13 questionnaire to guide their conversation and come up with their own responses and synthesis.
- The students NZCER researchers had worked with in 2007 (Year 12 in 2009) looked over the findings from the Year 13 students and Year 10 students to comment on the different patterns they saw within each age group, and to put forward their own thoughts on the topic.

Two teachers facilitated a series of discussions over the year with the students and provided support for the Year 13 students’ empirical research. We also provided some background support.⁸ All three groups of students then presented their thoughts and findings at a community forum and teacher professional development day.

Students’ advice for ongoing work

The next two chapters look at what the students said during the workshops and what changed as a result. However, to conclude this chapter, we briefly outline the student feedback about the workshop process; what they enjoyed or found challenging about working with us, and their suggestions for ongoing work.

The students’ summary of the best and hardest aspects of working with us (see Table 5 below) shows the importance of balancing opportunities for students to “have a say”, while also providing support and information to help them understand others’ ideas and express new ideas themselves.

⁸ We reviewed an early version of the students’ questionnaire, talked through potential analysis techniques and bounced a few ideas around on the purpose and process with the teacher.

Table 5 Collation of presentation slides by School One and School Two students about their reflections on the workshop series

| Best bits | Hardest bits |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing opinions about how and what we're taught • Learning about the curriculum • Activities like Venn diagrams and interviews • Being recorded • Being a real researcher • The food • Finding out stuff that we didn't know • [Having] discussions • Getting the chance to get our opinions out there | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not [having] enough time • Missing classes and catching up • Trying to understand things for yourself • Understanding the theory stuff • Getting the answers [from interviewees] that made sense to the [interview] question • Finding the unexpected • Staying focused for such a long time |

Many of the students we interviewed at the end of 2009 were keen to continue with this type of work. Their recommendations for any ongoing work included:

1. Work with a range of teachers and researchers:

Students hoped for opportunities to work with both researchers and teachers in the future. They felt they could speak more deeply with teachers with whom they had a stronger relationship, but could sometimes speak more freely with the researchers who they thought could bring a wider perspective and different type of expertise. They hoped that teachers from a broader range of departments might get more involved over time:

It would be good to work with other teachers; we've really just worked with the English department. It would be good to get a couple of others, e.g. science and maths. I bet their views would be different from the English teacher. (Year 12, School One)

2. Involve more students:

The students wanted the FACE project to draw in a greater range of students within and beyond their year level. However, when we suggested that perhaps this kind of work could occur as part of their everyday school work several expressed reservations. For example:

On a massive scale I can't see how it would work—lots of people probably wouldn't want to do it. Because we had so few students we were more engaged than if there were thirty... It would be broad [with more people] and I don't think everyone would take it to their advantage. A lot of people just don't care and they wouldn't be interested, and so the information you'd get out of it wouldn't be very interesting. (Year 12, School One)

3. Be clear about purpose and process:

School Two students thought future work should be even clearer about the purpose and the process from the outset. They suggested we convey the big-picture purpose with the curriculum

visual metaphors that we developed for workshop two, and that we entice students to participate with phrases like:

You could have a say in the school; You can make a change; You can have a dream; We can all make a difference together; You feel important being recorded.

4. Connect beyond students:

Students were keen to connect with secondary students doing similar work in other schools, and to establish more ongoing contact and conversation with local primary and intermediate schools, parents, community members and others.

Summary

In this chapter we explained the workshops we designed to support students to begin to research, reflect on and critique various experiences and views about learning and schooling in the 21st century so that they might become active partners in discussions and decisions about education in the school. Below are four principles of our process—each tacitly guided our work but became more explicit as the result of our experience and synthesis:

- Start with students' own lives and experiences

We started with students looking at themselves before they set out to do their own research. This signalled that their experiences and thoughts were valued⁹. By examining these we could both model research skills necessary for more representative work and deepen conversations about learning as we built a sense of trust and co-ownership of the process.

- Bring together our knowledge and students' knowledge

We provided some training and skills development to support students to express and reflect on their views. We were explicit about our own knowledge areas (i.e., education theory and research processes) and attempted to translate our thoughts about curriculum design into a frame that students could engage with, without oversimplifying matters to the point that they were inauthentic. We continuously reaffirmed that we learnt a lot from talking with students, and that education is always up for debate, with students having as much to contribute as other experts.

- Develop participatory activities

We tried to make the workshops relaxed, fun and as thought provoking as possible, and to develop a range of participatory activities that might differ from the learning opportunities students commonly experience at school. While we strived towards the process being student-led, in reality we were somewhat constrained as outsiders in a school setting. Our work with

⁹ Connecting to experience is also a basic tenet of learning theory.

students meant taking small amounts of time away from their scheduled classes, and both students and (some) staff experienced some anxieties about this.

- Have an end product in mind

We requested that, at the very least, students be able to present their work to an audience. NZCER researchers and key school staff worked behind the scenes to clarify how student work might be able to dovetail with (or initiate) other developments within the school. While we could not promise to the students that they would feed directly into curriculum decision making, we did try to enable conditions for that to be possible. This principle is based on: (a) other research we have done that demonstrates the educational benefits of having a real purpose to school work (Gilbert, 2005; Hipkins, Roberts, & Bolstad, 2007; Roberts, McDowall, & Cooper, 2008); and (b) our support of the UNCROC declaration that states that young people have a right to have their views listened to and acted upon (Lundy, 2007).

4. Students' views: What did they say?

This chapter addresses our second research question:

2. What are the students' experiences and views about learning and school (e.g., what do they think is important to learn), and:
 - How do these relate/compare to ideas about 21st century learning?
 - How these relate/compare to the views of school staff, and parents/community members?

We present a mix of raw data from workshop conversations, the students, our analysis of that data and snapshots of the students' final presentations. We look at students' views on:

- what important learning is and where it occurs
- curriculum decision making
- impressions of schooling and curriculum shifts over time

Important learning and where it occurs

The positioning of the post-its in the photo of the workshop one activity below shows that the majority of what the students considered important for learning occurred in the intersection between home and school, and in the spaces between home and/or school and other environments (for example, their local community, church, cultural and recreational spaces, online and broadcast media, time with friends etc.). In general, important learnings in the school space tended to relate to subjects and particular school topics (such as history, or how government works) whereas learning in the home space related to moral, spiritual, cultural learning as well as household functioning (such as hygiene and money management). Learnings that occurred in both spaces were more varied, including some traditional subject knowledge and many dispositions and skills.

Figure 2 **Photo of the activity in School One**



In addition to talking about *where* different kinds of learning occurred, the School Two students discussed differences between learning that was “taught to them” explicitly in different environments, and things they thought they “just learnt” through experience, as outlined in their summary presentation slide below.

Figure 3 **School Two students’ summary slide on most important learning**

Some of our “most important” learning...

| | HOME | BOTH | SCHOOL |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Taught to us | Manners and morals | Basic subjects (like maths & English) Different careers | How to find information Options for learning in-depth (in our personal areas of interest) |
| Both | Learning about your own culture Spending money wisely | Learning about other cultures Working to achieve what you want | What it means to belong to your school |
| Just learn from experience | Independence How to look after yourself | Social skills Managing self Public speaking | Relating to peers |

The students' discussions in both schools highlighted to us that they wanted learning opportunities that could equip them with a balance between content knowledge, useful skills and dispositional attributes. They wanted learning to be useful for their lives in the present and to prepare them for their potential futures. They also wanted to learn in ways that could help them explore their positioning in various communities and the global context.

This activity led to a discussion about the relationship between home and school. We asked students "How much does home know about you in your school world?" and "How much does school know about you in your home world?" The students thought that school and home were somewhat disconnected. Their comments suggested that information tended to flow from school to home, that this information was generally passed via newsletters and reports (or through what students felt like sharing), decided to share and that this information is primarily focused on students' achievement. Students also suggested that their parents' own experiences with schooling seemed to impact on how they interpreted what their daughter said about school, and what they were most interested in hearing from their daughter about school:

Some teachers know something, like they may know I go to church or something like that, but they don't know very much in my personal life. Home knows the basic [information about school] from newsletters and stuff like that. (Year 9, School One)

I think school doesn't know anything about my home life pretty much. Only how well I do at school. I think home knows a lot more about school because of reports and newsletters, and I come home every day and talk about it. (Year 9, School One)

I think they [the teachers] don't know much about each person because there are so many students. (Year 9, School One)

Home sort of connects to school because sometimes I tell my dad what we've been doing. (Year 9, School Two)

Well it's a little bit of a relationship but not much. My home doesn't know how I act but more what happens, like my grades. School probably knows because of the way I act that my home life is pretty cool and pretty thinking and stuff. (Year 9, School Two)

Teachers don't tend to take much interest or tend to worry about what happens at home unless you're playing up in class. (Year 9, School Two)

Direct conversations between family members and school staff were seen to be restricted to parent-teacher interviews, occasional interaction at sports or cultural events and conversations of concern if a girl was seriously suffering personally and/or academically. School Two students focused on the perceived inadequacy of parent-teacher interviews, and School One students discussed teachers' apparent lack of recognition that homework impinges on family and community commitments. At the same time several students also mentioned that there could be both positives and negatives to closer home-school relationships. Some wanted to maintain a degree of privacy between their worlds:

I hope that the school knows nothing about my home life, because that's personal. What's it going to matter to the school whether my parents are divorced or married or whatever, or what I do in the afternoons? That's not really any of their business. (Year 9, School One)

The overall message was that key people in each space, such as teachers and parents, do not always know *what* students learn or how they are *being* as people in the other space, even though girls build their knowledge and identity through learning in both spaces. In discussing exceptions some students noted that they had closer relationships with one or two teachers¹⁰ and that most teachers knew more about older students' family lives and interests.

Curriculum decision making

Considering the huge range of possibilities for learning outlined by their initial brainstorm, we encouraged students to consider how they thought decisions were made about what should be learnt at school. Many students had not considered this question in depth before but, when asked, each offered at least one suggestion for how they thought such decisions *might* be made in their school.

When we put all of their comments together the students had built a fairly accurate, if somewhat Industrial Age, picture of curriculum decision making in New Zealand secondary schools. They thought that what is taught must be driven by experts knowing what students might need for their future, especially in relation to specific subject requirements and for different careers. While some students thought that there was some kind of national curriculum from which teachers simply select each lesson, others thought that teachers have a greater hand in designing “what works”. They thought that the curriculum decision makers of the future would need to provide opportunities for students to develop a broad base of knowledge and skills and to balance common learning for all students with more in-depth options to choose between. For example:

Well teachers kind of have to know the stuff for the year to come, so you're not behind in the next year. Maybe they know from having meetings [with each other] or from [their own] experience.

Like you need the basics for when you go to university. If you're going to be a doctor you need to know something about the body, so teachers cover cells. The topics have been decided already the previous years.

The curriculum must set topics that you need to cover in a week or a term, and the teachers must look through their resources to find exercises to do on the topics.

In science there is a list of 'I cans' and our teacher says she basically chooses one. I don't know where they come from—like 'I can label a microscope'. They are in our book.

They see what works and doesn't work. Teachers go on courses.

¹⁰ Especially in subjects that they saw as being *about* their personal lives and interests, such as in health where “it's [the teacher's] job to care”.

The Ministry of Education might do a review of the year and decide what's been good about the year, and what topics haven't been good.

It might also depend on the ability of the student. Like if you're not good at maths the teacher knows not to choose something hard, but choose something at your level. They probably decide from your test results.

Students' accounts of curriculum decision making tended to mention governments, experts and teachers, but they did *not* see much of a role for students, families or anyone else from the community. They felt students' biggest input into curriculum decisions were the personal choices they could make between optional subjects a decision for which many felt underprepared and uncertain. Within some subjects, classes could occasionally choose between topics (e.g., between Shakespeare and another author in English) or between activities (for example, between a worksheet and a quiz to learn the same material in maths). As younger students in the school they felt particularly removed from curriculum decision making:

It's more the BOT [student] rep[resentative] who does that [gives student input into school decisions] but they don't ask us anything. I don't even know who it is... They are supposed to talk to us but they just go to the meetings. They haven't asked us if we want any input to do with anything at our school, apart from what charity we wanted to donate to, but nothing to do with our education and how the school is being done.

Some of their suggestions for more shared decision making included:

Everyone [should be deciding] like teachers, the Ministry and us all together—it would probably make everyone happy.

It would be cool if we got a bit more say in what we do because some of the stuff we do we don't pay attention to because it's not fun. Some of the ways you learn could be changed.

I reckon they should interview you at the beginning of the year and talk about the stuff you enjoy.

They could put all the people who are interested in the same things in the same class.

Impressions of schooling and curriculum shifts over time

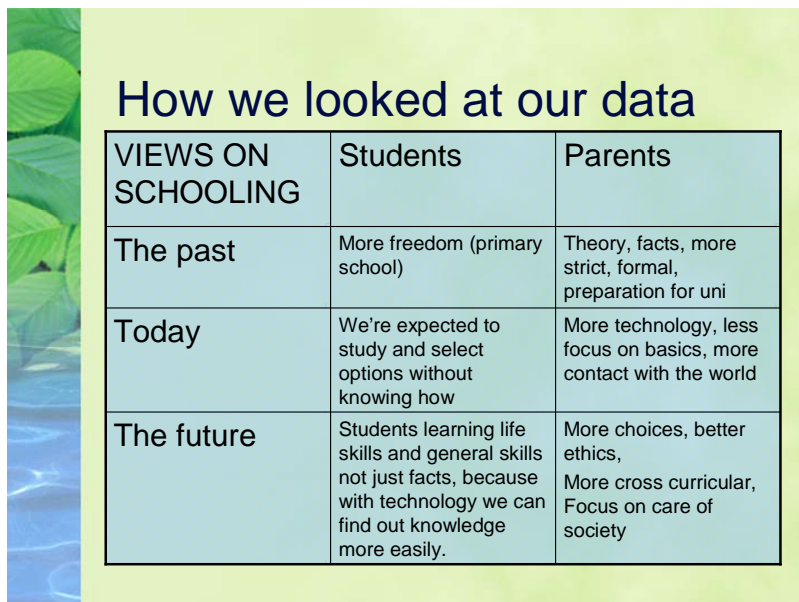
With our aim for students to become informed contributors to curriculum design we wanted to support students to view their initial ideas about schooling and curriculum in a broader context. As noted in the previous chapter we did this by helping the students to conduct their own research on their peers' and family members' views of school and by introducing them to educational theory and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Thoughts about how schooling has changed over time

Many of the students said that they heard surprising things from the people they interviewed about what schools were like in the past and could be like in the future. They especially enjoyed family

members sharing personal stories about their childhood experiences of school. Below is a brief summary from the School One presentation, where the students looked across parents' and other students' views of schooling in the past, present and future.

Figure 4 **School One students' summary slide on views of schooling**



| VIEWES ON SCHOOLING | Students | Parents |
|---------------------|---|--|
| The past | More freedom (primary school) | Theory, facts, more strict, formal, preparation for uni |
| Today | We're expected to study and select options without knowing how | More technology, less focus on basics, more contact with the world |
| The future | Students learning life skills and general skills not just facts, because with technology we can find out knowledge more easily. | More choices, better ethics, More cross curricular, Focus on care of society |

Note: The student interviewees spoke about schooling in their own past (i.e., their primary school) rather than secondary schooling before their time.

The slide and original interview material showed that people in both generations could see that many aspects of schooling had changed over the decades, and they expected it to continue to change in the future as a further progression of current trends. Some perceived shifts from the past to the present (and predicted to further develop into the future) included:

- from being strict with physical punishment to being more “laid back”
- from decisions made by adults to student input into decision making
- from learning inside a classroom to learning in interaction with local and global communities and through virtual learning environments (with “hologram teachers”)
- from a few standardised subjects to a proliferation of subjects with more choices within and between them
- from rote learning from books and teachers to teaching skills for students to seek information from elsewhere
- from monocultural to multicultural
- from teaching everyone the same to more one-on-one attention
- from exam-focused to future career-focused
- from failing nonacademic students to opening up possible pathways for everybody
- from streaming to mixed ability classes
- from docile students to assertive students
- from learning as individuals to learning through collaborating.

Many of these trends match well with the literature on the 20th century to 21st century transition in education. At the same time the students also said that a number of interviewees mentioned aspects of schooling seem to have been retained across the decades, including having the same basic core subjects, overall timetable structure and learning in year levels and classroom groupings.

Thoughts about curriculum changes

We gave a presentation about education theory and practice related to curriculum design and decision making, highlighting some differences between:

- a national curriculum, school curriculum, taught curriculum and learnt curriculum
- the “taught” curriculum and the “hidden” curriculum
- a prescriptive curriculum and an outcomes curriculum¹¹
- the evolution of New Zealand curriculum documents over the past 15 years.

We answered the students’ questions as fully as possible. For example, one student wanted to know if the Prime Minister is “the expert person who finalises the national curriculum”. We discussed the consultation processes that went into developing the new national curriculum, as well as the formal relationship between the Government and the public service. Students also wanted to know whether in New Zealand we are closer to the prescriptive [“gingerbread”] or the outcomes [“meal”] end (see copies of the PowerPoint visuals and the footnote below). We explained that recent curriculum documents appeared to be moving New Zealand more towards the latter but that it was not an either/or situation. Naturally, students wanted to know “What kind of outcomes do they come up with in the curriculum?” Each student looked through *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) to consider the outcomes messages and decision-making suggestions embedded in the document, especially in the vision and principles.

¹¹ Here we used an extended metaphor to convey the fundamental differences between a prescriptive approach and an outcomes-focused approach. We likened the prescriptive approach to curriculum to making gingerbread cookies. That is, by following a recipe exactly, using prescribed ingredients and doing each thing in the right order, the product should be reasonably identical (and replicable) gingerbread cookies. For the outcomes-focused approach to curriculum, we used a metaphor of a high-level outcome such as “design a meal that is healthy and delicious”. As long as each recipe meets the high-level goal of being healthy and delicious, this outcome goal could be met by any number of different recipes, prepared in different ways to reflect local variety and tastes etc.


Figure 5 Slide used to convey a prescriptive curriculum

Like following a recipe....

RECIPE: GINGERBREAD MEN
Ingredients
3 tablespoons golden syrup
75g caster sugar
1 tablespoon water
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon mixed spice
1 1/2 teaspoon ginger
75g butter
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
225g plain flour


Method
Preheat oven to 180 C Gently melt syrups, sugar, water and spices in a large saucepan. Bring to the boil, stirring well. Remove from heat, add butter and baking soda. Add enough sifted flour to make a firm dough. Sit aside to cool. Roll out dough and cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Decorate with currants or chocolate bits as desired and bake for about 12 minutes or until golden and crisp

If you use all the right ingredients...



If you follow the directions exactly

You will get the correct product at the end



(Somebody already decided what the right product is)

Figure 6 Slide used to convey an outcomes-based curriculum

E.g. instead of there only being one single recipe..

“We want a meal that is healthy, nutritionally balanced, and delicious”

We could use many DIFFERENT kinds of ingredients.....

We could prepare lots of different kinds of meals....

What matters is how well our meals fit the “outcome” that we were hoping for!



Many terms from the *Curriculum* were unfamiliar to the School One students¹² and, even though they thought they might be important, they didn't think that they *explicitly* talked or learnt about them at school. The School Two students suggested that some areas were given higher priority than others in their school. Interestingly, even the areas that they felt were high priority were often associated with a particular subject or opportunity contained within one area of the school, or they felt that it was part of the "hidden" curriculum rather than the taught curriculum. Most vision statements were placed in the learning zone between home, school and "other".

The School One students initially interpreted an outcomes curriculum as follows:

We can meet certain criteria but still be ourselves.

Teachers and students have a lot more responsibility in their learning.

You have to decide what you want to be—you have to think about it, not just follow it.

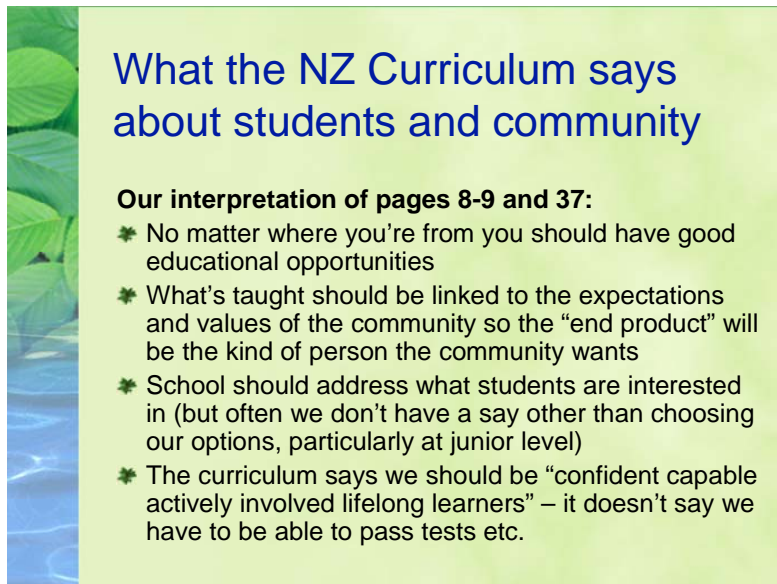
Teachers can teach the way they want to, and in the end we're still learning what we need to but just in a different way.

In a way that suits teachers and students, not just the way that it suits the school.

This way we get more of a choice of what we want to do and what we can do in the future.

Below is a summary of the School Two students' interpretation of some messages about education outcomes and decision-making processes in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Figure 7 **Slide from School Two presentation**



What the NZ Curriculum says about students and community

Our interpretation of pages 8-9 and 37:

- * No matter where you're from you should have good educational opportunities
- * What's taught should be linked to the expectations and values of the community so the "end product" will be the kind of person the community wants
- * School should address what students are interested in (but often we don't have a say other than choosing our options, particularly at junior level)
- * The curriculum says we should be "confident capable actively involved lifelong learners" – it doesn't say we have to be able to pass tests etc.

¹² For example: Being positive in your own identity, Being resourceful, Able to relate well to others, Connected to the land and the environment, Contributors to the wellbeing of New Zealand [and your communities], Informed decision-makers, Sustainability, Globalisation, Citizenship, Being enterprising & entrepreneurial, Managing yourself, Thinking.

The students were generally interested in young people and their communities having more input into what goes on at school. At the same time they were concerned that an emphasis on flexibility, big-picture goals and shared decision making could mean that students miss out on essential knowledge that might prove necessary for their future, be it an upcoming exam or their later career interests:

I reckon it should be in the middle [between a prescriptive curriculum and an outcomes curriculum] because I wouldn't want everyone to be the same, but I wouldn't want people to be 'it's whatever we want [so] we'll drop maths and English'.

This led to conversations about potential tensions between learning for life and learning for exams, and between standardising and personalising learning. The School One students were particularly anxious about covering all the material necessary for their end-of-year exams. They presented two key dilemmas that they saw for curriculum design in their final presentation: Life skills versus general knowledge; Going deep versus covering everything.

School One students' confidence findings

A teacher in School One worked directly with students between our workshops. Here the students were able to explore into their own experiences of teaching and learning—and those of their interviewees—in more depth. The key implications that emerged by the end of the workshop series were that:

- Learning happens if you feel confident and interested.
- Confidence comes from success.
- Goals are important, but they will be different for everyone.
- Pace is important and it varies for everyone.
- Knowing how you learn is important.

Questions around what supports students to develop confidence and resilience in a traditionally successful girls-only school resonated for school leaders and other adults in the school. As outlined in Chapter 3, the teacher therefore worked with another teacher to set up a follow-on project that would support students to investigate this area. We attended the students' final presentations, where they shared their findings and views.

To outline their contributions very briefly:

- The Year 10 students associated confidence with a range of qualities, such as self-belief, personal discovery and empowerment, and built a picture of the ways that these could be strengthened or undermined within different domains (such as in classes, co-curricular activities, school structures/systems).
- The Year 12 students reflected on the changing ways that their confidence had been challenged or strengthened over the years, alongside changes in relationships with—and

expectations from—teachers and community members. They especially noted that, with age, curriculum content increased and the need for collaborative learning decreased, meaning that their confidence became more associated with being prepared, self-directed and self-reliant.

- The Year 13 students looked at the different ways that students maintain their confidence, particularly in the face of adversity and uncertainty in the senior years. They noted how perceptive students are at noticing nonverbal cues from teachers, and that different types of students respond to cues and build their confidence in quite different ways.

A key message across all three groups was that relationships with teachers matter, and that this needs time to develop.¹³

Summary

This chapter addressed our second research question on students' views about learning/schooling and how these relate to ideas from parents, teachers and 21st century learning literature. Some of the points pertinent to the interests of the FACE project we have covered are:

- There is a multitude of things that students think are important to learn at their age; some relate to specific knowledge areas, while others are better described as dispositions, identities and competencies. *How* they learn and how they *feel* about learning is equally important to *what* they learn. What one student thinks is important to learn is not necessarily given the same value as another student.
- Students' home and school environments contribute to aspects of their learning in many knowledge areas and ways of being even though the people in each environment do not interact. Their families and schools may be invested in some similar "outcomes" but they do not necessarily recognise or plan for this in any explicit collaborative sense.
- Students have little input into what and how they learn at school and are largely uninformed about how curriculum decisions are made nationally and locally. They have strong views about what might be important for curriculum design and can explain what enables them to learn most effectively and enjoyably.

Students' views in relation to ideas about 21st century learning

The students' views of learning, schooling and curriculum design outlined in this chapter show that they, like many adults we work with, seemed to be in transition between 20th and 21st century ways of thinking about knowledge, learning and schooling. Some of their suggestions and interests reflect ideas in 21st century literature, while other comments they made are informed by 20th century ideas and practices. They did not necessarily envisage a radical shift of the whole structure of schooling and its place in society, and did not problematise many systemic aspects of

¹³ The two teachers developed a more analytical synthesis of the students' material and its potential implications for the school, which is beyond the scope of this report.

school as it is now, such as the timetable and subject divisions. Similarly, they assumed a certain degree of stability and predictability in the kinds of jobs and social roles that the curriculum will prepare them for when they leave school. The students were quite excited about future possibilities that align more closely with 21st century literature (from discussing potential future trends with us and their interviewees and in reviewing the new curriculum) but they were also anxious about some of the tradeoffs that might be necessary in order to get there.

Students' views in relation to the views of school staff and family/community members

We have shown that students are quite capable of making their own comparisons between their views and those of others. When given the opportunity to discuss big-picture curriculum ideas and undertake critical close readings of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), students could begin to articulate how these did or did not match their own experiences. Students also recognised some of the key dilemmas that educators and policy makers grapple with. They were ready to put their informed ideas in the mix and, as we show in the next chapter, looked forward to opportunities to discuss these with their teachers and families.

5. Changes and reflections: Did we make a difference?

The chapter addresses our third research question:

3. What enables students to be active participants in a school/FACE learning community and what is gained as a result (for students, for teachers and the community, for the school etc.)?
 - How can schools support (and create space) for students to co-construct curriculum development and teaching and learning in ways that reflect ideas about 21st century learning?
 - How (if at all) does students' active participation in these learning communities contribute to shifts in teaching, learning and educational practices and structures within their school?

The chapter discusses some of the shifts that have happened for the students, the schools and wider relationships to date, as identified through final interviews at the end of 2009 with four groups of students and one teacher. It is important to note that many of the shifts we present relate to other developments that were occurring in the schools and the wider FACE project over the study period, and were not necessarily the result of the student-researcher workshops.

Shifts for students

We identified three themes in the shifts for students:

Insights into education as a system

In both schools, several students said that the FACE project had given them a greater sense of purpose and sense of belonging at school. They had new insights into education as a system, and into the different parts and people that interact to produce what happens in classrooms:

It kind of gives school a purpose because we become more aware of how we're learning and why we're learning what we're learning. It's kind of like bits of a puzzle that make it all fit together: this is what the teachers are teaching, how they're teaching and how it's affecting us and how it all gets conveyed. (Year 12, School One)

I know more about what school is about now. I used to think school was just dumb and you had to come here to learn stuff, and now I feel more 'in' the school, not just having to come to school. Like I'm a part of here. (Year 10, School Two)

It's a different experience not many people would have got to have...learning about the curriculum—the national curriculum and school curriculum. It's cool to know what we are doing. (Year 10, School One)

This “meta-view” was broadened further for the School One students who considered research findings from different age groups across the school in the second year of the project:

The information was good that the other students came up with...like how [a teacher] said [our presentations showed] that when you're still in Year 10 you need affirmations and as you get older you become more self-reliant on your own confidence. I'd never really thought about it... The Year 12 slide was cool...the Year 13 girls used big words. (Year 10, School One)

The junior-to-senior jump comes on slowly—but now we realise how different it is... Our thoughts are now more independent, we've got more perspective. Some of the things they [the Year 10 students] said we would have said then—now we've 'been there and done that'. (Year 12, School One)

Confidence to express, research and represent views

Students talked about gaining confidence in expressing their views throughout the process. In both schools the students also spoke of facing their fears of public speaking and honing their presentation technique:

At first I was like oh yeah whatever, but then I got more into it, [and became] more open. At first I didn't really want to express and stuff. (Year 10, School Two)

We did [a presentation] to the staff and we made cue cards but we couldn't see the screen and there were gaps—a few awkward silences... [The presentation to students] was the scariest one—with parents you don't know them, and teachers kind of have to be supportive. Sometimes you'd look at someone and they would be listening and then you'd look at someone else and they'd be asleep... (Year 10, School Two)

The School One teacher believed that students' confidence had grown by having the same students over multiple years and enabling multiple opportunities for them to discuss ideas with staff and families. She noticed that the girls who had been involved as student researchers with NZCER in previous years were much more willing and able than their Year 13 “first time” counterparts to talk in depth about learning confidence in 2009:

It's been authentic and that's affirmed them by being able to present and get feedback. And then being interviewed by you [the researchers] makes it seem very serious and meaningful for them. They have really grown through that. Especially with the girls who have been involved for two years—I suspect they feel they have been more heard because we came back to them...I was stunned: I hadn't seen them [the Year 12 girls] for two years and they just walked in the door and just started talking at a high level. (Teacher, School One)

With the girls who have been involved for two years, their personal growth and their ability to walk in the door and able to talk about intrinsic learning has been amazing... Because when we first started in both groups they talked about 'we do graphs in maths' and it took us

ages to shift from that and this year when they walked in they were straight into talking about learning as this holistic concept. (Teacher, School One)

Indeed, one of the Year 13 students mentioned that this had been the first opportunity she could remember where she had conducted research with real social data as well as being the first time she had represented the student body in any way. A challenge for both groups was researching and representing others' views, not simply their own:

[The hardest part was] analysing...when you got something you didn't want...outside of what you were expecting, and outside of what you think. (Year 13, School One)

New eyes or dispositions for learning

We asked students directly if they thought they were any different as people, or in their learning because of being part of this work. Several thought they had developed a more critical eye for the learning opportunities afforded in the school, as well as for how they themselves were acting in class:

I've thought more about the confidence I have in class and what classes we're confident in and what one I'm not. We talked about being quiet in some classes and not in others. (Year 10, School One)

The School One Year 12 students noted:

I wouldn't have thought this in-depth about our learning, what we think about teachers, teaching styles, learning styles.

Sometimes in class I find myself sitting there observing the teacher still.

I just look at people more closely, and what works and what doesn't.

It's a lot easier to pick up what works. It helps you learn how to communicate things better and how to get as much as you can out of a certain lesson. To realise that not everyone fits [the] same category or teaching style. (Year 12, School One)

The School Two Year 10 students said:

I think more deeply and more critically than my friends.

Our friends are worrying about learning all the content, whereas we know it's about skills.

It makes us conscious of what kind of skills we need to be showing through our answers rather than just what you know.

At the same time very few students could identify much that they now do differently as a result, perhaps because our focus was not explicitly on learning to learn. Several statements made throughout the process could have done with more unpacking. For example:

...if you haven't learnt to learn by now then it's pretty sad. (Year 10, School Two)

I hope you don't have to do tests anymore, because that's not in the curriculum. (Year 10, School Two)

With maths it is all stuff. If you don't 'know this' then you fail. You've got to know the formulas—if you don't know the formulas you lose. (Year 10, School Two)

Shifts for schools

We asked interviewees whether they had noticed anything changing in the school as a result of FACE and what they imagined could be possible if work like this were to continue.

Reinvigorating respect for—and seeing the potential of—student voice

The most immediate result that we could identify from the final interviews was that school staff appeared to have an enhanced appreciation for the benefits of listening to students.

In both schools the initial opportunity for students to present quickly snowballed into other opportunities. For example, in School Two the students were initially invited to present at a community forum in Term 4 alongside a presentation by NZCER researcher, Jane Gilbert. The school then decided to invite them to present at both a Year 10 assembly and then at a full staff meeting where a New Zealand advocate for student voice, Gregor Fountain, also presented. The school is now considering options for enthusiastic teachers and students to expand this work in 2010. Similarly, School One organised a parent forum for the three student year groups to each present their findings, alongside some background to the FACE project from us and a summary from teachers. After the session the teachers decided to invite the girls to present at a school professional development day, and to return to a following session to have round table conversations with staff about suggestions for building student learning confidence and leadership across the school:

We're intent on developing more shared ownership—we've done lots of talking about 21st century learning and lifelong learning and it seems 'out there' but what does it mean in the classroom? [So we can say] this is the students' experience—lets think about how we can reflect it in the school's curriculum directions. (Teacher, School One)

The presentations created opportunities for further dialogue between students and teachers, and amongst teachers themselves. School Two students suggested that the biggest change for them was having new sorts of discussions with teachers, even those they had not met before. Students in both schools felt heard:

Teachers we didn't even talk to before have said to me 'Oh you were doing that presentation, I was really moved.' Maybe not moved but 'it was really interesting and I'm thinking differently now, and it's good to see and really positive'. I was a bit sceptical [that we could make a difference] at first.

[A teacher] said they've been talking about what we've done in the maths department—the problems we saw in the curriculum were mostly maths because it's where there is the most

content and least skills. Staff responded better to us than they probably would to a professional.¹⁴ (Year 10, School Two)

As one of those teachers listening to the students, the School One teacher we interviewed explained that she had always been an advocate for student voice but the FACE project had deepened her appreciation for its importance for implementing the new curriculum. She had come to see the students' inquiry to be intimately tied with teacher inquiry:

Having been involved in the whole process I can see that whole underpinning concept of *The New Zealand Curriculum* is inquiry and teacher inquiry. Even though I've been involved [in the FACE project and its earlier guises] for three years it's probably only now that I'm seeing how well it works... I always knew how important it [student voice] was but now I see how it is linked to the curriculum. When we went to the [2009 FACE teachers] workshop and Jane Gilbert spoke about the idea of shifting beyond 'expert' knowledge and [towards all] people being involved in decisions—that really resonated with this project because it was our intention to start making some collective discussions, if not collective decisions, around a particular area.

Ultimately she saw the importance of this for students functioning as active citizens in 21st century society:

[I've realised] that [collective discussion and decision making] is one of the biggest expectations our students will face in the future—and they will also be around ethical decisions I think. It's reflected say in political circles a bit like with the Kyoto protocols where it's all very well for one person to stand up and say 'this is what our targets are' but unless all the stakeholders are on board with that it doesn't matter what one person says—it has to be a collective decision. I think the girls will be part of that so this whole research project has really shown how it can happen I think.

Converting voices to changes

The students, like us and the teachers we worked with, were particularly interested in how this work might contribute to actual change in each school. As noted, School Two had not yet had time to consolidate the students' work, but the students were fairly optimistic:

I've just heard people like [*named five teachers*] all talking about having staff meetings in their subject things and talking about making changes but I haven't actually seen any changes yet. They're all talking about changing the way they teach and stuff. (Year 10, School Two)

In School One the first "change" was that the teachers found ways to continue the work, and developed their skills in supporting students-as-researchers in their own way:

We've appreciated the opportunity to do it for ourselves this year—being mindful of what we were doing and what we wanted to do. [It's been helpful to have NZCER] reminding us that a research process is supposed to be around the students' and not my own agenda. I

¹⁴ This quote inspired the title for this report.

appreciated being able to email you around the questions [etc.] to have someone outside the lens...asking what is your purpose. (Teacher, School One)

The School One teacher explained that this had contributed to some specific shifts in her department. For example, they converted some of the students' discussions around confidence into a learning framework for building students' confidence across the English years. She had also trialled commenting on effort as well as achievement in a Year 10 assessment.

In both schools the students thought that change would be gradual, even if they thought they had noticed some subtle shifts. Students had a few ideas for what could change in the future:

- regular teacher assessments by students and parents
- catering to different learning styles (by, for example, including visuals, bullet points, extended texts and teacher talk in all classes)
- self and peer assessment by students focused on effort and skills, not just content knowledge
- explicitly teaching study skills
- better IT capabilities and freer Web access so students can more easily access knowledge beyond books and teachers.

Some of the indications of change that students were hoping for seemed slightly odd to us, though we can see how they came to the conclusion within such a fast-paced project and with the priorities within each school at the time. Here are some extended quotes, within which we can see the different interest areas of each of the students and the teacher we worked with:

In subjects they could probably say we're working on these skills—they expect you to do it like with managing yourself. They could actually say today we're working on managing self. (Year 10, School Two)

Some of the level of teaching [would have improved where each teacher] really cares about the progress of everyone, and is able to adjust their teaching styles...to accommodate everyone, they don't just care about the top students. They have to be passionate and open-minded... We don't just learn knowledge off teachers, they influence who we are as people because it's your environment that makes you who you are and teachers are part of that. (Year 12, School One)

There would be more emphasis on the juniors...like talking more about the juniors in the school newsletters—make us more involved in the school. We could get badges... With the Year 10 exams and assessments you have no idea why you're doing it—make it more meaningful...and get your marks back before three months... For assignments...understand why we're doing them...know how it fits in your life. (Year 10, School One)

We've never had a chance to discuss things about life [so we'd like to see] a platform to discuss it...even have one [subject] on philosophy—that would help us build our confidence and help us know what our values are and what we stand for. (Year 13, School One)

In an ideal world I would like to create a structure where less is more—where students have less subjects but more meaningful learning relationships—where we have time to do more reflection on the learning that we are doing [and] that there is an ability to do a project where students were researchers in an authentic context...I'm hoping as a school we will

decide to simplify the Year 9 curriculum at least so the girls have more consolidated time of learning as opposed to lots of different ‘choices’. It’s not always about having choices [as options], but about making [informed] choices [as ongoing decision makers] and you can’t do without a deep learning experience. As school we thought we’d do a bit of everything so it was broad based but you can’t have both. Then within our learning areas we can see how to best use time to ensure students have deep learning. (Teacher, School One)

Overall, these comments show us that while each group can identify changes they think could happen, there is a need for ongoing dialogue so that the potential tensions and reasoning between different interests can be explored, particularly in relation to the 21st century context.

Shifts for family and community engagement

As noted in the Introduction we began this FACE project in separate components: one focused on students and another focused on families. The previous chapter noted the new insights into their understandings of education that these particular student-researchers gained from interviewing their family members. Did we see any shifts in family engagement beyond that?

A conduit for engagement

For both schools, although we did not set it up from the start, the students became positioned as a conduit through which the school might better engage with parents. Student presentations provided an event that family members might want to support.

Both schools were somewhat disappointed by the number of community attendees:

Even though we knew it would happen it was hard to see how few people came—perhaps that’s the nature of secondary schools or perhaps it’s just the nature of this one. We thought one way to bring in parents would be to involve a greater number of students and individually invite their parents—but a number of the girls didn’t come with parents and the ones who did, the parents came in support of their students rather than coming with the intention to offer something themselves... (Teacher, School One)

Only about 20 people came—nobody knew about it. They only mentioned it once and students never told their parents. It was in [the school newsletter] but half the parents don’t read it—it stays in your bag. (Year 10 students, School Two)

Despite the overall numbers, most of the students we spoke to in the final interviews did have at least one family member present, including parents, aunts, uncles, nieces and siblings. The students thought their family members had found it interesting, and different people were particularly interested in different messages, but thought that their family members did not wholeheartedly engage in discussions:

My parents said it was interesting to listen to us. There aren’t many opportunities to go to things like it—but they didn’t really make suggestions about how to improve the school. (Year 10, School One)

The students also saw an ongoing need to inform parents about curriculum decisions and about students' and teachers' views. Ultimately they wanted their parents to be more onboard with the school's approach:

There are a lot of parents who don't really understand about the new curriculum. My dad doesn't know much about it. I missed a physics exam last year and he thought it was the end of the world and I wouldn't get to do it in Year 12. He thinks school now is fuzzy. (Year 12, School One)

Mum's stuck in [the] Cambridge [examination system]—that's her frame of thinking... She's trying to compare [my schooling] to her Year 12, like [saying] 'We didn't do this, and we didn't do that.' Mum doesn't like NCEA and doesn't understand it. (Year 12, School One)

The School One teacher also spoke about the vulnerabilities associated with asking students to say exactly what they think about their teaching and schooling, and was happy to hear the parents affirm the complex job that teachers do in trying to serve the potential of each individual student:

After all this effective feedback and confidence raising they [the teachers] are ready to run (laughs). We hear so much about knowing your students, rewarding effort, giving feedback and opportunities to redeem themselves especially in junior school... It's a huge additional workload... Even if nothing else came from that [family] evening it was nice to hear the parents acknowledging the teacher, and for students to hear that. (Teacher, School One)

Shifting from presentations to dialogue

Both schools aimed to move from one-way presentations, perhaps with a simple question-and-answer format, to a more free-flowing two-way dialogue. Each set up to have table conversations around a set of open questions after the presentations (due to timing and numbers, School One stayed as a full group):

It would be good to see [parents'] side of the story. They're always just there for presentations to come and have a look, and they're like yeah that's nice—good to see. But finding out what they *really actually* think would be interesting... (Year 13, School One)

In hindsight we would have been better to have asked questions and comments of parents as the girls went [through their presentations]. It may have been far more interactive... so we didn't really get the parent consultative bit quite right. (Teacher, School One)

Students at both schools wanted to get to a point where teachers, parents and students could sit around a table and discuss ideas and concrete strategies together. They had experienced possibilities in the parent sessions, but like the school staff we spoke to, thought that family members would need a different kind of support to become excited and confident in the process:

After we did the talk we went off into table and talked about stuff like what we're saying here. It was good because you got the parent, teacher and student's view... I think the parents and teachers focused more on broader ideas whereas the students want things that will help them directly. The parents and teachers wanted to talk about really big ideas and

the students wanted to bring them really down to earth and say ‘What will it mean?’ (Year 10, School Two)

If [parents] had been more involved [along the way] they would have more ideas about what the discussions were about so they’d probably have more insightful things to say. (Year 12, School One)

It was nice to hear what the parents said—they’ve not had a big role in it—most of our research has been student–teacher. Our parents haven’t been involved apart from [what we talk about at home]. My dad has a lot to say these days. (Year 12, School One)

A couple suggested that parents could be part of workshops like the students. The School One students trialled the first workshop post-it activity about important learning with parents and then staff, with interesting results:

It was cool. There were heaps and heaps [nearly all of the post-its] in the middle with parents. With the staff there were still more in the middle but there were some in school and hardly any in home. (Year 10, School Two)

Summary

This chapter addressed our third research question on what might be gained as a result of supporting students to participate in inquiries and conversations about their education in the 21st century. The previous chapters suggested that our input only represents the very beginning of a long-term process towards students becoming co-contributors to curriculum, teaching and learning. However, this beginning work indicates that some initial shifts occurred after our workshop series (and the subsequent teacher-supported follow-up work, particularly in School One). In summary these shifts were as follows:

- Students gained new insights into education as a system, and began to see themselves as part of a much broader picture nationally and historically.
- Students gained confidence in expressing, researching and representing the views of themselves and others.
- Students began to bring more of a critical eye to what, how and why they were being taught. The majority focused on what they thought teachers could do differently, while a minority also noted that they had approached their own learning differently.
- School staff were impressed by the power of the students’ messages, and their abilities to speak confidently amongst large audiences and intimate two-way discussions. This often required them to consider questions beyond what we had covered in the workshops and opened up additional opportunities for them to engage directly with other groups.
- A few concrete changes developed as a result of the work in School One, where the project had extended and teachers were working with student-researchers directly. Possibilities for change were being discussed in School Two.
- Families were enticed into the school for conversations about teaching and learning because they wanted to hear their daughters present. The family sessions, and the interviews that

students conducted with family members as part of the workshop process, appeared to open up some opportunities for parents to affirm, question and challenge key messages about education from the students and other presenters. However, they tended to listen more than speak.

- Students and staff at both schools were interested in further exploring ways to better engage families in dialogue. They thought family members needed opportunities to become more informed about the big picture in order to formulate their suggestions and engage confidently in discussion with teachers.

In the final chapter of this report we cast a critical eye over the processes we have described from our perspectives as researchers. We look at some of the tensions we faced, and explore some of the implications of work like this in the broader attempts to encourage greater engagement of families and communities in education decision making.

6. Conclusion: What did we learn?

The work described in this report built the participating students' confidence, knowledge, interest and reflexivity—to a point where we believe they could start to engage in broader learning communities with teachers and family members, and continue inquiries into their own and other students' experiences. We gained some insights (summarised at the end of each chapter) into:

- the kinds of support that we provided to help students reflect on their experiences and critique educational ideas
- the students' views about important learning, school–family relationships, curriculum and shifts in schools over time
- the shifts that occurred for students, schools and family engagement as a result of the process.

In conclusion, we would like to set out some of the tensions we experienced as researchers, and raise some questions for further consideration by those interested in this kind of work. We hope that schools keep these tensions and questions in mind as they continue—or embark on—establishing learning communities designed to engage students as partners.

Tensions and questions

Tension 1: Reifying students' "naïve" claims versus inculcating them into "our" paradigm

One of the challenges we faced was balancing our aim of asking students to express and represent their views with our aim to give them access to the "big picture" so that they could make more informed comments. Students were often keen to hear what we thought about particular aspects of education. We tried to present a range of viewpoints, and to suggest that ours was just one perspective within wider educational debates.

Questions

- Could these collaborative approaches produce an unintentional co-opting of students into existing frames of thinking (i.e., teaching students to see things in "school" ways or "researcher" ways of thinking *instead of* in students' ways)?
- How do we avoid this work becoming just the transmission of yet more content knowledge for students to regurgitate (e.g., educationalists' views of the curriculum)?

Tension 2: Presenting views versus entering into dialogue

The primary aim of the project was to work towards establishing learning communities where teachers, parents, students and other partners could engage equitably in conversations. This is not about compliance, nor is it about making everyone alike, but about strengthening the capacities and processes for communities to enter into dialogue with each other.

Questions

- How do we create space for different people’s areas of expertise and concern to be acknowledged and made explicit, without silencing some voices more than others?
- How do we move beyond the “consultation” model in which different groups are asked to present their views to one another for school staff to “take into account” in their planning, and move towards real-time problem solving and shared decision making?

Tension 3: Creating expectations for change versus managing expectations about change

The youth participation literature suggests that authentic student participation should lead to action, but in any project like this, change is likely to be gradual, emergent—and sometimes nonexistent. A key motivator for many students we worked with was a chance to “make a difference”. We, too, were invested in the possibilities of real change, but were also aware that this was dependent on many factors beyond our control, and that, at least initially, students’ suggestions would be filtered through the current priorities of each school.

Questions

- Is participation authentic if no change occurs?
- How do we ensure that there are good feedback processes in the future so that students can hear about any long-term changes that their work may have fed into?

Tension 4: Meaning making versus destabilising experiences

The opportunities for inquiry into the bigger picture context helped some students to “make sense” of their educational experiences but, at the same time, we were aware that without adequate support this might have the potential to destabilise them. We were concerned that the students might become frustrated or disillusioned, perhaps even switching off from their learning.

Questions

- If students learn to critique their education experiences through a future-focus lens, will they then feel frustration if they perceive they are experiencing outmoded forms of education that do not live up to their new ideals?
- How can we increase students’ ability to see “problems”, while at the same time also developing their capacity to represent or solve them?

Tension 5: Quick, broad coverage versus long-term in-depth investigation

As we were only in the schools for a limited time, we attempted to cover a lot of ground quickly, in the hope that students or the school might find something of particular interest to follow up on in more depth. This limited our ability to support students to delve in depth into one particular aspect with us, as well as our ability to unpack some of the assumptions underneath the comments of some students (and some of our own).

Questions

- How can work like this align with the principles of 21st century learning: for example, giving students opportunities to generate new knowledge by carrying out authentic tasks in real-world contexts; foregrounding the agency, responsibility and transformative potential of the learner; and providing opportunities to help students see the “big picture”? (Gilbert, 2005)
- If this work is to align with a transformative agenda in education, how do we create spaces for, and types of, conversations that can encourage everybody to think deeply about the underlying assumptions about the purpose and function of schools?

Tension 6: Working *in* schools versus working *with* schools

There are both benefits and drawbacks to being “outsiders” working with students in schools. On the one hand, we are able to offer a perspective that is quite different from that of teachers or students. On the other hand, for change to be sustainable it seems to us that it should be driven from within a school, not by external visitors. We experienced some “talking past each other” with staff in both schools in the first year of the project as we each struggled to clearly articulate and develop a shared understanding of each party’s objectives for this work, and of who should be “driving” the development of the process.

Questions

- What relationship or role should researchers or other external “experts” play in supporting schools to develop learning communities that genuinely engage students, staff and families/communities?
- How can teachers, students and researchers develop the skills that are necessary for this work (particularly when it goes beyond the traditional roles and experiences of each)?

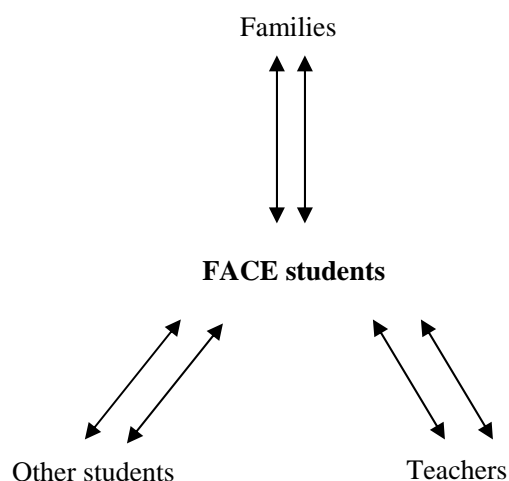
Tension 7: Students as connectors versus students as contributors

We set out to support students to become contributors to conversations about education design, but as the project progressed, they were increasingly positioned as connectors for conversations between other parties, such as schools and families (see Figure 8 below). The FACE students’ research and presentations provided an avenue to (a) provide teachers with some insight into parents’ views about education, and (b) bring parents into the school to engage with teachers directly.

Question

- If students are seen as a “lever” for engaging parents and families into dialogue with the school, how can schools avoid “tokenism” (i.e., valuing students not for their input, but for their strategic value as connectors between other groups)?

Figure 8 **FACE students positioned as a lever to connect the views of others**



Tension 8: Students as a homogeneous group versus students as heterogeneous

In this project our main groupings were: students, teachers and parents. It could be interpreted that we assumed there were more similarities within groups than between groups. We were conscious that we did not always give adequate space for the expression of difference within the student group.

Question

- Could a similar process begin with groupings according to different demographics, such as by culture? (For example, could a group of Māori parents, Māori students and Māori teachers work together and come later into conversation with a group of Tongan parents, Tongan students and Tongan teachers etc.?)

Final remarks

This project provided important learning for the NZCER FACE project, and hopefully both of the schools involved. To conclude, we would like to point to some important parallels between the experiences of students, teachers and researchers throughout this project:

- We all took on new roles that extended our skill sets beyond what is traditionally associated with our positions and our “training” (i.e., there were challenges to what it means to be a student, a teacher, a researcher or a parent with regard to education).

- We all sometimes struggled to translate our ways of seeing the world into the language of another group (research language to education language, or “school” language to language that was relevant to parents and families).
- We all wanted to value our own and each other’s areas of expertise without one form of expertise dominating the conversation.
- We all had to work around systemic constraints associated with current schooling practices—such as timetabling and other school culture practices—that, among other things, positioned our work with students as something “extra” that took time away from their regularly scheduled classes.
- We all appreciated feeling that our small project together was contributing something useful to a bigger system (students contributing to their school system, each school contributing to the student component of FACE, our student research component contributing to the full FACE project, the FACE project hopefully contributing to New Zealand education and so on).

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Appendix A: Interview guide for student researchers

Briefly explain our role/involvement to date. *[Assumption: NZCER researchers are part of learning community and/or change system, and our role should be transparent.]*

| Interview questions | Rationale/ relevant research question |
|---|--|
| <p>How did you find the parents' evening last night?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was it like presenting? - What was it like facilitating conversations with parents? – facilitation/recording role/ parents views - What would you do differently next time? What could have the teachers have done differently? | <p>Debrief from prev night – links to RQs below</p> <p><i>[Assumption] students are likely to need specific support and guidance in order to: represent their perspectives on these matters to an audience of teachers and parents/community members.</i></p> |
| <p>What would you say is the purpose of all of this work that's been going on?</p> <p>Why were you interested? (perhaps also from different people's perspectives – e.g. as students, for teachers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence focus • FACE/students as researchers focus | <p><i>Our view: project aims to develop a process to engage and support secondary students to become critical and informed contributors to curriculum and education design in their school... activities designed to support student researchers to investigate different aspects of their own and their peers' perspectives and experiences, and to introduce the students to various relevant ideas about learning in the 21st century.</i></p> |
| <p>What has it been like working with teachers in this way?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's new/different about it, if anything? • What was difficult, if anything? | <p>What kinds of support help students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research and reflect on their own and their peers' experiences and views about learning and school? • engage with and critique various educational ideas about learning and schooling in the 21st century? <p><i>[Assumption: students are likely to need specific support and guidance in order to: research and reflect on their own/their peers' learning experiences and views about school]</i></p> |
| <p>[Memory jog for 2007 and 2008 groups]</p> <p>What was it like working with NZCER researchers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was good/helpful about it, if anything? • What wasn't? | |
| <p>What has it been like trying to research or represent the views of students, not just your own?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How/have you done this? | |

| Interview questions | Rationale/ relevant research question |
|---|---|
| Overall, what has been some of the best thing about being involved? | What enables students to be active participants in a school learning community (the "FACE" learning community) and what is <i>gained</i> as a result (for students, for teachers and the community, for the school, etc)? |
| Overall, what has been some of the biggest challenges? | |
| <p>How has your thinking about school or learning changed through being part of this research?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of all the things you have been part of at school and during this FACE work, was there a time when you came to think quite differently about learning or school? • Thinking differently about <i>yourself in relation to Learning & School, students' roles and teachers' roles in school, who gets a say in shaping curriculum and teaching?</i> • Or anything you have learned about yourself in this process? | <p>What <i>are</i> the students' experiences and views about learning and school (i.e. what do they think is important to learn), and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these relate/compare to ideas about 21st century learning? • How these relate/compare to the views of school staff, and parents/community members? <p><i>Assumption: Students are likely to need specific support and guidance in order to: engage with (and critique) various educational ideas about learning and schooling in the 21st century.</i></p> |
| <p>If you were to change three things about school tomorrow what would they be?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did that suggestion come from? (own view, other students) <p>[If approp/nec] If you had 3 years to make changes to school what would you change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did that suggestion come from? (own view, other students) | |
| <p>Have you noticed any shifts in teachers, the school, or your family related to what you have been doing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, explain biggest, most exciting • If not, why don't you think you have? | Will students' active participation in these learning communities contribute to shifts in teaching, learning, and educational practices and structures within their school? |
| <p>What would you suggest could be done differently if we were to keep going with this FACE project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think could happen next year? | How can schools support (and create space) for students to co-construct curriculum development and teaching and learning in ways that reflect ideas about 21st century learning? |