Conceptualising Student Leadership at a Time of Change

by

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Draft in progress—comments welcome*

Introduction

As head of Computer Studies at an American-curriculum high school in south-east England I am responsible for determining and purchasing school information and communications (ICT) technology equipment. In 2007 I began to notice that students at the school were disengaged with the technologies provided for them by the school, and so I decided to ask them why. I conducted a study examining students' views of the access to and the uses of school technology. What they told me was that school was that the technology provided for them at school did not engage them, nor did they feel that they were being prepared for the self-service digital culture of the 21st century. They also said that students were not included in decisions about which technologies the school purchases for them, nor how technology is used in classes. One student said, "No one asks us, we are just dust in the wind". I then began to think of ways in which I could involve students in decision-making about school ICT.

In 2009 I designed and facilitated a project, which became to focus of my doctoral research. It involved 25 students aged between 14 and 19 working with 13 staff at the school to devise policy statements about teaching and learning with ICT, for recommendation to the Senior Management Team. The student-led project lasted 9 months, and involved four cycles of action research. The students played the role of researchers while the adults in the consortium served as their critical friends. I studied this group using case study methodology over 33 months to understand how and why student leadership of ICT for learning could impact the knowledge, practice and school environment, and the consequences of their involvement.

The research aims to understand student leadership and uses ICT for learning as the setting for the investigation. My primary concern was about students' emancipatory interests and the approach used takes into consideration the cultural practices within the school. The goal of the student-led project was in part getting students at the school to have a say in how ICT facilities are organised and used to benefit them. It was also about empowerment of these students through their negotiations with adults in the school, which has consequences for

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planning and implementing school ICT, and for ICT policymaking, rather than directly with teaching and learning with ICT.

My conceptualization of student leadership is drawn from Bourdieu's (1977a) study of culture. His work has been used to understand education leadership (e.g. Gunter, 2001; 2003; Wilkinson, 2010). Bourdieu's (2000) approach allows researchers to transcend the dualities of structure and agency, objectivism and subjectivism, and I use his concepts of field, habitus and capital to emphasise instead the relationship between *agency*—student leadership—and *structure*—the student-led project. Agency allows for descriptions of the student leaders not simply in terms of their traits and characteristics but also in relation to the habitus of the project. The student-led project as a field makes it possible to establish the context of student leadership as a structured social space, with its own properties and power relations. Bourdieu's (2000) work helped me think through the interactions between the student leaders and adult participants in the consortium, who are from other fields within the school with different hierarchies of influence and power structures.

Student involvement in school ICT decisions

Literature discussing research done in the UK and US education state sector revealed that little consideration had been given to students' opinions on the impact of computers on their learning (Arafeh and Levin, 2003; Selwyn et al., 2009). In sharp contrast are more recent ideas on learner-generated context—the appropriations, usages and connections that students make using ICTs outside the classroom—which provide motivation and justification for listening to students, and for learning about how they generate contexts that enhance their informal learning. This view can be extended to private institutions since private schools recruit staff from state schools (Green et al., 2008). So that while the internal organisations of schools within the state and private sectors may differ, many of the practices remain the same.

Schools worldwide continue to spend large sums of money annually on technology infrastructure, with the aim of infusing ICTs into the curriculum. Recently there have been studies to examine the extent to which schools are developing the capacity to integrate ICT into learning, teaching and management processes. Much of the evidence gathered shows that there has been an increase in the number of computers and ICTs in most schools allowing them 'to achieve baseline targets for computer-to-pupil ratios' (Condie and Monro, 2007: 3), and that teacher competence and skills have improved in part due to increased ICT

professional development opportunities (Schibeci et al., 2008). ICT is also now more embedded in the everyday practices in school than ever before: electronic attendance systems, online grade books, etc. However, there is a growing body of research (Eynon, 2009; Furlong and Davies, 2011) which confirms that students make more use of ICTs, particularly the Internet, at home than in school. So despite many years of huge investments in networks, computers and ICTs in educational institutions the actual implementation and use of school ICT is far less extensive and sophisticated (Selwyn, 2011a; 2011b) than it could be, and many questions remain surrounding who determines why and how computers are used to improve learning and instruction.

Students' participatory rights

There is also the issue of students' participatory rights, such as those elaborated on by Thomson and Gunter (2006). Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which assures 'the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child' (UNCRC, 1989: unpaged), is both a substantive and procedural right entitling children to participate in matters affecting them, such as schooling, as well as enabling them to defend these rights and to challenge the abuse of these rights. The Convention does not address student leadership directly; instead it opens up avenues through which students may become involved in daily school life, including leadership.

According to Thomson and Gunter (2007: 328), the more common ways in which the Convention has been enacted in England are through '(a) the development of forms of school governance where students have a place on formal committees and councils, and/or their own student representative body, and (b) a move to involve students in school improvement'. However, as Smyth (2006) suggests, democratic approaches differ both in their scope and in their interpretation. It is therefore not surprising that there is a tendency for school leaders to choose interpretations which best fit in with their personal goals and objectives. In Bourdieu's (1998) view any social formation consists of a hierarchy of multiple, relatively autonomous fields with their own logics or laws of practice, hierarchies and power relations between agents and their positions within the field. Agents within the field compete for control of interests specific to the field and utilise their capitals (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) in this competition.

Even some of the governmental educational initiatives claiming to address the Convention use it in a rather limiting manner. For example: provision for young people in England to contribute in a systematic way towards policy decisions arrived with the introduction of the Children and Young People's Unit following the 2001 general election. The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (ECM) (HM Treasury, 2003) was subsequently released. It was followed in 2004 by the Children Act, which represents the main piece of legislation in relation to children's rights in England. The Act stipulates that local children's services should reflect the needs of children and young people and that, accordingly, local authorities and partners need to encourage a good level of participation by children and young people in the design and delivery of services relating to the 'health, safety, enjoyment and achievement, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being' (UNICEF, 2006: unpaged) of children. Although these five outcomes of ECM are supposed to be based on young people's views collected in a national survey, the final document being delivered to schools and other institutions does not have anything to say about children's participation in making decisions about their learning or any other issues.

With student participation becoming part of the popular and political discourses, schools now find it necessary to include students in leadership decisions. Student voice is often associated with a wide range of public activities that take place in and outside schools about the leadership decisions at various levels throughout the school. Fielding (2006) describes student involvement in school reforms 'that directly affect their learning' as happening in a variety of ways (see p 299). Included in this continuum are approaches, which he warns may tend 'towards an exploitative use of young people largely for purposes of perpetual performance and occasional ostentation' (p 300). Thomson and Gunter (2007: 23) concur with this view and say that at best, the 'virtual absence' of student voice from school leadership is compensated for 'by children being asked to respond to and hence legitimise adult practice and plans'.

Three broad categories of student participation in the governance of schools are referred to by Thomson and Gunter (2006; 2007): Students-as-Respondents, Students-as-Consultants and Students-as-Researchers. In the first of these students are simply a source of data, which may or may not serve to inform school policy and practice. As consultants, students play the role of expert advisers, providing a perspective available only to them in their unique position as consumers of education. A less common approach involves students doing research about their school (Fielding and Bragg, 2003). When engaged as researchers, students are

positioned as planners and leaders of evidence-based school reform. Promoting the importance of students as researchers, and co-researchers, makes them aware that they are keepers of information that adults need but cannot access unless students are included in discussions about their daily lives in school, which positions them as powerful individuals within the school community. Through such involvement the individual and collective knowledge of students is valorised and made essential to the running of the school.

UNCRC (1989) as an influence for collecting and understanding students' perspectives is fraught with problems including legitimacy—who they represent and what gives them the authority to speak on behalf of others—and language—how they put across their ideas and what meaning is read into what they say. Nevertheless, there is still a strong case for including students in decisions about school ICT. Their claims that the ways in which ICTs are currently used in teaching does not include them (Davies, 2011) should be of great concern to educators everywhere. Arguably, the manner in which students use ICTs outside school is impossible to replicate in classrooms structured to support formal learning; yet, the ubiquity, flexibility, adaptability and portability of ICTs place students in a position to create learning experiences that are highly personalised and provide them with the knowledge required for designing similar learning opportunities for others. Since this knowledge is often based on personal resources, such as their motivation and existing understanding, it is essential that input from students be given serious consideration. The challenge therefore becomes constructing spaces where forms of leadership that are inclusive of the knowledge and aspirations of young people, regardless of whether they are in state or private education, could be exercised.

Democratic student involvement

The concept of democracy is widely seen as the most legitimate form of government in terms of ethics and practice (Diamond, 1989). A democratic government is supposed to vest in its citizens, direct or indirect rule by the majority. Two prevalent views of democracy are: the representative view, which is about enacting or choosing people who will represent the views of others—nowadays modelled on a modern market—and the participatory view, which emphasizes democracy as a moral ideal. However, the fragility of democracy is well known in the western world and beyond (Fielding, 2004; Osler and Starkey, 2006). Though fraught with ambiguity (Apple, 2008), the word democracy evokes emotional responses and this adds to its popularity. Over the past couple of decades there has been a global interest in

developing a democratic culture of participation, collaboration and cohesiveness in schools, and for the use of education in cultivating a more democratic society.

It has been argued that there are distinctions between state and private schools in the US and in England, especially in terms of how they are governed and controlled (Apple, 2007; Ball, 1997). Claims are that governments rely on democratic control while private sector activities are about commercial gains, structured by markets. But part of my argument in this paper is that students' experiences are more dependent on where they are located within the power structure of their institution than on its organization, and therefore the daily experiences of students within the state and private schools can be quite similar.

Democracy in schools takes on different forms. Citizenship, inclusion, teacher voice and student voice are just some of the terms used to refer to ways of forging new relationships within the demanding settings of schools in order to empower those involved to build and develop sustainable learning communities. Student voice projects specifically focus on working with young people to break down traditional assumptions about students, and to promote dialogic relationships between staff and students. Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) by the UK in 1990, initiatives in schools to promote participation of their students in school-based reforms have grown rapidly. Yet the literatures show that approaches to the enactment of this principle can differ greatly.

Democratic education in schools, both in the UK and abroad, continues to have high political stakes, but there is a tension between educational programmes promoting national unity and identity, and addressing diversity, and the multiple identities of students (Osler and Starkey, 2005). However, there is evidence that young people are socially engaged and politically aware although 'their strategies for citizenship and relationships with formal politics may be quite different from those that are visible through a conventional lens' (Harris et al., 2007: 22).

Democracy is important in schools, not only for teaching students about its principles but also for creating conditions which encourage multilateral discussions about changes in education for providing opportunities for self-reflection, and for giving focus to the common good balanced with individual dignity (Apple and Beane, 2007). There is evidence to show that schools that allow democratic participation by students, where a culture of harmony exists between students and staff, are most likely to become effective learning environments

(Lansdown, 2000). It is important to examine students' contributions to discussions—not least, about using computers for teaching and learning, because their perspective as learners in the digital age is unique. Students can provide insights that teachers and administrators could use to gain better understanding of the specific practices through which learning with ICTs can be made effective (Davies, 2009). Self-advocacy projects have the potential to provide avenues for student leaders to learn how to educate themselves about issues, how to organize their peers, how to communicate their ideas and put across their concerns confidently, how to negotiate solutions with those in authority, and the importance of appealing to decision-makers within schools. Courses about democracy provide students the opportunity to address issues of inequality and injustice, grapple with globalization and migration, discuss possibilities for civic and political engagement, and model forms of democratic participation in society (Osler and Starkey, 2006). The Internet and new media now make it possible for young people to exchange political views, regardless of where they live or what type of rule they are governed by. Concepts that resonate with democracy raise aspirations and hopes for a new kind of citizenship: one that operates for the good of all humanity.

School leadership that is able to speak for and on behalf of all members of the school community needs to be in touch with students' perspectives, as well as those of teachers and other stakeholders within the school community. Including students in school leadership decision-making safeguards against a single group having dominance over other sections of the community, in this case adults over students—even though they are not in the minority. Democratic legitimacy is often linked to consent given in the form of democratically held elections. Students who are elected to speak on behalf of others learn that they are 'in a strong position to influence what happens in their communities' (Fielding, 2009: 503). If, as Perry (2009) comments, 'education policy is democratic inasmuch as it supports equality of opportunity and outcome for all students' (p 436) then policymakers' intentions, their aspirations and their practice need to be inclusive of students.

The student-led project

The student-led project involved 25 students enrolled a course I taught and took place during the 2009–2010 academic year. I initially thought of working with the Student Council but decided that this was already an elite group of students, and that having them participate in the project would only reinforce existing hierarchies among students (Reay, 2006). I provided

their parents with an overview of the project and sought their consent. Assent was also sought from the students, and they were given the opportunity to switch to another course should they not wish to participate. I also presented my plans to the staff prior to starting the project. I acted as the group's secretary: drawing up a tentative schedule of activity at the start of the project, planning when certain lessons should be taught to increase students knowledge about the research, and booking rooms for consortium meetings. I also kept a research diary throughout the project, which helped inform my case study.

The project took the form of an action research, involving four cycles of planning, implementation and evaluation. It began with a period of reconnaissance during which the student researchers uncovered key issues that would eventually shape the research. It was the most important stage in the project as it allowed them to understand the work involved and to commit to it. Each of them kept a diary for one week in which his or her daily experiences with ICT were recorded. The diary data revealed four main problems they encountered with ICT for learning in school, which they used to identify a rationale for the project. They shared this information with the consortium and it was agreed that an all-student survey would be conducted within a month.

The student researchers worked with consortium staff on preparing the student survey. Then they collected and analysed the data, and presented their findings to the consortium. During the discussions that ensued it was decided that the next step should involve exploring the ICT experiences of teachers at the school. A random sample of 40 teachers was selected to complete the questionnaire. The student researchers analysed the data and presented their findings to the consortium staff. Problems with classroom ICT experienced by teachers were similar those students had reported in the all-student survey. What followed were discussion about the problems teachers encounter with using ICT in the classroom and how these might be alleviated. The consortium decided that it was worth looking into the ICT practices at other independent school, and asked the student researchers to prepare a questionnaire addressing relevant areas. Two hundred independent schools in Europe, Asia, American and Africa were surveyed. The data collected were presented to the consortium and discussed, and used to come up with a tentative list of recommendations.

The student researchers gave a presentation about their project to the whole school at the end of the 2009–2010 academic year. They invited members of staff, parents and the school's SMT. They presented the project's aims, discussed some of the data collected and shared

some of their ideas on improvements that could be made, and why. Everyone was invited to provide feedback. Eight policy recommendations aimed at improving ICT for learning were drawn up at the final meeting of the consortium on 22 April based on the data collected and the feedback received. These were included in a written report to the SMT. The Head of ICT met with the student researchers, which provided them with further opportunity to negotiate what was in the best interest of students and teachers.

Data collection and analysis

The student-led project was simply a lens though which I could observe how student leadership is constructed and understood. Even though I helped with planning and setting up the project, the student researchers led it through to its conclusions. Once it ended I began collecting data for my case study. Data were collected mainly through participant interviews. There were two rounds of interviews with six staff participants were and three rounds with groups of the twenty-five student participants. My interpretations of what I observed during the consortium meetings provided useful framing for questions used in the first round of participant interviews, and this data informed my approach to the second and third rounds of interviews. I also analysed school documents, including the philosophy statement and the five-year plan, which included a sections labelled enhancing ICT for teaching and learning, and preparing students for success and leadership. I had attended the ten consortium meetings, and made notes of my reflections and perceptions throughout the project. I also made notes following each interview, to help me capture fully the essence of the meeting, and to record feelings and perceptions after the event. These notes were used to triangulate the interview and document analysis data. The interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants for verification. The data were then coded to produce categories related to my research questions, and two new ones that emerged. These higher-level codes were linked to supporting archival data and field notes to expand the sense-making process. This process of abstraction—formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories—resulted in major themes that were compared across the participants and supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence.

The findings

Most of argued that leadership is more than just managing ICT purchases, which appears to be the role of the Head of ICT, and that students want to be involved because ICTs is crucial to their learning. The students also suggested that although teachers might be allowed input

they are not responsible for the final decisions. While the student researchers saw their involvement as a right due them as the main consumers of school ICTs, staff participants took a more functional view of student participation: students could help them achieve more effective use of ICTs in the classroom. What evolved from the interviews points to the fact that the meaning of student participation is at the discretion of the head of the school, which determines how and what decisions students are involved in, and its sustainability. It also emerged that the school's approach to student leadership is not as democratic as the school philosophy might suggest.

Structuring student leadership

Bourdieu's (1977b) theory of practice is based on his understanding of culture—how the structures of social phenomena determine, and are themselves perpetuated, by action. It is not a deterministic theory; instead he draws attention to the interplay between structure and agency. He attempts to develop a set of robust thinking tools built around the ideas of field, capital and habitus that is objective and generalizable, yet accounts for subjective thoughts and actions. Bourdieu's (1998) concepts locate structure as being embodied and expressed through the actions people undertake, and their dispositions. In other words, structure is not static, it should be observed as constituting and dynamic. Throughout the Project the student researchers were 'structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1977b) through the agency they showed. At the first consortium meeting they were able to outline clearly why the Project was important to them, who would be involved and how the first stage should proceed. The staff participants said they were impressed mainly because these students had exceeded their expectations.

To explain their strategies within the context of the student-led project, it is necessary to examine the school as a field. Bourdieu (1999) defines a field as a structured social space that contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. The school field consists of various actors—students, teachers and administrators—and is the 'locus of power relationships and of struggles aiming to transform or maintain them' (Bourdieu, 1987: 141). Gunter and Thomson (2007) have argued that elite adults typically set the agenda in schools, which is ultimately designed to preserve their positions of power. The data in the present study show that students and teachers at the school have hitherto had no say in decision-making about ICT for learning; instead they suggested that the head of Central IT, who controls the budget, is responsible for making the decisions about school ICT. The opinions

of teachers, and certainly those of students, are not taken into account because the focus is on making the school look outstanding, by abiding with the ICT and other standards to which the school subscribes. Teachers are not involved; they are not even provided with the necessary training that would allow them to participate in ICT leadership decisions. Statements comprising the school's philosophy are not of priority either; what matters is only that which is necessary for them to rate highly as an independent school, thereby increasing the school's market value.

Bourdieu (1999) views any social formation as consisting of a hierarchy of a number of relatively autonomous fields and subfields, each with its own logic of practice. His theory of practice deals with how to recognise the impact of structures and social facts on practice, while at the same time recognising the impact of practice on structures. Practice is what people do—the actions people take. Originally, the student-led project was framed in terms of the structures of the institution, and yet those structures and power relations were being affected simultaneously, and subsequently, by the actions of the student researchers. Through the project, the doxa—the taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs about students at the school—were shaken to their core. The subsequent reactions of adult participants in the project, and other adults within the school, demonstrated that they had never thought of students as being capable of making important contributions to teaching and learning.

Fields within the school

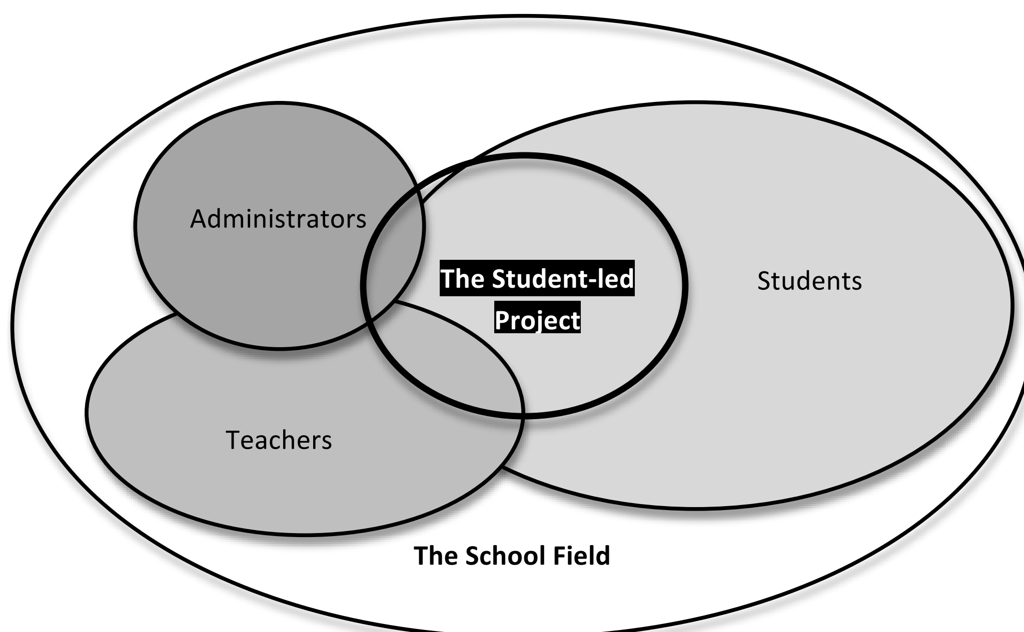

Figure 1: The school as a field with its subfields

Considering students, teachers and administrators as subfields of the school field (Figure 1), makes it possible to envisage how agents within each of these specific subfields compete for control of the interests of the school field, using all the capital at their disposal. By staking a claim to a field position a person becomes situated within a particular socially constructed disposition. Individuals internalise the social structures that exist and this structures the way in which they see the world. This is what Bourdieu calls habitus; he notes that 'the field structures the habitus' (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989: 44). He argues that people's actions can be explained not only by the structures that they are living in, as objective reality enforcing its inescapable will, but also by their habitus. Habitus may be seen in the practice, the technologies, the ways of standing and walking, the gestures and the very nature of individuals belonging to a particular field. It is embodied in them.

Among the actors at the school the smallest group, administrators, ironically occupies the most dominant of the three subfields. The interests of this group lie in maintaining the reputation of the school, advertising its successes, attracting more students to the school and increasing its profits. They interact with teachers and students mainly through handing down policies and school regulations, setting school calendars, planning infrastructural changes; they are solely responsible for the look, feel and daily running of the school. The actions of the administrator field also defines the ethos of the school because the high fees result in a certain kind of student body—those from high socioeconomic backgrounds—and the policies result in teaching and learning happening in certain kinds of ways. For example, the absence of policy on ICT for learning at the school means that it is not a compulsory subject for students. There is an Administrator habitus, which includes having lunch as a group at the same table in a far corner of the cafeteria. Combined with this is a doxa of self-evident leadership, which sets them apart and makes them easy to be identified as school administrators.

The interests of administrators sometimes prompt those of teachers. In attempting to increase profits through increasing student enrolment, the school remains non-selective; anyone who can afford its fees is welcome to join the school. As a result teachers struggle with large student numbers in their classes, many of whom are either ill prepared, or unable to speak coherent English because of their international backgrounds. Teachers therefore see it in their interests to ensure that their classrooms are not overcrowded, and that students who do not have the necessary preparation are not enrolled in their classes, moves which often put them at odds with school administrators. Teachers too have a habitus, and since some of them are

also administrators, there are sometimes overlaps: habitus shared between two fields. Teachers and administrators work with students in classes, extracurricular activities and official school business. Both of these groups took part in the student-led project.

Students soon learn their place within the power structures of the school. Participants of the project revealed that students, like teachers, are not involved in school ICT decisions; they simply use what is provided. Their attitudes to school may be seen in terms of their individual life and family histories whereas what Bourdieu (1977b) calls habitus develops and evolves through interactions with others within the field, and with the culture the individual is living or has lived in. He sees habitus as deriving from and being part of the whole person. So when students join the school, even though they may be from affluent backgrounds, the attitudes acquired in their family settings begin to be restructured through the social conditioning that occurs when they start to notice the 'Do Not Enter' signs on doors to the staffroom and teachers' offices. They are not invited to staff meetings, even though much of the discussion at these meetings centres on them. They soon begin to understand that it is fine for them to organise bake sales and student dances, but that they have nothing to do with the day-to-day running of the school. All too soon, students become aware of the inequalities and power differences operating at the school. However, when it comes to ICTs they are conscious that they have certain capabilities that the school is unaware of—their appropriations, uses and connections made using ICTs outside school—and they want these to be taken into consideration. Their position within the power structure of the school, where they are expected to sit, listen and learn, gives them little chance of making their case. The project became an opportunity for them to make a strong case about their ICT needs, and to be listened to.

The student led project was a field in its own right. It was strategically positioned because it did not align itself with any of the existing fields. It included students, teachers and administrators and was about their shared experiences and concerns with school ICT. The practices of the different players within the field and their relations to each other, and to the structures of the field, contributed to the makeup of the field. Thus it, and indeed any other field, can be seen as more than just a set of structures or rules.

Soon after the project started, the student researchers were using words and phrases outside their everyday vocabulary: evidence, beneficiaries and empirical research. Once they felt situated as leaders within this project group, they took the initiative of finding out about ICT

practices at other independent schools by looking for information in websites on the Internet. They decided what questions they wanted to ask teachers and students in these schools, based on what they felt would increase their knowledge and understanding about the issues the consortium had decided were important. As they gained new experiences each person's individual schemata was modified and developed to recognise the relevancies in their surrounding world.

As players within this field they had capital, which they used to achieve their aim of being recognised as leaders of ICT for learning. Their actions in using this capital and the availability of the capital itself were both constrained by the shared habitus: because schemata filter information, people's actions are both limited and enabled by their understandings of their world (Rumelhart, 1984). They saw the knowledge they were generating from the data as an important process in the project, because having adults listen to their results made them feel important. They even made efforts to improve. By the second consortium meeting they were able to answer challenging questions about the student survey data. The adult consortium members interrogated graphs produced by the researchers, but because they had really immersed themselves in the data analysis, they did not appear nervous or intimidated as they went over detailed explanations carefully. They were in charge. While analysing the data collected from teachers, the researchers looked for areas of the presentation they were planning for that might be unclear to the audience. Efforts were made in advance to include details that would help the staff understand what the data meant. Their knowledge helped them to gain confidence in themselves, which manifested itself through the clear and detailed explanations they gave. Through the gathering of data and acquisition of knowledge—knowledge for action—the student researchers gained capital, which became symbolic when it was presented to the consortium who recognized it as legitimate and powerful. Teachers in the consortium said they were impressed with the data the researchers collected and how well it was presented. Student researchers remarked that they felt important, and listened to. Through the interactions with adults in the consortium the researchers developed practices 'related to different contexts, the dispositions within the habitus, and were structuring structures' (Gunter, 2003: 345). The objective relations between students, teachers and administrators shifted within the consortium—the project group—in the way that Reay (2004: 436) remarks, 'when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjuncture can generate change and transformation'. Their actions made them more powerful members within the project group. They developed a 'feel for the

game' (Bourdieu, 1987: 64), which can only be understood through their interactions with others.

After the consortium had met for the last time one of the researchers suggested an assembly where they could report on their project to the whole school. This was a new strategy acquired by experience, which is part of habitus; and they did not misrecognise the situation. They were aware that through their actions they had gained new ideas, *capital*, which becomes symbolic when presented and legitimised, thereby allowing them to shift their position towards becoming more powerful actors.

Having shifted the boundaries within the consortium, the student researchers were ready to take on the whole school to see if the boundaries there could be shifted also. They wanted to challenge the status quo by asking questions such as who makes decisions about school ICT and where this knowledge comes from. And through this gain symbolic capital within the school field, and similarly shift its boundaries. The actions, strategies and struggles of the student researchers were not just about material gain but also about the staking of symbolic capital (Gunter, 2003) to help them shift boundaries in order to reposition themselves as more powerful people within the school.

The desire to present their work to the whole school may also have been their way of resolving the tensions developed from the multiple identities the student researchers had experienced—'a double perception of self' (Bourdieu, 1999: 511)—first as powerful members of the consortium; second as students in the school, where they were expected to be seen but not heard. When they were asked to recommend teachers who could be invited to join the consortium their initial discussions centred on whether one teacher was 'too hard' or another was 'easy'. The teachers who were part of the consortium also taught these students. Even though some of them really excelled as project leaders, they may not have been performing at the same level in their classes: on the one hand they were excellent project leaders, and on the other they arrived late for school, skipped classes and did not do their homework. This habitus 'divided against itself' (Reay, 2002: 223) continued to generate uncertainty in an ambiguous way throughout the project, and it is possible that the student researchers wanted to resolve it by showing everyone how good they really are.

Conclusion

Student leadership should be something students do, not just something they read about, watch or is said about them. Yet while that *doing* clearly requires their active participation, forces or structures beyond their control predominantly dictate the terms on which it is performed. The rules that govern the leadership practices in school are not, by and large, open to negotiation or change: habitus is fixed. The student-led project interrupted those practices though the enactment of leadership by its students. Their strategies included generating new knowledge, challenging the status quo, seeking equal status and modelling organic change. By asserting the power of agency these students were necessarily diminishing the power of existing structures at the school. This relationship between agency and structure continues even in the wake of the project.

It is worth framing research questions that could guide the examination of what might be defined as student leadership. First, how is leadership of school ICT inclusive of students? A doxa of beliefs about students were to a large extent been shattered by the student-led project. Many adults at the school now see students as mature enough and capable of providing useful information about school ICT change, and indeed other school reforms. Staff participants of the project realised that students can actually 'take charge' to provide evidence-based policy recommendations about ICT for learning. Students need to be allowed to develop plans to address school-based problems that involve them. As Mitra and Gross (2009: 535) note, students can provide fresh new ways of examining problems that adults had previously ignored or misunderstood. The student researchers' decision to involve staff in the project demonstrated that they understood that school ICT problems were shared. It was their way of giving a public face to the issue in such a way that did not put them at odds with adults in the school. These students were able to forge new relationships with staff participants and to come up with pragmatic solutions. They demonstrated a professional approach in going about the tasks they set themselves. This repositioning is illustrative students' potential to contribute to school leadership.

Second, where and how is knowledge about teaching and learning with ICT generated? Student-led activities such as the project could be efficiently organised to provide school administrators with information about ICT for learning, and other school matters. One advantage that gaining knowledge through such initiatives provides is its authenticity. Smyth (2011) has argued for engaging students in authentic participation and inclusiveness around their own needs and concerns. If there is the possibility that school policies could provide

convergence between the subfields contained inside the institution, then the importance of spaces where staff and students can participate in dialogue, and subsequent action, that help to frame the multitude of perspectives, judgments and suggestions individuals have pertaining to what is best for their community, cannot be overemphasised.

In this reframing of questions that directly address opportunities for student leadership it is possible to see structure and agency as interrelated and mutually interdependent: agency necessarily works through structure, and structure though agency. Therefore it becomes essential to approach exploring how and why student leadership of ICT for learning can contribute to changes in knowledge, practice and the school environment with a willingness to name and confront organisational inequities in school.

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