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Crouching target, hidden child

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Abstract
Drawing on interviews with 33 young people between the ages of 14 to 17 attending three English schools we examine their experiences of a personalised education system. The policy climate in England has for some time been one of intense and persistent reforms. The Labour Party took office in 1997 and advanced 'personalised learning' as a central reforming concept that made use of individual targets, data and pupil voice in the learning process. We identify that while the opportunities for productive voices are evident, the young people's experience of it is inconsistent. Notably, the use of targets and data has often made them invisible and mute, and this affects how they understand the purposes of schools and their place within a school. Outcome data are a necessary and proper concern of schools. However, we suggest that the conceptualisation of learning, and the relational processes involved, are being damaged through the interpretation of voice as a means of delivering instrumental data sets. We argue this point using a conceptualisation of social practice and ethics drawn from Alasdair MacIntyre.

Keywords
virtues, ethics, targets, research, voice

Introduction

Following a general election in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1997, the Labour Party (known as 'New Labour') took office and introduced whole-scale 'modernising' reforms of English public services 'designed to remedy deep-seated social problems such as poor schooling, ill-health, child poverty, rising crime and urban decay' (Newman, 2006: 1). The terms 'personalisation' and the 'citizen-consumer' became a key in these reforms (Clarke et al., 2007: 1). Our research emerged from a curiosity about the meaning of personalisation as a motif in reflexive stages of modernity (Beck, 2010; Giddens, 1991) and its implications for the norms of public services and social justice. Personalisation in New Labour policy suggested that a young person ought to be visible as a learner, actively engaged and represented, almost dialogically, in the practices of learning within a school. For example, a UK government review, designed to produce detailed guidance about personalised learning in England, concluded that a central feature would be: 'Pupil voice: establishing the habit of talking about learning and how to improve it' (Gilbert, 2006: 20).

It seems to us that the cultural allusion 'crouching target, hidden child' illuminates the predicament of the learner positioning within this policy strategy. The learner experiences personalisation through individual targets for improvement, which renders him or her invisible through data collection, management, publication and evaluation. The use of individual targets and 'pupil voice' in personalised learning is constructed through policy as an effective strategy for schools (Gilbert, 2006). However, Arnot and Reay (2007), drawing on Bernstein's work, challenge researchers to be more analytical and differentiated about which aspects of pedagogic talk and social talk are being researched and what these relationships indicate about the rules of power in play. In reviewing our data we identified resonance with the problematic. Personalisation positions learner voice at the centre of young people's school life, but it is this voice we suggest that young people find the most difficult to articulate and negotiate over within their institutional experiences. Arnot and Reay (2007) argue that 'although student consultation appears democratic, it is a clearly bounded pedagogic event' (p.322) and the apparent neutrality of student voice can hide 'the social stratificational aspects of schooling' (p.322). Many young people are excluded because they cannot access the 'rules of recognition or realisation' in a 'pedagogic encounter' (Arnot and Reay, 2007: 322), or they self-exclude because they already have access to those rules and do not value the consultation.

In this paper we approach the challenges raised by student voice in effecting young people's learning, and we argue that the data and the analysis presented have

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implications for the consistency of teaching practices in schools and therefore for leadership. The approach to the data draws upon a neo-Aristotelian moral philosophy of social practices and the virtues following the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1994, 2001). Following MacIntyre (1994, 2001), we contend that there is a difference between effectiveness and excellence in the social practices of those who work in schools (Wilcox, 1997) and that the capability to engage voice within pedagogic practice is very inconsistently, and hence unjustly, experienced by young people.

We begin by explaining a little of the background to personalised learning and its relevance to the paper. The methodology is briefly outlined, followed by an exploration of the themes characterised by the metaphor 'crouching target, hidden child' illustrated by some of the data from the research. Data in relation to student voice in learning are presented and reflected upon using MacIntyre's (1994, 2001) arguments. This is followed by further reflections suggesting that young people did experience moments of pedagogy that invoked a more powerful sense of voice, arguing that moral agency on the part of teachers can be exercised to provide a richer, more democratic sense of engagement. A final conclusion outlines some implications for school leaders.

Personalised learning and the learner's voice

Personalisation became a rubric for New Labour public service reforms encompassing the motifs of the citizen-consumer (Clarke et al., 2007) exercising voice and choice with the threat of consumer 'exit' (Hirschman, 1970) as an ever-present driver for change. David Miliband, a former senior education minister within the UK government, took the citizen-consumer motif into the notion of personalised learning at a critical juncture for the welfare state as an 'unashamedly political concept' (Miliband, 2006: 22). Miliband described the essence of personalised learning as: 'an education system where the system is moulded around the child, not the child around the system' (Miliband, 2004, unpaged). One New Labour secretary of state for education stated that: 'the central characteristic of such a new system will be personalisation – so that the system fits to the individual rather than the individual having to fit to the system' (Clarke, 2004: 4). Another education minister suggested that personalised learning held 'radical implications' for the education system (Knight, 2007, unpaged). Such was the commitment to this idea for reform in England, personalisation was being promoted in various guises up until the last days of New Labour's government (see McGuire, 2010). The concept provoked a lot of debate as a potential 'big idea' for education (Pollard and Jones, 2004: 4) and critical attention (see for example, Fielding, 2006; Hartley, 2007, 2008, 2009) and was deemed to be empty of meaningful content for teachers (White, 2006). The House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2007) thought that the transformational approach promised by personalising learning had yet to be realised and an early thinker in promoting educational practice in the idea concluded that it was 'well-intentioned waffle' (Hargreaves, 2008).

The relevance of starting with personalised learning for this paper is twofold. Firstly, personalised learning purported to be a matter of social justice (Miliband, 2004; Gilbert, 2006) and it is interesting to understand whether it contributed to developing just practices especially in relation to young people's voice. Secondly, that departmental guidance (DCSF, 2008a; DfES, 2004) on the pedagogy of 'personalisation' conceptualised a version of assessment for learning (AfL) with a large emphasis placed upon the engagement of learners' voices in the classroom (Gilbert, 2006).

However, official guidance on young people's 'ownership' and voice in the learning process was centred on providing pupils with an 'understanding of how they are doing' (DCSF, 2008a: 19) and that it should be based upon 'precise target setting and rigorous and regular tracking of progress' (DCSF, 2008a: 140). While the Conservative-led coalition government in the UK, who took office in May 2010, has dropped New Labour language such as personalisation, their programme reinforces the notion of 'harnessing detailed performance data' and 'liberating' individual potential (Gove, 2010: 7). Although headteachers were probably confused by what personalised learning was trying to say, it appealed to their notions of child-centredness and what they thought the 'job was about' (Hartley, 2009; Rogers, 2012). Detailed data on pupil performance, tracking progress and setting targets became part of the personalised learning discourse. Reinforced by the tensions in the schooling system toward hierarchical and rational goal models of governance that depend on technically audited and publicly transparent data (Newman, 2006), such 'data' have proliferated in schools. In the school's view these data are then translatable to the students to give them yardsticks of progress; a seemingly rational and technical solution to maintaining the visibility of young people and very much in step with the 'modernising' ideologies of contemporary public service reform (Newman, 2006). Within this context, the research reported in this paper was designed to gather young people's perception of the impact of these policies and reforms in their learning and particularly their experiences of learner voice. We briefly describe the research methodology below.

Methodology

Three schools were selected that represented some 'typicality' (Schofield, 1989) in that they expressed a commitment to using student voice and personalised learning as part of their improvement strategies. In addition they were schools that were part of the English National Challenge Strategy (Balls, 2008; DCSF, 2008b) designed to rapidly raise attainment as measured by exam passes or, if failing to do so, be put under direct government control. Ash Tree School represented a white working-class community that had suffered a historical loss of their local manufacturing base and whose ethnic mix was beginning to diversify; Beech Tree School represents a multi-ethnic,

working-class community in a town that has recently undergone large changes in its employment structures; Cedar Tree School draws from a predominantly white mixed rural and town community where unemployment is not such a challenge but living standards are low compared with the national average. Therefore the schools represent different communities in England but are typical of many in their commitment to student voice and personalisation, and under severe pressure to rapidly improve their attainment outcomes in disadvantaged communities.

The schools were invited to select 12 young people to volunteer to be part of the research from those who had participated in a variety of student leadership programmes. Eleven young people from each school participated, aged 14–17 years with an almost even gender mix. A group interview with four young people was conducted in each setting. In addition, small focus-group activities in each school were designed to elicit their views about the role of student voice in their schools and how they thought the institutions of schooling could be improved. The data represents a qualitative view of perceptions of students in the sample and are not matched against those of school staff. In addition, the sample of students is small and transcript extracts used in this paper to illustrate points are only a tiny selection from the group interviews. Therefore the generalisations made are necessarily tentative. However, we are struck by how remarkably consistent the views and perceptions expressed by young people are across the settings through the interviews; views supported by feedback from the focus group activities.

'Crouching target, hidden child'

As part of the group interview process young people were asked whether their learning targets were clear to them, whether they felt personally involved in constructing these targets and if these held any meaning for them. Across the schools young people felt little connection to these targets and saw them more in terms of the institution's reputation rather than their learning. For example, in Ash Tree School:

> AARON: yeh, they're just, the main objective of the school is just to get good grades for everyone and
> AMY: yeh it looks good on them
> AARON: yeh, it's just, I'm not too sure if they're more bothered about the school image and like grade success overall or whether they actually do want to get the best potential out of every kid

And from Beech Tree School:

> BASHIR: I think it's just for school's benefit it's not for our benefit; I think schools should think about education at the end of the day
> BOBBIE: Not, not reputation, it should be about our education
> BASHIR: I think every year it's about the school going up the league board.

In Cedar Tree School the young people also perceived targets to be more about the institutional reputation and perceived that the school went for various awards and kitemarks to bolster their public image. In this school Carol remarked that: 'The school's so busy trying to get the next award and ticking boxes so we can have something else at the bottom of the letter.' Cedar Tree Students felt that the achievement of awards had little impact on how or what they learnt.

Compiling detailed data on student progress and using that information to support individual pupils' learning is a seemingly rational process for schools to undertake. However, we suggest that in these three schools young people's personal identities as learners are being subsumed in the data and target-gathering processes to that of the institutional reputation and that these students feel a disconnect between their personal visibility and the public profile of the school. The public profile of the school is extremely important in the English public service policy context as their future existence is governed by the demands of audit cultures (Power, 1997) that are harnessed to the values of competition and rational goal models of governance (Newman, 2006). Public accountability through published data such as numbers and grades of exam results was a key driver for New Labour's English schools reform programme (Newman, 2006).

Some of the young people in the research perceived that their school's need to get 'better exam results' impacted upon their experiences of learning. The students in all three schools perceived consequences for the way students were 'labelled', the way in which they were taught, and their ability to express voice in regard to their learning. We briefly illustrate these three consequences for the young people of target regimes constructed around data collected by schools about individual pupil performance.

Firstly, the schools' use of target data are seen by young people to construct expectations that are experienced personally as unfair and on behalf of their peers the students expressed a sense of injustice about the way potential is viewed and limited by school. For instance, Bashir in Beech Tree School when commenting on how target data is used in school in relation to himself said:

> *Basically, what I feel in school is that, I think, I know that I'm capable but the thing is the school they don't think I'm capable, so they always like try to find short cuts around things so like we do better but we, I personally know that I can do better, but like the school they, they won't take that.*

In Cedar Tree School Callum remarked that 'special needs kids are smothered but they want their independence' and as a pupil who had experienced extra support in school he perceived that while 'some mentors and teachers are good' he believed that: 'I can do more than people think'. In Ash Tree School students commented on how sets were based on target grades but these groupings led to lower expectations from everyone in the school community (staff and students), for example:

> AARON: and the kids that are in like, set 6, like the lower ability, just stay there, there's not like

ABIDA: they give up, they just think I'm in set 6 so they won't even
AMY: yeh, so like they have a reputation

In Beech Tree School Blossom expressed a sense of injustice on behalf of a peer because the school had not talked to this student about her work but had set a course for her based on grades in an earlier period of her school life:

this girl she's got like a really, really low grade, and so they expect her to get low grades, so they, so everything, so all the work that they give her is a really low standard, like easy work, so she's like 'I can do this'.

We tentatively suggest that the relational aspects of teaching that encourage student and teacher to engage in a dialogue about developing a personal learning capacity can be muted through data that corals adult perceptions into limited expectations.

The second consequence of the audit culture in relation to schools improving their exam results is the young people's perception of their pedagogical diet. In Cedar Tree School, Carol thought that the school was 'very, very exam driven' and Chrissie that: 'teachers are constantly pushing for good exam results'. One consequence of this was that for Chrissie (Cedar Tree School) teaching that pushed exams was 'causing the students to lose interest'. Young people in the other two schools also expressed dissatisfaction with their pedagogical 'diet', its uniformity and lack of variation. In Ash Tree School, Aaron cited examples of subjects where 'most lessons are read from a text book' and Amy added that: 'the teachers need to approach it in a different way and do something more interactive'. In Beech Tree School Bashir commented that:

Some lessons yeh, like are the same from the beginning to the end like, all the way throughout the year so you don't really get a sense of change. So that, so I don't think it helps learning.

In the same interview Bobbie complained that:

I don't see the point of coming to school when you're only taught in only like two lessons a day something properly; rest of lessons you're just sat there pen and paper in front of you; that's it, you didn't learn really.

Bobbie expresses a sense of pointlessness about many of her lessons. The pedagogy of personalised learning was designed to engage the voice of pupils in the processes and content of learning (DCSF, 2008a; Gilbert, 2006). We suggest that data gathering to compile targets to support the process of personal engagement has tended to render young people less visible in school and is more to do with schools having to ameliorate the risks of public accountability and pressures from central government. We argue that the third consequence of the gathering and public dissemination of school-held data is that schools are under pressure and taking time to engage learner voice is a risky, and perhaps for some teachers, peripheral enterprise. So that a further facet of the invisibility of learner identity is a sense of muteness; young people in all three schools feel that their voice in engaging with their pedagogical diet is problematic. We provide some examples from students to illustrate this point but firstly support our argument by drawing upon MacIntyre's (1994, 2001) work and making a distinction between effectiveness and excellence in the practices of teaching (Wilcox, 1997).

'Effectiveness' and mute learner voice

The use of detailed data sets and target setting for students is a rational and technical solution to improving standards of education and is conjoined in policy with concepts of good teaching (DCSF, 2007, 2008a, b). But 'good' is a normative concept that implicitly carries moral meanings. MacIntyre's (1994) concepts of social practice and the virtues can be used as a conceptual tool to understand and strive for the ethical and educational goods inherent in creating pedagogical voice for young people within the habits of classrooms.

Drawing upon an Aristotelian notion of *telos*, MacIntyre (1994) outlined an argument for rehabilitating an ethical language of reasoning through examining the standards of excellence that are the internal goods of social practices and examining the virtues employed that both define and extend those goods. This contextualised view of ethical judgement has not found universal philosophical favour (see Rorty, 1994) and neither has MacIntyre been willing to extend his concept of social practices to teaching (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002). However, cogent arguments have been advanced for using his concepts in teaching, for example by 'refurbishing' the concept of practice (Hager, 2011) and by advancing the centrality of care and relationships in a virtue orientated view of education (Noddings, 2003).

Noddings (2003) argues that the distinction of a social practice is an important one because teaching as a 'relational practice has its own distinctive criteria of internal excellence' (p.251). The notion of excellence in the social practice of a school could be argued to be the development of the whole person on a number of capabilities that we might wish to define in some broad manner (Nussbaum, 2003). Some of which might be the fullest development and employment of 'the senses, imagination and thought' and another an ability 'to participate effectively in choices that govern one's life' (Nussbaum, 2003: 41/42). Headteachers would broadly agree with such notions of excellence (Rogers, 2012). However, institutions such as schools need to strive for a concept of virtues to continually realign their practices to the criteria of excellence that they value. MacIntyre's (1994) definition of virtue here is valuable:

A virtue is the acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving such goods (1994: 191, original emphasis).

MacIntyre (1994, 2001) makes a distinction between effectiveness in practice and excellence, whereby the former

delivers goods external to the practice and the latter is concerned with the intrinsic merits of its telos. The pursuit of 'better' exam grades is an external good that in itself is entirely reasonable and to be expected as an outcome of schooling. However, 'better' exam grades bear normative implications that are rarely examined and school improvement that judges effectiveness in improving results is not necessarily constructing a rich notion of learning (Wilcox, 1997). Education policy that frames effectiveness through improved exam results simply as a means of improving the future social capital of a society or the local competitiveness of a school can exert distorting pressures on the virtues cultivated and modelled within schools. Using student voice for school effectiveness is therefore different to that of enabling a variety of rich democratic encounters (Fielding and Moss, 2011). In this research a reflection on the pedagogic voice being enabled by schools is that institutions working within models of governance that tend towards technical control by central government (Newman, 2006) are squeezing 'voice' into serving a narrow conception of effectiveness.

Following MacIntyre (1994, 1999), the kinds of virtues we might expect to see in the practices of teaching are courage and honesty in taking feedback and improving one's practice, respect for and trust in those you teach and work with, and a 'just generosity' (MacIntyre, 1999: 121). Just generosity carries a concept of enabling the capacity of others to take control over their lives (Nussbaum, 2003) while acknowledging the relational care and regard for the other (Noddings, 2003). Young people being enabled to engage with the pedagogical practices of the school requires teachers to be able to exercise the virtues listed above (and many more besides) and to model these virtues in order for the students to develop their own sense of moral wellbeing. A virtuous practice with regard to learner voice thus characterised would begin to build standards of excellence other than those reflected in exam results.

The data from the research suggest that young people in all three schools experienced excellence in the practice of pedagogical voice inconsistently. In Ash Tree School students offered examples of some opportunities they had to express voice about learning:

> ABIDA: In some lessons we do, in some, like in [subject]
> AMY: they give us this sheet, like and we have to say like, evaluate the lesson, what we understood and what
> ABIDA: what she does good and what she does bad

However, this seemed to be an exceptional case rather than a norm of the school's pedagogy. Aaron went on to say that:

> *it would be good to have like a feedback session at the end of every lesson to say what was good what was bad, and if it was even useful. But, but we feel we can't talk to most teachers about it.*

Following Aaron's comment the interviewees discussed how they ought to be able to talk about the lesson but were not sure about the best means to do so as 'some people (students) would find that uncomfortable' (Abida). Aaron added that he did not think teachers would 'like to hear criticism either'. What the young people expressed was both an inconsistency in being asked to talk about learning, a key element of personalisation, and a lack of comfort on the part of both students and teachers about engaging in voice to do with pedagogy in lesson time. A student in Beech Tree School spoke of her lack of 'comfort' in being able to talk about the efficacy of lessons to teachers. For example:

> BLOSSOM: 'Cos they just tell you if you don't understand it, come to them but you can't really go up to a teacher and say 'I don't get this' because you don't feel comfortable telling them. Yeh, when we have student voice, but, I've done, I've done one student voice but when I do it I feel like, I'm, I'm not, I can't say what I really think because, it's not like the looks, it's just er, that they ask you the questions, but you feel guilty, because er, they tell you just be honest but if you be honest, they look at you like, *you can't say that* (emphasis in transcript).

The 'student voice' Blossom refers to in this extract is a forum that invites young people to discuss pedagogy and lessons with senior management. What Blossom describes is her lack of comfort in being able to be open about with her feedback of pedagogy, both in lessons with a teacher and to senior management of the school in a supposedly confidential and open forum.

Cedar Tree Students expressed similar sentiments about their inability to consistently express learner voice but emphasised their relation of powerlessness with regard to the pressures of achieving exam results. So for example, Cedar Tree Students felt that while 'some teachers were really good in lessons' (Caitlin), they felt 'we can't talk to most of them about the lesson, once we've done the work we never really speak about it and then just move on' (Ciaran). Ciaran and Caitlin perceived time in lessons to be compressed with teachers moving on quickly to the next topic so that lessons are never interactively reviewed, perhaps a reflection of pedagogical advice in English education policy for personalised lessons to be characterised by 'pace' (DCSF, 2007).

Blossom summed up her sense of powerlessness and muteness within lessons and in so doing seemed to capture a perception that was prevalent in all three schools:

> *I don't feel like we've got a good voice, like I don't know, we can't be honest.*

The conditions of dialogue and the rules of the voice that can be exercised are not clear to Blossom. In all three schools young people experience fragments of talk with which to critique the pedagogy on offer but experience a 'message' (Arnot and Reay, 2007) of powerlessness to effect lessons as there are no means, or rules of engagement, available for what they perceive as 'honest' discussion. School leaders have to grapple with the implications of how 'honesty' might best be achieved in the relations between young people and their teachers.

Further reflections

We suggest that in the core purpose of learning, student voice is mute and not engaged in virtuous practices that might be characterised by honesty and trust. It is easier to talk about these kinds of virtues in the abstract than engage with them in the intense working environment that characterises these schools. However, 'good' teaching and 'good' learning are all part of the same relational practice of inclusive schools (Smyth, 2011) and in this research young people in all the three schools talked about their experiences with 'good' teachers. Young people in all three schools talked about teachers who 'care', 'have a sense of humour', display 'enthusiasm for the subject', 'tell it like it is', so that students do not feel patronised or belittled. Carol in Cedar Tree School pointed out that, 'some teachers really, really care about us. If they trust us, we trust them.' Enough descriptive phrases were used by the young people to suggest that the qualities they perceived in 'good' teachers were relational virtues that contributed to standards of excellence in schools. There are teachers in schools whose moral agency demonstrates the capacity for a much richer and virtuous form of dialogue with young people within the learning process. Young people in this research seemed to encounter these teachers inconsistently and the struggle for school leaders is to develop the consistency of rich learning encounters in which learners are visible and their voice engaged.

Perhaps, it is less 'risky' for school leaders to develop student voice outside of the classroom, this is speculative, but the schools in this research had spent considerable energy on developing mechanisms for student voice that could appear as part of the portfolio of an 'effective' school but without critiquing the unequal relations of power between student and teacher. For example, young people in two schools were involved in interviewing prospective staff. But with some irony Bobbie in Beech Tree School noted how one teacher really 'performed' for them in an exciting way in a show lesson but was not 'anything like that' in the classroom after appointment. The headteachers in the case study schools were aware of some of the tensions at play; two expressed a desire to do far more with student voice in the classroom than they thought some teachers were prepared to accept.

Whilst the paper has presented up to now a critical view of student voice from the young people's perceptions, the findings did not arise because headteachers have necessarily imagined it and led it that way. The heads have to exercise critical negotiations through competing values in public-sector governance (Newman, 2006). English school headteachers are externally audited on a narrow range of effectiveness measures. Furthermore, managing large numbers of young people so that they all feel connected, engaged and noticed in school is obviously a challenge, especially if from adolescents there could be a certain amount of resistance to the adult ordering of their world through regimes of discipline and imposed structure. However, there is a critical policy interest in asking whether these orders are creating identities of resistance (Smyth, 2006) and in reminding researchers that students speak from within a range of dominant discourses such as those of consuming children (Thomson and Gunter, 2006). Therefore, there is a need to look at how the heterogeneity of young people's perspectives play through the competing values of institutional life. But one theme that can stand out for school leaders is that young people look for more in their learning experiences than the practices of these three schools consistently offer them:

> *We need to have a say, not only in the kind of the things like the uniform and so on, we need to have say in what we do, how the school works and the structure of the lessons, we need to have say in things that matter.*
>
> (Carol, 16 years old Cedar Tree School, emphasis added)

School leaders who can find ways to engage with students on the issues 'that matter' are also perhaps contributing to the wider civic goods of democratic societies by enabling young people to anticipate 'future modes of being' (Fielding and Moss, 2011: 148) through consistently and richly modeling the virtues of trust and justice.

Conclusion

The cultural metaphor 'crouching target, hidden child' was employed to characterise how a policy of personalised learning that drew upon the school, compiling student performance data into targets, renders young people consistently invisible. While we recognise the shortcomings of these conclusions, drawn as they are from a small research sample, there was enough consistency of student perception to highlight some of the processes involved. We suggest there is a disconnect between schools' need for public audit and pupil ownership of targets and the use of school-held data constructed what young people believed to be unjust practices in relation to their personal capacities. Most importantly, at the heart of the school, learning and pedagogy are the elements of school life young people feel least able to exercise voice in; they are rendered mute. Using MacIntyre's (1994, 2001) concepts of social practices and virtues we suggest that there is a difference between effective practice and excellent practice especially in relation to student voice.

We argue that school leaders need to engage more richly and continually with their staff and students about the purposes or telos in learning, and encourage throughout a school community more discussion of the virtues that are not only definitive of standards of excellence but are also necessary to extend those standards of excellence. This in itself requires of leaders such virtues as courage and trust in their values and the heads in the research schools displayed such qualities but found themselves negotiating their values through models of governance directly accountable to central policy makers (Rogers, 2012). Smyth (2011) pushes school leaders and researchers in the 'direction of making schools accountable to young people' (p.58) through asking questions about the way power operates, not least through how young people experience and witness

how they are sorted and re-sorted through internal and external league tables. Our data provoked us to do some serious thinking about how young people are enabled to engage with the positive relational pedagogic experiences, but how this is not only inconsistent but is mainly problematic for them. Personalisation through targets and effectiveness measures often renders them invisible and mute, largely through the logic and instrumentalism of rational school improvement. The implications for school leaders are that there are no easy answers:

> *At best, we can only hope to extricate ourselves by having the courage to ask profound questions about what we are doing in schooling. But that is ultimately what leadership is all about – a preparedness to challenge the status quo with alternatives.*
>
> (Smyth, 2011: 67)

It seems to us that the alternatives are already evident in schools.

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